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Translated by Shimon Sharoni

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THE MARCH OF THE LIVING



How could you stay alive - ask the two boys

Translator's note

Lea Schnapp's book was not the first one of the survivors' memoires that I have been asked to translate into Hebrew. Some of these survivors recounted their experiences and sufferings in form of a diary and in a quasi-objective tone, and only between the lines could you have detected the shock and spiritual effort that must have accompanied the agony of writing. Others, blessed with talent, treated the horrible experiences in a literary fashion, putting their recollections through the furnace of creative imagination.

Lea Schnapp's writing doesn't belong to either of these categories. True, the terrible events burst out from her pen too of their own volition, as it were, but they take up a form one could best describe as lyric prose, or poems without verse. Deep feeling softens the severe personal experience. Her looking back to the world of childhood on the one hand, then forward to the new life in Israel on the other, gives the story a wide, almost historic perspective, without losing the immediateness of a personal tone.

As I have been lucky enough to escape the horrors of the Holocaust by coming in time to Eretz Israel, the translation of these testimonies opens before me several opportunities to a second-hand experience of what the writers had gone through. The higher the writer rises into the realm of lyric, the sharper becomes this vicarious feeling, and this is what had given me such unforgettable pleasure during the long hours I have spent on the translation of Mrs. Schnapp's writings.

Shimon Sharoni

Dedication

Let this book be a drop
in the sea of tears -
for the sake of those
who haven't been left anybody
to remember them.

GETTING READY

The days before Passover. There is so much to do... Every passing year seems to be the same - still, the Passover preparations of each year seem different. Life always brings up something all-important at the moment, some new goal, some new impetus, some stimulating thought, that governs our steps at the time. My children, grandchildren are due to the Seder; thousands of different tasks go around in my head, lest I forget something that is imperative. Every evening a new reckoning, planning for tomorrow, preparing a new agenda. So many preparations, till everybody sits in peace around the festive table to listen to the ever recurring questions: "What is the difference..." Four decades of Seder-preparations, first with the children, then with my daughters-in-law and the grandchildren. Friends, relatives join us too occasionally around the Seder table.

Still, this year's Passover preparations differ very much from the rest. I am getting ready for something else too. Six days after Passover - Holocaust Day. And now I am getting ready for a pilgrimage on that same day, forty five years later, to Auschwitz. How did this natural - or maybe unnatural - wish take root in my soul? In the midst of the Passover cleaning I am running over, like a lunatic, to the travel agency, where up to now they could not find a seat on the El-Al plane going to

Budapest, so I shall be able to go on from there to Cracow and thence to Auschwitz, in order to take part in the Remembrance Ceremony on the 22nd of April, two o'clock in the afternoon.

"Keiver Oves", visiting the graves of the dead - no Jewish person should be forgetful of it. How I wish I could do the same, in spite of knowing that there is no Keiver, no grave - only an immense graveyard. Still I am mad with desire to show it to my son, so he should see with his own eyes, hear with his own ears, absorb from my very words the dreary story. Some of my acquaintances try to dissuade me of my plan. It could be too devastating an experience, they say. But I feel that should I give in and stay, the thought that I could have gone and did not - would depress me all the same... I have to confess, both alternatives - going or staying behind - torment me immensely. Meantime there are the Passover preparations, G-d forbid a grain of "hometz" remain in the house.

In our freshly cleaned home we shall sit down finally to the Seder table and recount once again, in a year by year more sumptuous way, the miracle that redeemed, on the night of the Exodus, our people from its tribulations. This year's Pessach differs from the rest in that at one and the same time I am celebrating the Feast of Exodus and preparing myself for this woeful journey to the place, whence so few had returned, while the rest never saw the day of liberation. I have the feeling that these events are also worth recalling, recounting, passing on to the young.

Polish, Hungarian, Czech visa, passport - all in order. Tzipi from the travel agency, seeing how ardently I wish to go, reassures me: there will be a seat for you! I

hurry home, empty another cupboard, prepare the goose-feather for the Hometz-search, just as I have seen at my father's, grandfather's home, just as I have passed it over to my children, hoping they will do the same... This is our chain of life, I won't give it up for anything in the world, won't break the chain... Alas, some of the links in the chain were blackened by fire! Another thing to show my son, when we get there.

I have the feeling that by the time I am getting rid of the last hometz, I shall have the ticket. I shall be tired, terribly tired, thinking the tiredness comes from the Passover cleaning. But in my inmost soul I am aware, that my inner conflict, whether going or staying behind, has brought about this exhaustion. And being aware of this, after asking Heaven's help, I am preparing myself, physically and spiritually, for the road. G-d willing I shall go for the sake of those, who are unable to do so, and maybe there I shall feel the presence of those saintly souls, whose sacrifice has contributed to the rise and survival of the State of Israel too.

PILGRIMAGE WITH THE "MARCH OF THE LIVING"

Just when my protracted preparations for the final Warsaw-Cracow-Auschwitz route were more or less finished, my doubts arouse again: am I doing the right thing, taking my son Yitzhak with me on this difficult journey?

My sabra son has already fought in the Yom Kippur and Lebanon war, served seven years with the regular army, has strung electric lines all over Judea and Samaria. He still goes on reserve duty occasionally, otherwise he is going on with his job, has a wife, together they raise their children - why should I drag him with me to Auschwitz? The thought arises in my head: were those,G-d forbid, **his** parents, who have been killed in Auschwitz - would he also take **his** child with him to Auschwitz? I would never put this question before him, of course. I prefer to keep quiet. Such silences come up quite often between us. I am reminded of the patriarch Abraham, preparing himself for the fateful journey with **his** son... I turn to the Almighty, asking for the spiritual strength I need at this point. Finally I decide not to relent and we depart in peace.

The Polish plane looks alien, unfriendly to me, although there are some Jewish youngsters from Lithuania among the passengers, keeping up the Jewish spirit in spite of the long communist rule. I don't like the

Warsaw airport either. Everywhere you see the vestiges of the forty year long communist regime. The Warsaw-Cracow plane is hours overdue. We reach Cracow late Thursday night, and we may feel lucky to have been able to get a room in the Holiday Inn hotel. Thousands flock to the city from all over the world, spend the Sabbat there and go to the "March of the Living" on Sunday. 5000 youngsters are there, 3000 of them come from Israel.

My son and myself join one of the youth groups, 16-17 years of age. Their organizers are: Yitzhak Cohen, who serves as our historical guide too, and Gedeon Greif, one of the producers of Galei Tzahal, who has already made this journey with youth groups 14 times.

Friday and Saturday before the March of the Living is spent with spiritual preparations. All Friday we were searching for the great Jewish past of this city. Among the dreary ruins of the sometime great community we detect some bright stars: we say prayers at the tomb of the famous "Remo", rabbi Moshe Isserlis, the expounder of the Sulchan Aruch. Then we go on, in the wake of wonderful memories, to the synagogue of Rabbi Eizik Yakeles, of legendary fame.

The Polish people is impoverished, unhappy. Awakening from the hated communist dream, their disenchantment resembles those of the other Eastern Bloc peoples. Bureaucracy, corruption, poverty, empty stores everywhere. The same Polish people arose, to be sure, against the German tyranny, but in the extermination of the Jews they saw eye to eye with them. In the face of this fact I am unable to feel sorry for them.

Menahem Golan, one of the captors of Eichmann, is also in our group. Both of us are survivors of Auschwitz. And the young wish to hear the more from us about the terrible events we witnessed here.

Sunday morning we depart on our buses. On the way I mumble the words of the Wayfarer's Prayer, asking the Almighty to send one of his angels to pave my way, to strenghten my limbs, to protect my soul from the terrible pain. Reaching the entrance of the Auschwitz camp my throat chokes, whith tearful eyes I step on the terrible square, where 45 years ago I was standing among the condemned to death.

Well, the angels were there: the students of the "Lady Davis" high school from Tel Aviv, 16-17 years of age. Shira embraces my shoulders, another girl takes my hand. How she resembles my little sister Evi, who wasn't even 13... Surrounded by these angels I enter the Crematorium, put a pebble in my handbag, light some candles in the name of others, who could not make this journey.

There I stood in the shade of the Crematorium building, surrounded by our wonderful israeli youth. Rabbi Lau, Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv, another Auschwitz survivor, reminded us in his exalted speech, that there are still some who yearn for the blood of Jewish children. "Pharao's daughter saw little Moses crying in his hamper... Don't forget, my brothers and sisters, that in this evil world there are still some Moiselach crying" - said the Rav.

From the strings of a young Jewish violinist we seem to hear the same warning, sad voices: "Es brennt Jidelech, es brennt..." We Jews were alone at this moving ceremony, no other country sent its

representative to the murderous scene. We were alone, as then - but in a different fashion. We imagined to see over us G-d's promise in the rainbow: there shall be no more Deluge... There must not be!

Tzwika the guide begins his explanations, talks about the "selection", the disinfecting showers, the gas chambers. From time to time he consults his notes. And I lived through all this at the time... Shimon Michaeli, 17, says Kaddish. Then approaches me, asks, maybe I have known his grandmother, Eva Gross, she came from Hungary too... Another girl tells me about her grandmother, who came from Debrecen. Still another youngster questions me about his grandmother from Lodz, maybe I have met her, she was in Auschwitz too... How could I explain to every blessed one of them, that there were over forty thousand suffering women in the C lager alone ?!

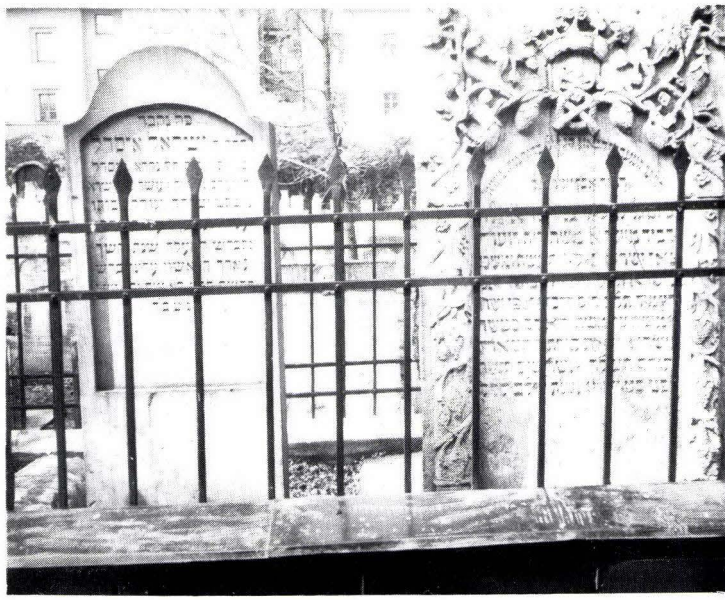
The March is on its way. The children surround me, asking, won't it be too difficult for me. The March of the Living walks all over Auschwitz-Birkenau, a seven kilometer long procession. During the march we hum the lines of "Jerusalem of Gold". My feet carry me easily. The souls of the martyrs, there to meet us, are marching with us. Every group of forty has its Israeli flag, carries it proudly.

The eyes of the Poles follow us from behind drawn curtains, just as they did when the millions went to their death. Where were they at the time? Didn't they feel the stench of frying flesh coming from the crematoria? How could they, how could their children sleep? This a sinful city, doesn't deserve a better fate.

Five thousand young people line up along the barbed wire fence, charged with high-voltage electric current at

the time, and along the barracks. The ceremony goes on. Everybody wears a light blue coat with the words "March of the Living" in the midst of a David Star. Angels accompany us. Yitzhak, my son, at my side, thanks me for the great experience, that will remain with him all his life. The organization is perfect. The guides, Tzvika, Yitzhak Cohen, Gedeon Greif, along with the young teachers who accompanied the children - did a wonderful job. This shall remain a lifelong experience and lesson for the young.

And my heart overflows with thanks to the Creator, who gave me strength to go on this pilgrimage!



Tombstone of Rabbi Moshe Isserless - Ramo - one of the Greatest Halachic Authorities

INDEPENDENCE DAY IN BUDAPEST

We left the gates of Auschwitz deeply shaken, full with unspeakable, indescribable thoughts. I didn't look back to that sinful site, where the brand of Kain, the catholic convent is still standing. But this is not the gist of the matter at the moment. The important fact is, that five thousand Jewish youth had seen, had absorbed the Auschwitz story.

My son Yitzhak stood still under the gate of horrors, with the "Arbeit macht frei" inscription on it, and solemnly swore, that he will take there his son too. This is the way to convey the message to him, so that what had happened never will be forgotten.

All this being done we still face the adventurous Cracow-Budapest journey: The night train crosses three borders (Polish, Czech and Hungarian) with the routine passport and custom control. Three quarters of an hour by car from Auschwitz to Cracow. Honestly, I couldn't wait to leave Poland behind. The railway station is sordid, wretched. All ticket offices belong to the "Orbis" state enterprise. There are no Jews any more, but the antisemitism persists. When I try to balance sin and punishment against each other, maybe the Poles have been punished more severely, than the Magyars. I don't know which of the two sinned more against the Jews, but I am sure both think they are innocent.

Arriving at the Eastern Station in Budapest, 14 hours later, I feel relieved. The city is decked out with the Hungarian red-white-green banner, you rarely see a red

one, in spite of the preparations for the First of May celebrations. The moment we arrive we face the hatred against communism, mixed with antisemitism, the communism being, after all - so they say - a Jewish invention. Budapest is a beautiful city, you could have enjoyed it, if... you were are able to forget the past. But it is not always possible.

The First of May preparations are simultaneous with Israel's Independence Day. On the previous Sabbath and Sunday there were remembrance ceremonies in the Jewish institutions for the fallen heroes. The Israeli embassy held a festive reception for the invited. Then a celebration at the Rabbinical Seminary and in the Temple of Heroes. Hungary's Jews pray for the peace of Israel and swear to full solidarity with it. They feel, they know, what it means to be backed by a Jewish State, that never fails to come to the rescue of its brethren in the Diaspora. I fully appreciate the gesture of ambassador Shlomo Merom, who came himself to the Ferihegy airport on Tuesday in order to make sure everything is going smoothly.

But let us dwell a bit more on the festivities. In the Dessewfy-place synagogue of the Bnei Akiba they say Hallel. The great synagogue on Dohány street was packed with audience on Monday night. Emil Tóth officiated as cantor and Professor Rabbi Schweitzer held a beautiful, touching sermon. Deeply moved, he translated Psalm 107 verse by verse : "Praise the Lord for He is good, praise Him the redeemed, the delivered from their distress, such as went down to the sea in ships, those who gathered a fruitful yield...." The State of Israel is our stronghold, our safe refuge, our hope -

said the speaker, and then recited the letters of President Herzog and prime minister Shamir.

The envoys of the Jewish Agency and the different parties work diligently to enlist more and more adherents. Among them the Shomer Hatzair. I have met one of these youngsters and he told me he visits the synagogue every Shabbat... Later he wants to be a kibbutz member. The Bnei Akiba movement sent its volunteers from Nir Gallim, who are doing wonders. First of all they try to teach the youngsters something about Judaism. They prepare teachers. Sylvia Deutsch, an 18 year old girl from Budapest puts her whole soul into her teaching. There is an enormous ignorance of Jewish spiritual values. The Chabad movement is also doing a wonderful, sublime job. Be it as it may, my feeling is that frail lights flare up again in the hearts of the Jewish youth of Budapest. Antisemitism is there, as it ever was and ever will be, and most of the Jews are pessimistic about the political situation. Budapest is full of wonders. I show my son the Isle of Margaret, the Citadel, the Hill of Roses, and the guilty old Danube.

Reaching my home town, Kiskunfélegyháza, I am confronted with reminiscences of the past, some old houses, a few acquaintances. The past torments me enormously, but the presence of my son mitigates my suffering, as I am conscious of passing on to him the past. He cleans up the tombstone of his great-grandmother, notes down the epitaph and says his prayers. As for me - I give thanks to the Almighty, who had allowed me to bring here my son. "This is a great experience" - whispers he, deeply moved.

My childhood girlfriend, Ica, accompanied us with her granddaughter. My heart is now full of peace,

knowing that Israel is now my homeland , my father and my mother. So I say and so I feel. The thousand faces of Budapest fail to cheer me up because of the past and of the future too. Because this future entails the reconstruction of the Diaspora, although Israel is ready to do everything possibe to liquidate it. Although confronted with a thousand problems it is receiving its brethren with open arms.

Although the loyal Jewish citizens of Hungary took part in the Death Marches, the Hungarian T.V. doesn't show anything about the "March of the Living". Ceaucescu, the suffering of the Rumanian people, children tortured to death - this is its main concern. In every gatherig, in the coffeehouses, in the taxis - people express their indignation, their disgust over the Rumanian atrocities. This is all well, but I dare to ask one of these wailing gatherings (now I have nothing to fear): How come this same quasi-humane Hungarian people didn't show any indignation 45 years before?! No, they din't want to hear, didn't want to know anything about this, they feel no remorse. Maybe this is the only meaning of my visit to Budapest: to knock on their door and remind them...

I recall Ingrid Bergman's rendering of the famous film made from Dürenmatt's play "The visit of the old lady". The old lady visits her homeland in order to take revenge. But we don't ask for revenge, we come in order to say our prayers at the graves of our loved ones, or look for the sites of old memories, the memory of father, mother, sisters and brothers...

Balm to my aching heart is - praise be G-d - the Israeli passport in my handbag...

YOU HAVE CONSOLED US...
(On occasion of a gathering)

The students who took part in the pilgrimage to the death camps in Poland came together again in the impressive lecture hall of the Zeitlin school in Tel Aviv. 300 high school students were asked to relate their experiences in full.

Mayor Shlomo Lahat and his deputy, Nathan Wallach, then the representatives of the Ministry of Education and two rabbis (one of them, rabbi Morgenstern, himself a past inmate of Auschwitz) listened first to the reports and expressed their appreciation, then asked the young directly about the impressions that the historical pilgrimage made on the participants. As for me, three long hours I listened to the moving accounts and felt that without this meeting and "debriefing" my participation in the "March of the Living" wouldn't be complete. Fighting back my tears I have listened to the touching reports of the children about what had happened. They recited their essays and didn't disguise their emotions. Most of them emphasized that by now they have learned to appreciate even more the meaning of a homeland and that they are resolved never to be a "yored", never emigrate from Israel. In failing voice recounted one of the girls, that she became a completely different person, when she came back from touring the death camps. Now she is attached stronger to her roots, now she really feels solidarity with the Jewish people. "We shall never forget, how our grandparents have suffered because of their Jewishness" - said several

of them. - "We wish our still living grandparents, survivors of the Holocaust, would open their hearts and recount their sufferings so we could get even nearer to them" - they repeated.

A 16 years old boy said the greatest experience of his life had been the Friday evening prayer in an old synagogue in Cracow. In Israel he never has been inside a synagogue.

After a tearful leave-taking I promised the students of the Lady Davis and Tichon Hadash high schools, that I will keep in touch with them further on.

* * *

Rabbi Akiba took his disciples to show them the ruins of the Temple. The disciples broke into tears, but rabbi Akiba rejoiced. His astonished disciples asked him, what is there to rejoice about. Rabbi Akiba answered: True, I see the destruction, but at the same time I see the coming deliverance!" His disciples responded with one word: "Nichamtanu" - thou has comforted us.

This is my message to those high school kids, holding whose hands, hoisting the Israeli flag, marching together I was able to enter the site of the destruction of my family and millions of other Jews: this is my message to you, precious children: Nichamtuni - you have comforted me! And to the mayor of Tel Aviv I say: this pilgrimage hasn't been in vain, it was worth every effort. The students took part in a sad, shocking, but lifelong experience. Now they have really perceived, understood the sufferings of the Jewish people during the Holocaust. They have become conscious of the unbreakable chains that bind them to their roots.

LOOKING BACK

PIGEON NESTLINGS

My grandchildren were happy to have found three pigeon-eggs in a flower pot standing on the window-sill of my daughter's home in Jerusalem. They were even more amazed, when the mother pigeon sat down to brood on them. At my last visit the excitement rose to its height: the hazelnut-size nestlings have just hatched from the eggs! The children observed breathlessly the little, fluffy creatures from a safe distance. When the mother-pigeon went for "supplies", we lifted up the pot (obeying the precept, that one should not gather up the nestlings in the presence of their mother) and looked nearer at the tiny ones. Then we put them neatly back on the window-sill and waited for the return of their mother.

The minutes passed and the mother pigeon hadn't returned. Granddaughter Feigy broke into tears and kept saying, that the nestlings may perish, if their mother doesn't come back presently.

Seeing Feigy weep I recalled another bitter tragedy, when human babies have lost their mothers and the world just looked on indifferently. There have been very few Feigys, who had shed tears because of them. What a curious association of thoughts! Nobody in the room had lived to see babies torn from the arms of their mother, but me. May the Almighty grant them never to see such sights!

The mother pigeon returned at last, the life-giving morsel in her bill.

SUNBEAM FROM AMONG THE CLOUDS

As I am busy with the festival preparations my unforgettable childhood memories keep coming back to me.

My father was a very astute, industrious man. As my grandmother from my mother's side used to say, everything turned into gold in his hand. While she was kept captive in Bergen Belsen, the only hope that kept her alive was that my father surely shall find some way to rescue his family. So great was her faith in his cleverness. When she dragged herself home from the camps, her disappointment was even greater than her sorrow...

Just now I wouldn't like to dwell on the unhappy past, but reminiscence about the last Seder-night in our home.. True, we were full of premonitions, still the unforgettable, moving memory of being together, of the warm, hospitable home has followed me all my life, like a shining sunbeam from among the dark clouds.

* * *

In the spring of 1944 a company of Jewish forced labour soldiers were brought into Kiskunfélegyháza. During the last weeks before Passover we already had to

put on the yellow star, but weren't yet driven to the ghetto.

My father turned to the military commandant of the town, although it wasn't too easy to come before him.

- Colonel, Sir, - asked father, - would you be so good as to let the soldiers of the work-company to feast with the Jewish families of the town? We are ready to make it worth while!

- Okay, David Kun! - said the colonel (at least this is how father recounted it to my mother) - I'm sure you know what I need...

Father knew. "My filling-station is night and day at your disposal, your Excellence!"

The deal was closed.

The collective furlough-pass of the company was already in Father's hands and when he came home, he asked Mother, how many boys would she invite to the Seder. The more the better - she said.

* * *

The boys were snapt up by the Jewish families like hot buns, taking care that the observant ones went to kosher homes. I can't remember now, how many youngsters sat around our table, but I do remember one of them, although I never saw him again and don't even know if he had survived. Pista Kertész was his name and he came from Budapest. He had dark, sad eyes and a worn leather coat. In my fifteen year old head I was convinced he was the One and Only for me. I have done everything in my power to draw the attention of the sad, dark eyes toward me. I even "borrowed" the dancing-slippers of my Mother, but this only draw to

me the attention of another boy from Budapest by the name of Freddy.

The boys arrived a few hours before the Seder, after wiring their families our telephone-number (owing to my father's astuteness the authorities haven't yet taken away our telephone). As the festive dinner was still a few hours away, Mother treated them to baked potatoes, borsht and hot scratchings. It goes without saying they didn't need much encouragement to dig into them.

Well, suddenly the telephone rang out. Somebody asked for Pista Kertész. Happiness shone from his sad eyes - and a drop of tear. I was standing near him, when he put down the receiver. He was so glad, he kissed my face. "It was my fiancée - he said - finally I was able to speak to my beloved..." - he stammered.

As for me, I took refuge in the neighboring room, pulled off Mother's dancing-slippers and went back to the main room wearing a pair of red house-slippers. Fair-haired Freddy's look was even nicer, but I tried to observe Pista better. The hair on his temple shone like silver, his back was bent a bit. I think I wished him sincerely well, hoping he would find happiness with that girl from Pest. Did he meet her again, what became of him - I have never learned.

The only thing I knew was, that at this Seder table, in the company of those Jewish boys and of my loved ones I was happy. There we were sitting around the table, covered with snow-white damask, fear and anxiety in our hearts - a handful of branded, yellow-stared host - but together! And on that night the curtain went down on my childhood...

Then came the Deluge.

THAT UNFORGETTABLE DAY

19th March 1944. Our filling station had been standing on the Yugoslavia-Budapest-Vienna highway for a long time.

This was the only filling and greasing station in the whole area, with all the spare parts available. To be sure, there was a "nyilas" (Arrow-cross member), who had the Shell-depot, only one time he was out of petrol, another time out of oil, or had to close the depot altogether, so busy he was with his party-work.

The Jew, on the other hand, with his day and night service, did well. Even we children had to roll down the petrol-drums after school to fill up the underground tank. Summer and winter nights, come rain or snow, my father sprang out of the warm bed, whenever the bell rang out for service.

Cars that had broken down, my brother Gabi was already under them to locate and repair the trouble. In the wartime gasoline was already rationed, but the gentlefolk always wanted more.

So life went on in the small, 40.000 people strong town on the Hungarian plain. The 1500 Jews of the town tried to stand up to the situation. They were already trodden down, harrassed, humiliated. Their work-permits had been revoked, but they were still alive... Most men were already suffering in the work batallions,

leaving behind their families of 8-9 souls, sometimes without any living means - but we were still alive... In spite of the evil world, March was still beautiful in the poet Petofi's town.

But on that fateful day of March19th we were awakened at dawn by the rattling of the windowpanes, the rumble of a thousand vehicles in front of our house. Somebody banged at the gate. A long row of German vehicles stood along the filling station. The town major was there too, giving orders to serve the Germans, who paid whith good-for- nothing Hungarian treasury vouchers.

Most Jewish homes were already without their adult menfolk. Recalling the many heroic Jewish mothers, my heart becomes constricted. Aunt Hinde with her nine children, Rochele with her eight - alone, and the list is so long! There were many pregnant women too, left to the generosity of the community.

In the morning hours the German invaders have already pumped out the last drop of gasoline, then went on to empty the larders, the demijohns, wine, spirits, whatever could be found. But who cared, when we were anxious for our life?

The Hungarian Petrol Industry Ltd. notified my father, that Jews were not permitted to serve gasoline any more. Then a rumour went over the town like wild fire, that a black German death-car is roaming the streets, pickig up the remaining Jewish men. We heard the names: the aged advocate Spiller, Dr. Berger, Bruckner and the rest. We stared in terror at the door, waiting with choking throat, when will they come for Father.

Around midday Father had felt very ill. I wanted to go for a physician, but they wouldn't let me leave the house. Still, I had waited for an unguarded moment to sneak out. I'll never forget the church clock striking twelve - like every day, without haste, not like an alarm-signal. Nobody had called out loudly: "This is an outrage, this shouldn't have been done!" I sneaked out by the back door, riding a bicycle between two rows of German cars to Dr.Semerat, who lived two kilometers away, asking him to come and see my father.

You shouldn't have come here! - said he. - Well, I have been a very good friend of your father, but now it is impossible...

The good Magyars on the streets surrounded the Germans, trying to make friends by gestures. Yes, in a few hours Kiskunfélegyháza was already fraternizing with the Germans. Under the sign of German-Magyar friendship, in a joint effort, they were already pulling tight the noose around the necks of the ill-fated, defenceless Jews.

When I finally got home, it seemed to me that my young, beautiful mother's hair became gray. She had no more strength to keep us at home. My 18 year old brother left home too, trying with a few friends (Laci Fauer, Herschi Rub etc.) to organize self-defence, where Jews were attacked.

In the afternoon, not far from our house, László Endre harangued the rabble with frothing lips. Anybody seeing him could be sure he was crazy, but the listeners didn't want to admit it. His only theme was: rooting out the Jews with the help of the Germans. Márton Zöldi, the captain of the gendarmes echoed his words.

As the wearing of yellow stars was fixed for the following day only, I could come and go among the people, looking for a humane expression on their faces. Suddenly I noticed our servant-girl among them, with her boyfriend wearing the green shirt of the "nyilas" troops. I was terrified: What, you too? She came after me and whispered in my ears: "For Heavens' sake, Miss, you better disappear at once, before they hack you to pieces!"

Still, at dusk I had found time to visit my Grandfather sitting with his long white beard and sidelocks before the holy books. Only my aunt and her three children were there, her husband had been gone long ago. In the same attire, with the little bag of talles and tefillin in his hands, arrived Grandfather also in Auschwitz .

Twilight came on the 19th of March with the same burning colours as usual. The moon, the stars, the Big Dipper, the Pleiades - everything in its usual place. They didn't go pale, just blinked at us without giving any hope. This was the moment when the Almighty turned away His face from His people. Only the acacia-trees' fragrance, that filled the night, served as deathly balsam for the hearts of our town's Jewry.

Dawn found us sitting broken-hearted by our bags, getting ready to leave the house we had built, where we had worked - still, maybe it was never a real Home. By the time the waggons departed towards Auschwitz, there were only tortured old men and children with us.
So if you, dear children, should ask me one day, why have we let this happen, there is one thing I can tell you for sure: we were no cowards - just homeless! And don't you ever forget this!

A HANDFUL OF CHERRIES

Every time I am talking about my last journey to Hungary, I start with some excuse. The first of these excuses is the visit to my grandmother's grave. The second: it was imperative that I show my daughter Deborah my birthplace, in order to reconsruct "in situ" the antecedents of the Holocaust tragedy. And the third pretext was, that we were able to combine somehow the travel back from the United States with a sidetrip to Hungary, so it didn't really cost a lot.

There was no real need for all these excuses, except to allay my conscience. After all oughtn't we call ourselves to account from time to time and put up the question: honestly, what on earth have you been looking for there, where your parents and brothers were delivered to the Nazis, where the best years of your youth have been destroyed forever?? I didn't dare to answer these questions truthfully before the mirror, the real answer being, that I would like to retrace the footsteps of my happy childhood before the tragedy, maybe I would find there a few honest people... I won't possibly find fifty just men, but for Heaven's sake - maybe ten? G-d has been ready to spare a whole town for the sake of ten just men... and Kiskunfélegyháza had forty thousand inhabitants!

* * *

Deborah accompanied me to Félegyháza. I took a picture of her before the famous town hall, with its ornament of painted tulips. This was the town hall, where my grandfather Kuhn had registered the birth of his four children, who all had honest Jewish names like Israel, Yitzhak, David-Shmuel and Feigi. Then came my father, who had three children to register: Gábor, Lea and Évike. The writer of these lines was the only one from these, who came back from Auschwitz.

The tulips are still shining on the town hall, but, again, what are we looking for there ? Some admit it, some deny it - I am not ashamed to admit my weakness, the nostalgia. We have come to Félegyháza in the company of an old Jewish friend from Budapest. A year has passed by, but I am still unable to give account of my feelings, when I first saw the sights of my home town. If my daughter hadn't been there with me, I would have turned back and fled. Nearing our house I asked my friend Eva to drive on quickly. I found no strength in my soul to enter the house, or even to look at it.

* * *

We left the car in the center of the town. There was only one childhood friend I would have liked to meet. The only one, who stood by me on those dark days. Tarjáni Ica had been her name then, but who would know her now by that name? I had no idea if she had married, what could be her husband's name - so I couldn't do better than recall her memory by the well that stood near the ghetto.

Twice daily they have let us leave the ghetto to carry water, accompanied by gendarmes, from the well. I

show the well to Deborah, the scene is so clear before my eyes, as if it happened only yesterday. I can't believe forty-one years have passed by since. When I had reached the well, there was standing 14 year old, barefoot Ica, who had been waiting for me for hours. There she stood weeping, holding a handful of cherries. "They are for you, don't be afraid" - she said and embraced me. Then she cursed the accompanying gendarme with such words she herself became ashamed of them. She was deeply convinced that the curse shall have effect immediately and I shall be free again.

Now I would have been glad to have opportunity to thank her belatedly for that handful of cherries, that slight sign of friendship and sympathy. Ica has been poor in worldly goods, they had only one room to live in, but she had a soul full of riches. There I was standing, bewitched, in the middle of the town. Finally I went up to a middle-aged woman. "If you please, I finished school in 42, but I still remember the list of the pupils in class IVB. Surely most of them are married by now and have other names, still, maybe you could find one of them you know?" And I began with the Bajza's, then Cibolya, Cserényi and so on. When I got to Lantos, she stopped me, she had known her. I was a bit disappointed, remembering that Lantos hadn't been keen on making friends with Jewish girls. She had been one of the "better" people, her father being an engineer. I give some distinctive marks - everything fits. Now she is a school principal, her husband's name is Gyula Makó.

I visit the Makó's. I find Sári Lantos at home. I recognize her and tell her, who I am. Four years we have been sitting near each other in class. "I would like to

meet some old school friends" - I say to her. She looks me over, then she says with a wry smile: "My memory is terrible. I can't recall you or any of the ohers." Before the visit is over, her husband puts in a word: "Will you please leave your adress, so if we find something we shall be able to write you?"

* * *

In the graveyard we found the sunken grave of my Grandmother. My eyes are full of tears. "Look, Mamika, I have brought here your great-granddaughter!" Deborah says her prayers, my friend Eva is looking on full of emotions. Good old grandmother, Esther Weber... You have passed away still in time...

But I couldn't find Ica. The town is beautiful, everything remained intact. I am the only one who hears the wail of the shrubs and trees.

This week I got a letter. The sender: Hermann Józsefné, Kiskunfélegyháza, Ságvári Endre utca 3. "My dear friend - it said - it is me, Ica. I have heard that you have been here and got your adress. I wish I were in better health so I could see you again sometime..."

"Dearest Ica - I have answered - now I know, why did this town remain intact, why didn't that beautiful town hall collapse ! Because there was at least one just soul living there...."

I WAS NO HERO...

It happens sometimes, that deep down we carry with us unconscious thoughts, being unable to express them logically. They stay there in our deepest recesses, even if we do revert to them from time to time. Then somebody comes along and puts exactly into words, aloud or in writing, what we would have liked to utter coherently so long.

A spiritual experience has been occupying my mind for decades and I was unable to bring it into consciousness, until, thanks to a story Dov Shilansky, the speaker of the Knesset had retold on the Holocaust Remembrance day, I was able to put it into words.

The story tells of two families in the middle of the Holocaust horrors, when everybody had tried to salvage whatever he could, and had fought first of all for his bare life. Some mothers have put their children into the hands of non-Jewish strangers, some youngsters have left their parents in order to save themselves. One of two sons of a certain family left it behind, joined the partisans, fought on the ground and under it against the Nazis. The other son felt unable to abandon his elderly parents, grandparents - and they have all perished. Now which of the two sons was a hero? Shilansky had no answer to this question...

But at that moment something cropt up in my memory. The time: Shavuot 1944. The place: the overcrowded ghetto of Marosvásárhely. New deprivation of rights, new humiliations every day. A few young girls went up to Budapest in order to procure false papers. With my fifteen years I wouldn't dream to abandon my family. The cramped ghetto home still gave some warmth, some protection. It didn't bother me to sleep in the same room with my parents and siblings. Every morning Grandfather had brought the water beaker and bowl to our beds, insisting on the six ablutions, so we wouldn't go around with soiled hands.

The ghetto brought us together with Grandfather, so every precept had to be observed stricter than before, still - it was so nice to stay together! 45 years have passed away since and yet I'm not sorry I stayed with them, didn't make use of the several opportunities to escape. Of course there was no possibility whatever for the whole family to get away. And what is more - we kept putting our faith in the land of the Magyars.

A few days before Shavuoth I was standing with five other young girls at the ghetto entrance, hoes on our shoulders, permitted to go to work in the vegetable gardens a few kilometers away. Before leaving Ervin Steiner, the head of the Jewish Council cautioned us lest we try to run way, Heaven forbid! Well, I could have escaped, but I kept thinking of my mother, my brothers and sisters. Without them the day's labour was harder, stretched out endlessly. We feared for each other, but even in the small ghetto still there was some measure of warmth of home.

* * *

After Shavuot we were driven into the brickyards of Kecskemét. I remember well spending the nights under the sky, on the bare earth, remember the heartrending wretchedness of the sick, the elderly, the little children. All the Jews of Kiskunfélegyháza, Kecskemét, Csongrád, Kiskörös were crowded together there. Besides guarding our scant belongings our only concern had been to stay together.

Gendarmes were guarding us. We had to go outside the camp to bring water. Coming back from one of these excursions the gendarme yelled at me: "What are you doing here among the Jews? Be off with you at once!"

I was quite familiar with Kecskemét, I could have gotten away, escape easily. But what will my mother think, what became of me? Couldn't she die from worry?

Shedding tears I tried to assure the gendarme that my family is there in the brickyard and that there is my place too. Even today I don't know if the gendarme had thought me to be Aryan or he had tried to save me...

No, I don't repent a thing. If there had to be an Auschwitz, then it was as well that I have been there. This made it easier for me to carry for 45 years the burden of the survival, of remaining alive. Being with my family lasted only up to the gates of Auschwitz. From then on I was in the hands of fate. Yes, I remained alone, but up to this day I feel I couldn't have done otherwise.

I still seem to hear my Mother's voice repeating: "If we shall be separated, take care of Évike, brush her hair regularly!" Mother and Évike were taken away from my side together, in an instant they were driven over to the other side. I didn't have to take care of my little sister's

long black hair. No, I was no hero, didn't perform heroic deeds - but knowing that I stayed with them as long as possible puts somehow my conscience at rest.



I HAVE NEVER REACHED SIXTEEN...

There has been a seemingly meaningless deed I tried to explain to myself. The recollections were arising in me like a small snowball getting in motion, swelling later into a demonical avalanche. It was an unimportant trifle: one of those spontaneous acts we don't ascribe any importance to - but what psychology has long ago shown to be signals coming from the deepest regions of the soul, a message of encapsulated spiritual experiences repressed into the unconscious, now arising from the darkness of unfathomed depths. This is how it was: standing before a shop-window I noticed a thin silver ring, the sort 12 year olds wear. I bought it on the spot, took off my gold ring and put the silver one in its place.

A childlike gesture - I could have called it, if there wouldn't arise from the deep a recollection of an old silver ring.

* * *

"1942-47 - five year reunion" - this has been engraved in the silver ring all 33 pupils of class IVB of the "Constantinum" girls-college were putting on their fingers on June 1942 between the snow-white walls of the flower-decked classroom. The girls kept giggling about their plans for the future, about choosing a career.

Only the four Jewish girls of the class felt their possibilities narrowing down day by day.

Four years I have been allowed to visit this famous school. We couldn't complain about anything special, except the double tuition fee we had to pay. But after the four years of junior high school to get into a lyceum, a teacher's college, an agricultural school, where you could find even countesses and baronessses - well, for a Jewish girl it was out of question. With clenched teeth I had to admit, that in spite of my good academic record there was no possibility for me to study further.

I was fourteen, when my mother contracted me as an apprentice to a sewing shop. I couldn't act like a self-willed child, we were mostly characterized anyway at the time by a sort of resignation. Looking back one could reflect, why had it to be so? Could we have acted differently? Would it have been any help if, in face of the satanic powers, we had done anything else? I had to accept bitterly, that in spite of the fee my mother had paid, beside sewing I had to carry coal and water, clean up the workshop - while the gentile young ladies were able to continue their studies.

Still the thirst for beauty kept on living in us. There was a wonderful Jewish youth. There were the Shabbats and the free Sundays. I have written a piece about the Good Fairy, built the scenery myself. My little sister Évike played the Good Fairy, the scene - an old tennis-table in the middle of our vast courtyard. My brother Gabi put up the electric gramophone with his own hands. Évi Grünwald from Budapest, who spent the summer with us, sang of Socialism. I recited naively and loudly a poem of Szabolcsi:

If the streets ring with hep-hep
And they show you the door:
"Begone! "
You should insist: no, never....

We sent the receipts discreetly to the collection helping the Polish refugees. Our Rabbi, Dr. György Kalmár visited the neighboring towns, lecturing on the works of Yehuda Halevy, Moses Mendelssohn and preaching "The Love of Zion". A small breeze of Jewish culture in the midst of the humiliating milieu. Values versus the growing barbarism; a colourful, translucent muslin curtain put on our windows to shut out the spectre of the coming conflagration and earthquake.

Dark clouds towered above my native town. The circle around us was narrowing all the time. I wasn't yet fifteen and wanted above all to become sixteen.

But I have never reached sixteen.

* * *

As they did every year, my parents have invited uncle Birnbaum, the cobbler, well before the autumn festivals to our house. He was a master of shoemaking. As usual he measured the feet of the children and wrote down the terms: laced, high, double-soled shoes, fine leather, to be ready before Rosh Hashana. This ceremony repeated itself year by year in an atmosphere of pleasant expectation. But this year I was sulking, while showing him my feet, and uncle Birnbaum couldn't come to terms with me.

- I want high heels! - I stamped my feet in defiance.

- Only when you become sixteen - answered my mother mildly.

"Deadly Spring" was running in the town cinema... Everybody was whistling the hit of the picture: "So did we perish..." In the window the pictures of Pál Jávor, Katalin Karádi, Éva Szörényi. For people over sixteen only! What do I care - I'm no schoolgirl any more! I wish to see the film on a Sunday afternoon.

- Wait till you will be sixteen - said Mother.

* * *

In a few weeks time no Jew, of whatever age, could go to the cinema any more. I couldn't even finish my two year apprenticeship. We were driven into the ghetto. The decrees fell one after another upon our heads like poleaxes. Giving up the jewels. I handed in my thin golden chain with its amulet, Moses and the two Tablets of the Law on it, and the silver ring with the anniversary inscription.

No, I have never reached sixteen. The train rushed us to Auschwitz. The Hungarian railroads have been working day and night so the delivery should run quicker. They had crowded more than a hundred in one waggon. Whence this crazy hatred? The great Magyar souls never have preached racism or antisemitism, not Kossuth, not Petöfi, not Arany, not Madách, not Kosztolányi, nor Atilla József. How come they listened to the voice of the depraved rabble and not to the poet Ady, who wrote in deep sympathy about the "branded host":

Be your blood a hundred times
alien
Still it is mine, mine...

Yet they worked overtime, diligently, servilely, deported us, finding sick delight in our destruction.

* * *

No, I never reached sixteen. We arrived instead in Auschwitz: an unending line of barracks, an enormous area, cut to pieces by barbed wire fences and watchtowers. My poor, good Mother, together with the Little Fairy, Évike, were taken immediately to the gas-chambers. My Father too. Brother Gabi met his death later, during the Vienna death-march. And I found myself, wearing the double soled, artistic shoes of uncle Birnbaum, behind the deadly barbed wire.

The bigger girls of the children's block were taken to work, breaking stones. The sharp rocks were stained by the blood seeping from the wounded soles of children. Uncle Birnbaum's fine shoes protected my feet very well, but not for long. The second day the S.S. overseer already had detected them. Scandalized she confiscated them, wondering whose carelessness brought it about. Barefoot I stumbled back to the barrack.

Well, Mother dear, I'll never reach sixteen!

The long Appels (reviews) went on for endless hours, now standing, now on our knees. After the "deadly spring" came the dogdays of summer, followed swiftly by the cold October dawns. They found us barefoot, shivering in a single thin shift. On November 25th I should have become sixteen, if we haven't been

vegetating without calendars, out of the world, suffering, doomed to death. My Mother's every word was like the Bible for us - and lo! - what didn't she promise me for this day! Lying on the stone-hard plank-bed I kept daydreaming: the skies open and the Good Fairy, together with Mother, descend to greet me on my birthday. The electric fences fall down, uncle Birnbaum creates new, high-soled shoes for my wounded feet. I shall be permitted to finish school.

All this horror is nothing but a dream. That there is not a drop of water for my parched throat. It isn't true, that I have been standing naked in the disinfecting room, with a lot of other girls, the S.S. horde guffawing all around us. This filth of the humanity disappears, as if it were nothing but an evil spell. I shall awake, Mother bakes the cake, the pink tablecloth on the table. Gabi comes home from the Yeshiva. Little Fairy tiptoes into the room and recites the poem I have written for her.

The skies didn't open on November 25th. Mother didn't come back. I can't find my sixteenth year anywhere. The blackhearted brigands stole it away. Every morning we march on bleeding feet wrapped in newspapers seven kilometers from the freezing barrack to the Telefunken factory in the town of Horneburg to our toil. Our wages: starvation, blood, wounds and the lash.

Freedom, the wonder of wonders, came too late for so many beautiful, good people who had perished. It couldn't give me back my home, couldn't revive parents, brothers, sisters. In our family home I found cold faces. Félegyháza looked bleak, alien. The cobbler's last lay forsaken in uncle Birnbaum's workshop.

* * *

We made aliyah with a sole rucksack on our shoulder, began a new life in the old-new homeland. Unfamiliar surroundings, unusual climate, strange new language and the hard struggle for the daily bread. In a rented room I give birth to my children.

Suddenly the wounds open again: the newspapers speak of restitution. After all they not only killed us, they divested us of everything. I am sitting in Dr. Brunovsky's law office. His notebook on the desk before him. "Tell me please, how it all began."

- Ghetto...the brick-yard... Suddenly the words choke me and I stop speaking. I can't help myself, sob bitterly, gasping, overcome by nausea and hysterical trembling. Flames flare up around me, the sickening odor of burning flesh fills the office... I am unable to speak. He asks for my father's name. Yes, he was there too - I nod in answer. But the word "Mother" squeezes again my heart into convulsion.

- Please, pull yourself together and come again next week, with witnesses...

Board of Restitution... Petition of disablement... Authorisations... Medical examination...

- What is your complaint?

- I never became sixteen, you know...

I had asked for two weeks in a rest home, but they refused. I appealed and the sentence came: In the name of the German people etc. the judge has ruled, that you aren't entitled to the recuperation asked for. So be it.

I walked uphill to the Carmel. There was my beautiful city, Haifa, spread out before me. A variety of

colours on the hills and vales, the blue of sea and sky. From the top of the Carmel I shouted into the wind: True, they have robbed us of our youth, destroyed our family, took away our belongings, made cripples of some, but we are still here, in our home, living , hoping and ... Am Yisrael chai! The People of Israel lives on forever!



IN MEMORY OF MY FATHER

Friends, near and distant relatives all have come together to "rejoice with the bride and bridegroom". How nice are these family festivities! A reunion of people one hasn't seen for a long time, felt close to at the time, but in the swift course of years hardly ever stumbled on to. Faces emerge from oblivion, wearing here and there the deep furrows of age. Some yarmulkes sit on bald heads and the beards are getting gray. Some of the survivors of the Great Catastrophe have grandchildren of marrying, or at least soldiering age.

On the other side of the room I see mostly strictly observant men around the table, at the head of which I notice a white-bearded, kaftan-wearing, one-eyed Jew. I feel the glance of the one eye on me. Then our eyes meet in embarrasment.

Suddenly the floodgates of memory open up.

I saw him last time in Budapest, after the war. He had revealed for me the day of my father's death. Both of us have met already in Auschwitz. It was difficult for him then to recount the happenings - and now I still see the pain of the death camps lurking in his one remaining eye. Later he had gone to America. Now, after so many years he had decided to wait with his family in Jerusalem for the coming of the Messiah.

The orchestra is playing, smiles, handshakes, high spirits everywhere. Only I am somewhere else: my thoughts linger on my Father.

He was hardly forty at the time. Those who remember him know what a handsome man he used to be. Loved life and people. Now we meet again as I see him alive, smiling in my mind's eye.

I recall the last Pessach day.

At that time father had accomplished daring feats of rescue. He arranged for some relatives from Slovakia to find shelter with us for some time. With his Jewish heart he solved every problem ingenuously,

The kaftan-wearing Jew on the other side of the room was a second cousin of my father and the only living witness of his last day.

The thoughts keep running in my mind.

Daytime, sweltering heat. They take us from the children's block of camp C to camp B. Like stray dogs we are looking around, where could we find a teeny drop of water. Four-five men in striped clothes came every day into the women's camp, towing-pushing a cart they had filled up with the content of the cesspool. The moment they arrived the resourceful among us cornered them instantly, because these always brought with them in the cart some water or a piece of bread.

One day they were looking for me, the girls were shouting out my real name, not my prison-number. One of the prisoners accompanying the cart is asking around: "Maybe one of you knows Lea Kun of Félegyháza?"

I approach them. "I am Lea Kun" - I say. "Don't you recognize me? Be here tomorrow too, I shall bring you news from your Father."

Next day he brought me a small packet and a sign of life written by my Father's own hand on a cigarette box: "Take care of yourself! Where are Mama and Évi?

Kisses from Father." For some days I kept getting messages with the tiny packages. I was proud of my good, clever father. He has found me. He will free me from here. But where is he? Why doesn't he help me now?! - broke out the aching sigh from me . And then and there, in Auschwitz, I accused the poor man, that he had forsaken me. "Were you not always, everywhere championing for everybody?" - I sobbed - "Why don't you try to save us now?"

Forgive me, Father, for my childish offense....

The packages were falling off. There were no more letters. Still the highlight of my sad days was the coming of the cesspool-cleaners in their striped clothes.

Finally I have run out of patience and asked the man directly: "Why has my father stopped writing?" - "Your father won't write any more" - said he. The piece of bread, the mug of water was already his own gift. My Father has been working in the Sonderkommando, who were exterminated from time to time. But I didn't know it till after the war.

* * *

I startled up from my reflections. The wedding guests surround the chupa. Somebody calls out the name of the one-eyed. They ask him to recite one of the seven traditional benedictions. Cup in hand he shuts his tearful one eye, then pulls himself together and blesses the Name of the Lord.

In the bustling room nobody suspected that the two of us, the man in the kaftan and myself - felt the cup the bridegroom stepped on under the chupa to be broken over our own hearts.

FORGIVE ME, MOTHER

There was no hand to break our shackles
Nothing but resigned apathy

(Ghiskalay)

As I am trying to collect my thoughts, reconstruct and note down truly those days, hours, minutes, when the American army came to liberate us, instead of rejoicing I am overrun by physical and spiritual pain.

But why?

Several stories, novels, dirges have been written about the Holocaust. But the last days, hours, minutes have been the most terrible. Almost out of our mind, in terrible pain, wallowing in the April mud we were unable to imagine, what could we do with freedom. There were only hunger, humiliation and total apathy.

Only who haven't lived those hours of liberation could imagine that there was singing, joy, laughter, that there were flowers, embraces, happiness.

Oh no! We, the survivors know better, what it was like: death-rattle, wailing, shrieks - and seeking madly for relatives!

What had freed itself first inside me, was the sober pain. It had been the first time in some months, that I

was able to weep freely. I didn't revel, I buried instead. I mourned for my Father, Mother, brothers and sisters who went up in flames.

Today, forty years later I feel, that the liberation has brought on me only a most excruciating pain, because, getting back to consciousness, only then was I beginning to comprehend the incomprehensible.

SALZWEDEL

I spread out the map of the Third Reich before me and with a magnifying glass I try to find between Hamburg and Magdeburg the tiny spot, where I experienced the last moments of my servitude and the first ones of liberation. From one side the Americans, from the other the Russians, from the third the English were pressing forward, tightening the noose around the Germans, who on their part drove, urged us forward before them, a few by train, the other thousands on foot, until from various directions we reached a huge camp surrounded by electric barbed wire fence. This was Salzwedel, an overcrowded lager, where the living and the dead were lying side by side on the bare earth.

At our previous, underground workplace bats have been darting, rushing around by night. A 14 year old girl went crazy from fright. On the last night in Salzwedel, lying on the muddy earth of the pitch-dark, crowded barrack I didn't fear any more from death or the bombs, only from that poor, crazy girl. Maybe I had already seen my own self in her.

In the camp around us - the darkness of Egypt. Bombs were falling somewhere. I seemed to hear screams of jackals, but I might have been hallucinating. In the barrack - moaning, wailing, bickering. The living corpses had to trample on the rest, if they wanted to move about. I was always in the company of two sisters, the third of whose was already gone. I stuck to them, as to a talisman. Their father was a holy rabbi in Félegyháza. We were lying head to foot on the ground and it was quite possible for anyone of us to stamp her feet into the face of the other... I crawled out from the barrack into the open and the dark, where at least there were no feet, no stench, no death rattle. Only the chilly, wet April night. I shivered. Then crawled on haphazardly, hoping to find place in another barrack. Something sharp cut into my hand, I felt my blood seeping. There I was sitting in the dark, licking, swallowing my own blood. For days I had nothing to eat or drink... I've lost my way back to my barrack. Crawling on I hoticed a tiny spot of light. It was the guardhouse. Inside our well known Nazi tormentors seemed to change into civilian clothes, leaving their S.S. uniforms behind, in order to escape more easily, but I didn't get the meaning of it, my mind wasn't reacting any more.

TI-TI-TA-TA

A pink strip on the horizon. Day was breaking. Oh, how could I find again my two comrades? See, the moment I have left them, I was wounded. Back, back, to

stick to them always! Even in death, if you must. I felt my way, but couldn't find them any more. Heads, feet only, screams, rattles. And... something resembling morse-signals. Ti-ti-tá-tá - from behind the thin wooden planks of the barrack. The French prisoners have been signalling us from the other side. There used to be with us a clever girl from Nagybánya, who knew some French and the Morse signals too. The French inmates had "wired" us already in the previous camp, that the Allies were near. But where was now that clever girl? Does she hear the signals, already impatient, waiting for an answer? We have to find her immediately! The life-instinct jerks me out of my lethargy. I ought to do something. The sky outside turned already pink. I cry out the name of that girl and at the same time I knocked back at random: ti-ti-ta, so they knew we were listening.

A flash went through my brain: brother Gabi used to court sweet Évi Berger from Csepel (both of them had perished). They were avowing love - by Morse-signals... Then suddenly, hearing the signals, L. breaks her way through the corpses from the other side of the barrack and soon answers lightning-quick: ti-ti-tá-tá... The French respond, she answers back. Several of us ask excitedly: what is going on?

Her hoarse voice is overrun by the sound of the whistles, but she outshouted them, so we could pass on to the rest: "Don't be afraid! You shall be defended!" Meantime the Nazi whistles kept shrieking: "Heraus! Out from the barracks!" (Later we were told that they wanted to execute all of us). While the thousands of women with their last drop of force tried to get up, the French rebelled! "Don't be afraid!" - they were shouting at us - "We shall protect you!" They had had firearms,

up to this day I don't know where they had got them. They had even captured some fleeing S.S. men and women.

Tormenting tension, hunger, thirst. This had been my longest day. I find my two comrades. Now we are not moving away an inch from each other. The minutes crawl by like snails, every hour - a year.

"AND THERE WAS LIGHT..."

The sun was setting. Oh, not another night again! We three dare to draw near to the gate. Our reward was to see the first American tank come thundering into the camp, with its tired but smiling soldiers - and the civil-clothed, self-abasing S.S. who got stuck there, hands in he air. One of the women inmates rushed to the tank, shrieking in Hungarian: "Please, look for my child! I had it on my arms just now, covered with a green woollen shawl!"

Hovering in the grey sky over the liberating tank I imagined to see the tearful, reproaching look of Mother: "Why haven't you taken care of your little sister?" "Forgive me, Mother. Believe me, I have gotten hold of her little hand. A monster had torn her away from me, Mengele was his name... "

Nobody rushed on the Germans to lynch them. The pain was stronger than the will of vengeance. The most tragic fact has been, that just in these hours so many of us have died. They couldn't wait any more, it was impossible to save them.

The darkness has been gone that night. The Americans improvised a temporary lighting in the camp. As a first help of food they threw sackfuls of dried potatoes to us (even today I hate the sight of it!).

The next day they began evacuating the camp, then burnt it to the ground. The Americans made the Germans clean out an army barrack for us and transferred us there. The third day they had to operate on my wounded hand, that became infected.

The first rush of overeating caused a lot of further deaths. The rest were getting the first tastes of freedom. We wandered about, "requisited" things in the village, whenever we got up enough strength. We even met the the former French prisoners. One of them pulled out a hen from the German farmers' coop, wrung its neck right there and handed it to me. I asked the girl from Nagybánya to tell him, that I can't eat a hen that was not ritually slaughtered, but he couldn't understand it.

HÄFTLING - FLÜCHTLING

A lot of Yugoslav partisans have been liberated at the same place. That was a real, unforgettable liberation! They had even found a banner somewhere - and lo, they had already created a homeland for themselves... But what about us? Häftlings (prisoners) we were and now we became Flüchtlings (refugees). Israel didn't yet come into existence at the time and the wretched little group, who didn't want to return to those who had extradited them, vegetated on there for years as refugees.

Every time I think of it, I give thanks from the depth of my heart: **I do have a homeland!**

During our "free shopping" I got hold of a notebook and a pencil. Lately I had before me the notes from April 1945, but on the fortieth anniversary I destroyed them, lest my children get to know, how I had been quarreling with the Lord, like Hiob in his time.

But now I offer thanks to the Almighty, that He had let us live, that after undergoing thousands of sufferings we still had strength to preserve our faith and confidence and to bring forth a new generation in the land of Israel.



FORGIVE ME, GRANDMA

The 27th day of Nissan - the day of destruction and heroism. This day we shall remember forever, so we never forget the Holocaust, that took six million victims from among our Jewish brethren. The passing years didn't obliterate anything, didn't let us, living witnessses of the atrocities, forget, because it is our eternal duty to give warning. And the answer to that should be unconditional loyalty and gratitude towards our homeland.

That same gratitude fills my heart, that I have been able to take part in last year's pilgrimage to Auschwitz and to transmit to the next generation all that happened to us. Let this small recollection be a drop in the sea of tears.

* * *

The liberated prisoners of Hillersleben camp had surrounded excitedly the bellowing loudspeaker calling out monotonely the names of the survivors from the neighboring camps.

A stooping, freezing old woman is listening with all her senses. She has heard the name of her granddaughter called out and remembered exactly the name of the camp where she should be now. So she didn't ponder long, but took action. Where the granddaughter stays, there should

be the grandmother too. She dragged herself to the camp-commandant's office and said a sole word to the American sentry: "Urgent!" Now I don't know if she said it in Hungarian, German, Slovak or Yiddish, still it must have been told with such self-assurance, that they gave her an interpreter and brought her before the commandant.

As Grandma related later, the officer was chewing something, his feet on the desk before him. So what? Who had worried then about such niceties? Hadn't these fine soldiers liberated us in the last moment in Bergen-Belsen? Hadn't they brought us here to try and put life back into hundreds of half-dead men?

- What's up, Grandma? - asked the captain, chewing-gum in mouth. Grandma recounted how she had heard through the loudspeaker, that her granddaughter is staying in Salzwedel, and she insists that they bring her there instantly. The interpreter translates, the captain answers with a sole word: Tomorrow! Grandma shakes her head: Not tomorrow, today! Who knows where she will be tomorrow? She will wait right there, before the command-post, until they bring her granddaughter there...

Two hours later I hear my name called out through the loudspeaker. Everybody is looking for me. Well, where have I been? Like somebody obsessed I have been looking for my sister Évike, though I knew, had seen with my own eyes, how Mengele had sent her to the left. Together with Mother.

* * *

They bring me to a pair of lanky American soldiers. Hello baby! - they greet me and thrust a big table of chocolate in my hand, then invite me into their jeep. Not on your life! Why should I drive around with two soldiers just for the fun of it? It lasts a bit until with my scanty English I understand finally, that my grandmother is waiting for me. It sounds unbelievable, but my heart began to warm up already.

Grandma stuck to her word. She had been waiting exactly on the same spot, before the command-post, from where the soldiers went to look for me. She stumbled up to me and kissed my face. "Where is your Mother?" - she asked.

- She will come too - I say, that is: I lied. She looked searchingly into my face, wanting to believe me.

* * *

Grandma and I had made an adventurous journey, till we reached home. Mother never came back. Grandma kept asking me about her with growing mistrust. I could see in her look the silent reproach: "You have deceived me!" Maybe - thought I, but at the time I felt I couldn't act otherwise.

Her distrust expressed itself in other ways too. I grew up meantime, but she still wanted to "protect" me. "Where have you been? With whom?"

Well, one nice day I stood before her and announced: "Grandma, I'm going to marry. He is a nice, good boy."

I don't know if she had believed me then. With my husband I made aliyah. Grandma stayed with her only surviving daughter and her family in Makó.

* * *

Ten years have gone by. Once upon a time people used to say "It is as far as Makó from Jerusalem". Well, it seems nowadays Makó is not that far from Jerusalem! Grandma made aliyah when she was seventy five. "I want to die here, in the Holy Land" - she said. "Carve on my tombstone the names of my children and grandchildren, who have no grave!" That was the wish of the wise old dame. Embracing the first time my daughter, whom we had called Deborah after my Mother, she sent me a forgiving glance from her blue eyes.

I visit her grave every year in the Zichron Meir cemetery and feel that Grandma has finally forgiven me my pious lie...



F E L L A

Maybe it was as well that they made us leave our belongings in the waggons. We didn't want anything any more, except to stick together with our loved ones. Mother was holding my hand, I - the hand of my little sister. The tiny hand stuck to mine so hard the S.S. man could only with difficulty tear it away.

I was already trudging far away, but still could hear the scream my Mother has sent after me. Finally I arrived at the childrens' barrack. One thousand children, aging between twelve and sixteen, in barrack no. 8. Most of us didn't touch for weeks the swill they gave us to eat, cried out instead in unison: Mum, Mamele, Mummy!

Hunger, cold, thirst and the "Appel"-s had finally hardened the young hearts. In some awoke the will to live - those stole out to the garbage-heap for every potato-peel or scraped out the dregs from the swill-bin. Others had broken down and fell - then at the next "selection" they went to the gas-chambers.

For several days now I have been suffering from terrible head and ear-ache. My mouth festered out from fever, blood and pus were oozing from my ear.

"Zehlappel (review)! The sick remain in the barracks!" We were aware by now, where were the sick going in Auschwitz, but I didn't care any more. I lay down on the cold floor, waiting for something to happen, that will stop the terrible pain, be it Death

himself! :"Mummy..." - I whimpered. I held out my arms in the direction, where her cry had come from, imagining to hear her vocie.

A pair of kindly gray eyes looked down on me.

- You have to go out to the Appel, you know! You shouldn't be sick here!

- No, no, I don't want any Appel, I don't want anything any more!

A pair of strong hands helped me up.

- You must live, don't you understand? - said she in German and pushed me out to the Appel.

It was Fella, the Blockälteste (overseer) of barrack no. 8. When we came back, frozen, swooning, from the morning review, Fella took me to her tiny room at the end of the barrack. She put me on her bed, made tea, then began to clean out the suppurating, infected ear. She caressed my bald head, then began to relate her sad story. She had been studying to become a nurse in a Polish small town. This was her fourth winter in Auschwitz. She had to put her Mother with her own hands on the truck going to the crematorium, because the frozen flesh was hanging down in shreds from her bones and couldn't stand the agony any more.

- Still, you, children, must stay alive! Maybe the children of Israel will resurrect one day! - she used to say. Daily she took care of and served as a mother for one thousand suffering children. Before lying down in our terrible coops, Fella went over us, kissed the remaining children on the forehead - since our numbers were diminishing from day to day. She tried to instil solace and the will to live in us.

Two months later I was transferred to a work camp. Lots of suffering and vicissitudes were still laying before

me. Even after the liberation I have been living the life of the orphaned, the lonely. Life went on, and though our hearts were still bleeding, we have found a new homeland. Then came the children, the small joys and sorrows. I haven't forgotten Fella, but have never heard from her since.

* * *

Twenty-four years have gone by. The six-day war came. My son was studying in a Jerusalem yeshiva. I called him up:

- Come home, son, be with us in these times!

- Mother - came the answer - you shouldn't ask this of me now. I can't leave Jerusalem. Every able-bodied man is now giving a hand...

The war was over. I was among the first who went up to Jerusalem. I was standing before the Beth Hakerem yeshiva, listening to the hum of Talmud-study. Here comes my son, the talmud-scholar. He embraces me smiling, then says:

- Well, mummy, now I shall show you Jerusalem the golden!

I am happy, this is the first time I feel that it has been worth to escape from Hell.

The same instant, as I was beginning to move, my eyes met a pair of tired, sad, gray eyes. I am unable to speak. I snatch the hand of the woman. Sobs break up from my heart while I gather strength to utter the one word:

- Fella?

And she answers in tears: - Block eight, my child!

My son stood petrified by me, until Fella invited us to her home.

Then we began, among tears, our conversation, while I related everything I could recall about her. She just nodded her head from time to time. She said she is now a head-nurse in the Hadassa hospital.

- Day and night I am taking care of my children - says she.

- What children!

- All the wounded soldiers are my children!

* * *

The rare half-hours I am able to spend in Fella's simple, but gracious home in Beth Hakerem, where she is living with her husband Abraham, the gifted agronomist, stay with me like as many unforgettable memories. Her greatest joy is to meet one of the children from Block 8. She would like to bring together the survivors (we have counted some fifty of us) in the children's memorial at Yad Veshem, and remember those who haven't lived to see the day of liberation. Otherwise she didn't want any thanks, any laurels.

I remember how she had stood, pale as death, beside Mengele trying desperately to think of something that could hold back some of those doomed to death. And sometimes she had succeeded. I still imagine to see the fair-haired young girl in her striped prisoner's garb, watching Mengele's hand and sweating... Then, after the Appel, she spread out her arms towards us: "My dear children! Don't give up hope! You must live!!"

And now, as I am sitting beside her, she spreads out her arm the same way towards me and I feel, that she still carries in her heart her beloved lager-children, and I promise her, in the name of the surviving inmates of barrack 8, that we shall never forget, never forsake her...

The 7 km long procession. 45 years ago I was marching with trembling feet on the road towards the death-camp. Now I feel no exhaustion

I am looking at the sky. Do <u>they</u> look down upon us? Behind us the procession of several thousand young people - the Jewish youth with the blue-white flag raised high.




מצעד החיים תש"ן
MARCH OF THE LIVING 1990

On the ramp again, along the rails.

ARBEIT MACHT FREI - *Work liberates - this is where I as a young girl was carrying heavy stones. Now my son Yitzhak stands there. Unbelievable, but true...*





My son watches over my every step

The students consume the sandwiches brought from home. Eating the "Angel" bread from Jerusalem, this was the first time I have wept.





I tell about the tragedy.
The kids listen with bowed heads.

Israel's youth, the next draft of soldiers around me.
Shira doesn't move from my side.





Rabbi Lau, chief rabbi of Tel Aviv speaks,
then "Hatikva" from several thousand young throats
- in Auschwitz!

In front of block no. 10, wreaths in
memory of the martyrs.




10
BLOCK

Before the open gates of Auschwitz.

At the wall of execution - with Yitzhak.





Breathing stops, hearts fail a moment
in front of the crematorium.

Countless shoes, suitcases in an enormous room.
On a torn suitcase I noticed my father's name...




KUHN
EVA PANDER

Behind the gates I imagine to see Mengele and the crematorium

We leave Auschwitz, consoled by the thought: Am Yisrael Hai!






K.K.L. J.N.F.
זכור

MY PRIVATE COLLECTION

As an introduction, let me say a few words about the collecting hobby, which, of course, has several variations. Japanese millionaires, for example, are apt to pay 40-50 million dollars for a Van Gogh masterpiece. The most populous crowd are, probably, the stamp collectors. Others collect coins, antiquities, Judaica, what not, some of which might become quite valuable. Our grandchildren, of course, begin on a more modest level, like collecting paper napkins, match-boxes, hotel-stickers and the like.

My collecting hobby concerns my former lager-comrades, or more exactly - the former inmates of children's block no.8. in Auschwitz. Those minors, who had survived out of the one thousand deported children.. I too have been part of this sad crowd for a few months.

I have found already our Blockälteste, Fella. I wanted to thank her from my deepest heart, but she warded me off, saying: "Were you not my flesh and blood? I would have given my life for you!"

My collection up to now consists of 12 former prisoners of barrack 8. We are planning to visit Yad Veshem and recall the memory of those, who didn't live to see the day of liberation.

The circle of my friends knows, how important is this for me, how many years I have been looking for my

comrades. So when at one of my friends a Canadian guest has mentioned the children's camp in Auschwitz, she called me up immediately, even if it was past ten in the evening. There is a golden nugget for you - she said and gave over the receiver instantly to her guest. We recite each other's maiden name. Juci Winkler of Vác. Half an hour we cannot stop speaking. Forty-three years earlier we have lived trough the same horrors, but haven't heard from each other since. Now the terrible past comes to life again. We remember everything exactly.

Juci came here with the Canadian WIZO-delegation, has two more days to stay. We made an appointment for the next day in the foyer of the Panorama hotel on the Carmel.

Both of us arrive half an hour early. We embrace excitedly. "I had recognized you immediately" - we tell (lie?) each other. Juci became a beautiful woman. She was very thin in Auschwitz, sickly most of the time. She had been fifteen and she had told the most beautiful stories about her home. Her father wasn't earning much, but he adored his children.

"You know - said Juci on the wooden plank-bed of Auschwitz - when we were coming back from school and daddy told us, that we just had another little brother, out of sheer joy we began to dance. This was our parents' fifteenth child."

Well, could you forget such a tale? Sipping the coffee-cream in the Panorama espresso, we are wondering, how were we able to survive.

We were singing together in the children's choir too. I can only recall the tune, but she remembers exactly the words: "Liebe war es nicht - nur ein kleine Liebelei."

Juci even remembers my birthday. At the time we were in a work-camp near Hamburg, sixteen in a room. She recalls, how I have been putting aside my bread-ration for days in order to create a "cake" from it, with a thin film of margarine for icing. Everybody got a slice. Then each of us recalled her first love. Who haven't had one, made it up.

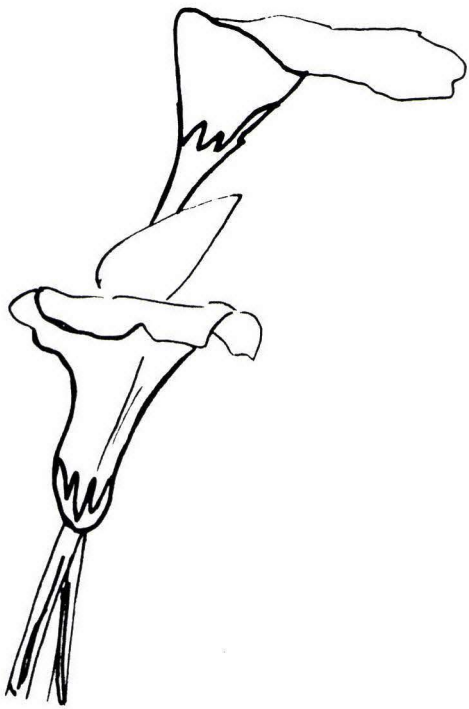
Meanwhile our lips were blue with cold, flowers of frost sparkled on the window-panes. The S.S. guards took turns watching us, though we were fully marked, so it was impossible to escape.

Where could be little Klári? Had she survived? Her love story was the most beautiful. Her thin body was full of sores, the veins stood out on her blue face, but her eyes were shining, as she told her story. "I had beautiful, long, vawy hair, you know" - she has begun. - "That day I put a carnation in it. I was going to visit my girl-friend, who lived on the other side of the town. Yankele had seen me, came after me on his bycicle, put me on the frame before him, pedalling slowly. He kissed my hair and whispered into my ear: "How beautiful you are, Klárika! I love you!"

Tears were running down her thin face. "I shall be beautiful again, you'll see" - she sniffed.

So we went on talking, remembering for hours. She looked then like she was, old little Juci. True, from time to time, she changed back to the grown woman, Judith, who is going to fly back to Montreal, to her two married daughters. I don't ask her, why doesn't she come to live in Israel. She knows the country is waiting patiently for its children. Meantime they are working for Israel.

Judith is already part of my collection. I wish there were more. If somebody hears of a former inmate of children's-block no. 8, will he let me know, please...



FORGET-ME-NOT

Whenever I pass through the early summer market, its marvelous sights bring up always the memory of the camps. The stands staggering with honey-sweet apricots, the watermelons lying in great heaps, piles of fine vegetables, the hard, red tomatoes - what would we have been ready to give for these there and then? All the money in the world. We would have been ready to mortgage our primogeniture a thousand times for a bowl of lentils - but there were no lentils, no tomatoes, only hell...

Apricots, their orange-coloured peels and flesh - wouldn't it be nice to prepare jam from it for the kids - if I had the right mood for that... Two acquaintances greet me from both sides at once and as usual, I introduce them to each other:

- This is Batya, my first neighbor in Israel, who had known my son David when still in the kindergarten (at the time our children haven't seen apricots, except in picture books - even if we could afford them). And this is my camp-sister A., we have been together in the children's block in Auschwitz...

When Batya departed, my one time camp-sister went pale and hissed with chattering teeth:

- I don't want to hear this any more: Auschwitz, camp-sister - let go, for Heaven's sake, I don't want you to talk about it, understand? I don't want it...

I tried to calm her, hush her up, and then somehow an old Hungarian tune came into my head: "You can't forget by order..." - can you? And later: "Blue forget-me-nots" and so on.

Calmed down or not - we take leave from each other. I turn towards home. The noise is deafening, women picking, looking for better, nicer merchandise, the vendors shouting, throwing cases around. Enough, let's go away. The pictures of the past keep spinning before my mind's eye, the past you cannot escape from. "No, you can't, can't forget". My son David wrote so: "Whoever looks back into the past only, has no future; who looks forward into the future and doesn't take account of the lessons of the past, can't have any future either..." I almost wander into a red light, somebody shouts at me warningly. Thanks!

Let's see, how did it happen?

Summer 1944. Sixteen of us, with skin and bone A., "skinny" A. among us, were pressed together on the narrow plank-bed of the children's block in Auschwitz, barely alive. We have to breath, to turn over together, there is no other way. I became acquainted first with A.-s feet, lying as we were head to foot, head to foot. Never in my life have I seen feet so lean. This is why we called her "skinny A.".

Skinny A.-s yellow skin clinged pitifully to her thin, crooked bones, bald head - but the will to live burned on in her coal-black eyes. Nobody was as terribly hungry as her. And how cleverly did she evade the selections! She was a unique artist of survival in that ongoing struggle

for life. She was the only one who could "organize" some potato-peels, or steal out for a jug of water.

And - what I have since forgiven her - skinny A. was stealing. With cat-like deftness. When dark night fell over the children's block and the hundreds of girls, fagged out by crying, fell asleep - a cry went out from here and there: "Oh, my bread!" That sawdust bread, of which only the very strong-willed were able to put aside a bit till morning, so they could assuage their hunger until the next bread-distributing in the evening.

But skinny A. had courage not only for stealing, but to help others too. She stole out of the barrack for a jug of water, when a daughter of a highland rabbi fainted and collapsed while reciting the Psalms. It happened during curfew and it was sure death would she be noticed.

There was something I was jealous of skinny A. for: she knew Yiddish. So she could understand with ease not only the orders of the Nazi beasts, but their intents too. And besides, she could curse them, damn them with such a relish, wishing cholera and such on their heads.

Later we went together to the forced labor camp, where we were called by numbers only. Anybody who didn't jump immediately after hearing her number was beaten severely on the spot. We Magyars, who understood German with some difficulty, suffered much because of it. So skinny A., when she heard my siebentausend neunhundert sieben und zwanzig (7927), poked me in the back just in time. I am still grateful for it.

Skinny A. and I were liberated together. I remember how she swore, that when she shall have a home again,

she shall always keep a pot of cooked potatoes ready. She was educated by the Youth Aliya, isn't skinny any more, a tall, good-looking woman - but still, one of the living victims of Hitler...



A 30 YEAR LATE INTERVIEW

After the second World War psychiatrists said most of the Holocaust survivors shall need several decades in order to be able to talk of their sufferings. The following story might be seen as a manifest example to this.

Éva was twelve, when we have shared the same fate in the children's barrack in Auschwitz. This frail creature must have been an exception, it was a miracle, how she could always evade Mengele's "selections". She was really nothing but a skeleton, doomed to death actually, but she has fought for survival with an incredible energy. Her intrepid struggle was reflected in her glowing, ember-like black eyes.

My little lager-companion stayed with me through oceans of suffering till the Day of Liberation in Salzwedel. Interim stations were: the munitions factory in Horneburg, the underground plant in Upper Silesia, then Fellersleben. Thanks to the request of my miraculously surviving grandmother the Americans transferred me from Salzwedel to Hillersleben. As for Éva, the Religious Zionists Organization took her, with a sizable group of children, to Bergen-Belsen and then to Sweden. Meir Sambulinsky, son of the Danish chief rabbi and previous director ot the Mikweh Israel

agricultural school was the organizer of this operation. Under his leadership the group regained quickly its physical and moral strength and waited for the green light to come to Israel.

* * *

It was only recently, after 42 years, that Éva was willing to reminisce about all this. We first met in Israel some 30 years ago on Haifa's Herzl street. When I began asking her about what had happened to her after the Salzwedel liberation, when she had barely kept soul and body together, she reprimanded me sternly: "I don't want to hear a word form you about that, I don't want to remember my past in the camps!"

Some ten years later we were sitting in threesome with Éva and a common acquaintance, when I remarked inadvertently: "Did you know, that I had been together with Éva in the camps?" Éva turned pale, an angry spark flashed in her eyes and she admonished me even more emphatically: "I don't want to hear of this any more!"

Years went by. Éva became business director of the Haifa Museum. When we meet, we speak of other things. The common suffering, that had made us like sisters, keeps standing mutely between us. The silence seems to whisper to both of us: I shall help you in need, but... it is forbidden to speak about it. I understood her. The wounds had sunk too deep into Éva's skeleton body, so she wants to protect them now with the same will to live, lest they tear open once again... Lately she introduced me to her dentist brother, living in Kiryat Shmona - and this was the first time she remarked softly: "Camp-sister. Auschwitz, children's barrack..."

* * *

A few days ago I visited the Haifa Museum with my 12 year old grand-daughter, Chayele. It was meant to be a vacation experience, I didn't even think of Éva at all. We enjoyed examining the wonderful paper cutouts, masterworks of artists from different countries; the artistic photos of the American Adams Amsel; the fantastic woodwork compositions of Dr. Dan Levin.

Suddenly I noticed Éva giving instructions to the staff. When she saw us, she caressed softly Chayele's hair, then invited us to the cafeteria. We promised to come back after we have finished looking around.

Meantime I have related Chayele Éva's struggles for life in the camps and told her it is forbidden to mention it to her. Why? Because she fears that the old wounds will open up... Chayele tries hard to grasp this lesson of the Holocaust.

Éva was already waiting for us, and then and there, without asking, she began to answer my questions from 30 years ago. She spoke of our common sufferings in the camps, recalling exact facts and episodes I have forgotten myself. She pulled out from her handbag a picture the Americans had taken of her immediately after liberation. This picture, her skeleton-like body covered with tatters - is a shocking document. "Now you may write about it" - she added. "This is me, Éva Abrahám, the thirteen year old girl, deported from Dés. Let Yad Veshem keep it, or the Diaspora House, let them show it to the coming generations, lest they forget, what Amalek had done to us..."

All this occcurred to Éva Abrahám-Goldberger after so many years, when she became a grandmother herself,

just to show us, that psychologists may be right some of the time. So many decades had to be gone by, till the gates of pain were opened again...



ZSENKA

I am not very crazy about those long tittle-tattles on the phone. Some of my friends don't like it, when I remind them, that it is not proper to keep the line occupied for more than ten minutes.

Little Dory.... small in stature, but great, even courageous in some matters. If she hadn't been deterred by two heart surgeries and a pacemaker and goes on working as before, I think we could learn a lot from her. She knows my weaknesses, among others, that I use the phone for short messages only. So when she calls me up, she immediately tells me that something is depressing her so much, she would like to tell me about it.

- But I'm sure you don't have time for it...

She stops speaking and the minute-long silence cries out to me. Suddenly I feel I have all the time in the world, I even know I better take pen in hand, to put down in writing something somebody really wants to tell.

* * *

Dory's tearful, faint revelation works its way into my heart. We of a common fate understand even the unsaid, comprehend its meaning.

* * *

A German munitions-factory in Reichenbach. 300 captive Jewish girls work there. They come in on foot from the camp situated a few kilometers away. Zsenka, a 20 year old girl form Mármarossziget is the "Lagerälteste", responsible for the 300 girls. Her sister Hedva is with her too. Zsenka is a clever girl, speaks faultless German. Maybe this is why the S.S. Oberscharführer chose her to be camp-overseer.

On my side of the line I feel uneasy. I am always afraid, when I hear of a misguided Jewish girl, who used her privileged position to treat her sisters heartlessly in those tragic days. So I ask quickly: "How was she?"

Dory's voice fails: She was very good!

- How could she be so good? - I query on. - Could she give even one piece of bread more to those 300, when she herself got maybe one more?

- She had a good Jewish heart, nice words, that worked as balm on the aching wounds - answered Dory.

* * *

"It happened on Pessach 1945. We were pressed together in a crowd on the Seder-Eve. Before us on a plank a piece of dry bread, the most wretched "bread of misery" in the world. We recited the Haggadah in turn. This seemed to give us strength and we began to believe that the Good Lord shall free us too from our slavery...

Zsenka went out to the latrine in the yard. A few seconds later the lights went out, suddenly it became dark. Rattle of guns howled in the night.

When morning came, Heddy, Zsenka's sister and some other girls from the camp, guarded by S.S. men, went for Zsenka's body and buried her.

She was twenty years old."

"It has now been forty five years" - continued Dory, - "that every Seder night I am thinking of Zsenka. She stays with me, among my children, grandchildren. And I keep silent all the time. I have never told anybody on Seder Night Zsenka's story. And it keeps pressing on my sick heart. She has been an angel among us, and if there are some of the Reichenbach prisoners alive, let them remember Zsenka in their thoughts. Zsenka, whose young life was extinguished so cruelly by an S.S. bullet or by the high-voltage electric current - we never knew, how and why did she have to die..."

The precept of remembering was handed down to us by the Almighty. You should never forget, what Amalek did to you... This is why Dorika has asked me to write down the story of Zsenka, one of the six million.

When we neared the end of our telephone conversation, there were a few words I wanted to tell Dory: "Yes, I shall write about Zsenka." But it was impossible, because at that moment I was weeping for Zsenka too...

A FELLOW COUNTRYMAN

Kinsmanship, godfathership, neighborhood, friendship - there are so many human relations, but they all depend on how we take care of them.

Still, there is a special, terrain-bound human connection with those, whom we call our "countrymen". Several decades later we still would like to meet again and again those, who have witnessed our childhood, our youth, and are still alive. Alas, less and less of them show up each year at the annual Memorial Ceremony of our martyrs, that we celebrated this year in the impressive Heichal Shlomo of Jerusalem. Every surviving Hungarian Jew should take part in these commemorations!

Encountering our countrymen is a spiritual experience: for a short while we return to the starting-point of our life, lest we forget it, nor the times, when the Holocaust put such a bitter end to our lives in the Diaspora.

One of my countrymen had come for a short visit from Los Angeles. For an hour we sat at a table in a quite noisy café. There were only two Félegyházians: Sanyi Friedmann and myself. Wife, relatives, friends all around - all of these came from other places. Suddenly everything fades away: two 'countrymen" are struggling with their memories.

Because I am the only one who knows, how beautiful had been Sanyi's sister, who had been taken to Auschwitz with his little daughter; only I know, how honest, how industrious have been the Friedmann brothers. Only the "countrymen" are able to speak without words to each other.

Only we, the plainsmen know the burning summers, the flowers of September, the moors sleeping under their snow-cover, when, seeing the birds flying away, we may have justly said with the poet: "Your fate gave you two homes, we had only one, and even that is lost..." Well, now I have got a country for myself...

We relive the past, glad to come back later to the present - only to go back again. The words fly there and back. Sanyi used to be a good footballist. We recall my brother Gabi. Only he, my countryman, may know, what sort of person my brother Gabi was.

Our company bear with us for being on a different planet, for speaking another language, as it were. Just now we are speaking of his brother in law, Imre Klein, who, owing to his advanced age, could not come, but sent his greetings.

I pull out my handbag, wishing to send some memento to the absent Imre Klein. As I couldn't find anything sensible, I send him to California, with love, this little remembrance, that concerns him.

* * *

Our world has been still more or less orderly then. My mother went regularly twice a year to the Lederer textile-shop and bought stuff for our winter or summer clothes. This was an exciting moment: my little sister

and myself could go along too, expressing our views about the stuff for our "dirndl". My father wrinkled his forehead about the recurring expense, but the eternal female motto: "I have nothing to wear!" has been valid at that time too.

Imre Klein was measuring out the cloth in the shop. A real gentleman, as my mother used to say. With endless patience he was putting before us the pieces of cloth. "Take your time, Madame, there is no hurry!" - he used to say. He didn't lose his temper even if after an hour of picking, choosing we left the shop without buying anything.

Imre had always had time. Even to marry. He was by long thought of as a bachelor, when he was conscripted to the work battalions. With Heaven's help he had managed to get home. The patience of the patient bachelor paid off handsomely: he married finally a lovely, fair-haired girl, some twenty years younger than himself.

What is my message to him, so far away? I'm sure he is still what my mother had said him to be. And that it is not too late to come home - to Israel. Maybe this too shall become real someday - seeing that he always had time for everything...

So few of us "countrymen" are still alive. A few here, a few there. All the waggons carrying our brethren from Félegyháza finally reached Auschwitz. But we, the survivors, remember the peaceful, industrious Jewish population of the town, remember ourselves, the happy youth assembling in the synagogue-yard. And even if we meet for a short while only, we relive our youth that shall never come back, and remember our

loved ones, who, owing to those tragic events, shall remain forever young in our memory.



THE OLD GIPSY

During a matinee in the hall of the HOH (Hungarian Immigrants' Union), a diligent young new immigrant had put a few dozen cassettes on a table in the anteroom. Hungarian hits, folksongs, tzigane music. The young man enumerated fluently the content of each. At first I thought, it is all the same to me, so long as I am helping a new immigrant and let him earn a few shekels. But it seemed that the young man wasn't after an easy income, he kept on recounting the well-known numbers: "Acacia Road", "On a May night I would like...", etc. He was already at the end of his list, when I became impatient and said:

- Look, it doesn't matter, just give me one... - But then - well, there are some spots we have forgotten how sore they are. This time it was "The old gipsy".

I bought the cassette.

At home, alone, I put on the "Old Gipsy". His voice trembled, his eye full of tears - just like long ago. But how come? The old gipsy has been dead for a long time!

* * *

Félegyháza. Uncle Jóska came every day and sat in our restaurant. The gentlemen-drivers came by to fill up their tanks (the filling station was ours too). And Uncle

Jóska kept playing his fiddle with his crippled fingers. He never asked for anything. If they gave him something, he thanked with a hundred bows. He was thankful for the little bench too in front of our house, where he could enjoy the sun.

How many times I have thought, how nice it could have been to hide in a miserable gipsy hovel, instead of going to Auschwitz. But at the time, squeamishly, we didn't even want to go near a gipsy hut. We couldn't imagine then, that there could exist Hell on earth.

When they dragged us to the ghetto, we thought our fate still could take a turn for the better. What may happen? Less bread, less living room, Jews all together - so what? Optimism reigned on, wholesale and retail.

What about the old gipsy? There he was standing by, as we put our belongings on the cart. He was sobbing inarticulately. "For Heaven's sake, dear sir, don't go away...!" And obsessedly he kept on pulling the bow. Uncle Jóska was the first to surmise the immense tragedy before us.

"Dear madam, I'll break my fiddle - he went on sobbing. - For my sake, at least, stay here, don't leave the old gipsy alone!"

* * *

When I had come home from the camps, like the rest of the few survivors, I too went to see our house. People said Uncle Jóska had died on the edge of the ditch before our house, his broken fiddle under his head...

The cassette runs on, and I listen on and on to the sad strains of the tortured old gipsy. I am thinking of

Uncle Jóska, who had more human sentiment in him, than the Hungarian seigneurs, whose heart couldn't have been softened even by the most beautiful music.



THE HAUNTING PAST

The Purim merriment has just ended in Haifa, but in Jerusalem it is beginning right now. I am going to visit my children, grandchildren, it has become a family tradition.

I pack up the mountain of nut, poppy-seed and raisin cakes, that fill completely my shopping bag. Let's go! On the Haifa-Jerusalem bus line every tree, every bush is an old acquaintance. I jump on the no. 940 bus already in motion, when a fair beauty runs after it, banging on the door, asking to get in. The driver opens the door and with typical sabre aplomb cries out: you may get in, but there are no empty seats! The girl doesn't understand Hebrew, so the driver has to restate the situation in English. O.K. - nods the girl, she will content herself with a standing place. She puts down her big red rucksack just beside me. I speak only basic English, but it is enough for offering her to change places somewhere during the trip. It is out of question - she says, she is glad to be able to see Jerusalem.

Both of us are making shambles of the English language. Outside it is darkening already. I ask her, maybe she speaks German. Oh ja - she answers happily. She gets back her breath, her face shines. I already know that she is a student, lives in Hamburg. She has already

booked a bed in a students' hostel. She patters on freely, sits down on her rucksack right beside me. What an exquisite fair bun she has! But for the sake of Heaven, isn't she exactly like Griese, the most merciless female Nazi commander in Auschwitz?! Forty years have gone by since then, the girl is maybe 25, well, couldn't she be Griese's granddaughter? She studies sociology. What type of sociology has been taught in Griese's time at the German universities? I let her speak, ask questions - then it is my turn to speak.

Yes, I too have been in Hamburg. From Auschwitz they took me to a munitions factory near that city. How old are you? - I ask her. - Twenty four. - Well, I was only sixteen. And the supervisors had exactly the same wonderful fair hair. Some of them were quite bearable. I keep speaking, while tears are running down my face. Let her take this home with her as a souvenir.

_ You see, this country has been built up by broken-hearted people like myself, and believe me, our only wish is to live here in peace.

The girl casts down her eyes. - Tut mir sehr Leid - I am very sorry, she whispers. We arrive. I pull out a bar of poppy-seed cake and extend it to her, wishing her "Bon appetite". It is Purim today, Haman is dead!

She thanks me profusely. Vielen Dank. I get down from the bus, straight into the arms of my son Yitzhak. He is on reserve duty, wears uniform, but has got a few hours leave so he could come to see me. "Mom,what happened? Why were you crying?" I am perplexed, talk at random: Griese... the blonde German girl... I gave her some poppy-seed cake...

How could I make him see what I was feeling right then?

NEVER SAY IT IS THE LAST TIME

Last week I decided not to write any more, everything is already written down. It's enough. Well, this was not the first time I have made such a decision.

From now on I shall use the traditional Hebrew sequel to a vow: "Bli neder!" (meaning: "this is not a solemn vow, really"), because something is always happening. Banal, everyday events, that don't deserve attention - but somehow they are worth to be put on paper.

This time, for instance, I have been waiting for my children and grandchildren to come to a Shabbat meal. In times like this I comb the shelves of the supermarket several days before, taking home the wherewithals for the treats my loved ones like best, then, during the preparation, I mix in my heart too.

Jóska Neumann from Dés, Yossi for everybody, is the expert chief of the fish counter. Fortunately there wasn't much business at the moment, so I had enough time to consult him about the merits of this or that fish, that deserves to garnish our Shabbat meal.

Yossi recommends a live carp- but alas! lately they have stopped to clean and cut up the carp in the supers, you have to buy it whole. To be honest, I'm not very adept at opening up the carp, always besmear the

walls with blood. So I prefer to buy carp on the market, where they sell it almost ready to cook.

* * *

I don't know how we changed over from fish to Auschwitz, but suddenly we were talking about the gipsy camp, opposite the barrack where I had been languishing. Then to Buchenwald. Jóska Neumann's parents and seven sweet little sisters have been exterminated there. At night - he says - he often starts up from sleep, tormenting himself, why haven't they gone into hiding. Tearful words, memories crop up from his heart. Episodes you, nilly-willy, have to retell. How he helped to rescue 2000 female prisoners just before Liberation. The German hangmen were hoping to drive them into a wood, when he shouted over to the women in Yiddish and Hungarian: "Scatter in every direction, run, run wherever you can!"

I interrupt him for a moment, asking about his birth date. 1926 - he says, then goes on with his story, trying to get rid of the huge stone that weighs on his heart. Meantime I try to make comparisons. My brother Gabi should have been the same age, had he survived. A grown man. It is 42 years that I carry him with me as I last saw him: 19 years old, lanky, full of youthful zest. Gabi stays young, just like Yossi's seven little sisters - only **we** have become older.

I'm still standing at the fish-counter, but my soul is roaming far away. Jóska brings me back to reality. He pulls out a fine carp from the basin, disappears, and brings it back later nicely cleaned, and puts it into my

cart. "To honour the Shabbat" - he says, smiling already, and bids goodbye.

The cashier girl looks amazed at the package of fish. "You really must have some pull here, to get the carp cleaned" - she says.

Oh yes, I do have some pull...

And because I did write down all this, it's better never to say "this is the last one"!



THE MEMORIAL CANDLE FLICKERS

Our Memorial Assembly didn't take place this year. Maybe we have become tired or indifferent. We used to arrange it on the 10th of Tammuz, the day my home town Kiskunfélegyháza's Jews arrived in Auschwitz. The day before we started our fateful journey from the brick-yards of Kecskemét, together with our co-religionists from Körös and Csongrád.

Now I kindle the memorial candle on the 9th. My eldest granddaughter happens to be here too. I try to make her remember the date. She is a clever girl, has read a lot about the Holocaust, still I feel I am putting a very heavy load on her soul.

Late night, at the light of the flickering candle, I arrange a token rendezvous in the synagoue-yard of Félegyháza. One by one I conjure up my friends, then my warm home, the circle of my parents and siblings. I succeed even to recall the fragrance of the acacia or the lilac around the house. Kiskunfélegyháza didn't differ much from the rest of the towns on the Hungarian Plain. 40.000 inhabitants, 1500 of them Jews. For a time a piece of Hungarian-Jewish symbiosis. Then: the Ghetto, the gendarmes, the deportation.

True, there were a few pious souls. Miraculously, one of these, a pious gentile woman, Veronika Porczai, is living here in Haifa with those she had rescued.

The Jewish school had had only the four elementary grades, then we have scattered to diverse state or parochial secondary schools. There had been plenty of these: intermediate schools, gymnasia, lycées, teachers' colleges - every one of these had a different size of Jewish "minority". Several times a week we congregated in the assembly hall of the synagogue for religious education or for a study circle. Even the greatest atheists had shown up from time to time, like ghosts, in the Jewish synagogue yard, because we couldn't be really merry if not among ourselves.

And it was not only the Jewish youth of Félegyháza, who stuck together. We have banded together with those of Csongrád, Kecskemét, even the recently retroceded Szabadka's youth had come over for a table-tennis tournament.

As an orthodox girl I couldn't receive an invitation for tea or dinner but from two families in Csongrád: from my Hebrew teacher Dr. György Kalmár, or from the nice Faragó family (Heaven helped four of their daughters to survive Auschwitz, but neither of them choose to come to Israel).

The candle flickers on. Oh, those unforgettable Sunday afternoons! Boys and girls were coming over from Kecskemét, or we paid them a visit. I am still seeing them in the beautifying light of memories. The pretty Lenke Gyenes, a real woman, although only fourteen. The freckle-faced Péter Fritz. The gallant Kecskeméti brothers, three boys - each one a filmstar. Imi Szeles is perhaps worth a separate paragraph: an earnest, intelligent, polite boy, but his chivalry didn't extend to having let me win the table-tennis match

against him, altough I have been a good match, maybe among the girls only.

Imre excused himself later in a letter for not letting me win. Well, in the letters he included other matters too, so I have kept his letters up to the ghetto. He was a strong addict of photography. He was twenty when he was conscripted to the work battalions, in an unknown place.

The brick-yards of Kecskemét. The cream of Southern Hungary's Jewry . We made acquaintances, there was plenty of time for it under the burning sun, out in the open. On the very first evening a nice, black-eyed woman, in advanced pregnancy, has been looking for me among the Félegyházians. I recognized her: Terike Szeles - Imi's sister. We embraced each other without speaking. She took me by hand and led me to her mother. They said it hasn't been difficult to find me, because Imi's photo-lab was full of my pictures. Aunt Szeles embraced me too. "I know you eat only kosher" - she said - "Imi told me, among other nice things."

- When we get home again - she said in a failing voice, looking at Terike's roundish figure.

The full moon over the brickyard didn't smile down on us. Mother spread out some blankets on the ground. She was sad, because her son Gabi wasn't among us.

Then I see my dear, good grandfather sitting on a heap of stones praying. Black, broadbrimmed hat on his head, long tresses of hair hang out from under it, his beard white as snow. Involuntarily one clutches one's hand - what did they do to us! And yet...

At the candlelight I give thanks to the Lord, that I am able to conjure so clearly these sights. That for one night

I was able to be in the company of all those whom I have loved so much...

Where are my old playmates?

Not Terike, nor her mother did come back any more. I could never ascertain either, where and how was Imi's young life extinguished, or if there is anybody beside myself, who cherishes their memory.

Maybe only the Good Lord himself.



COMMEMORATION

"Remember, what Amalek
did to you..."
(Devarim 25,17)

"I SHALL OUTLIVE THEM"

I am always holding back my breath when I listen to my husband's experiences during the war. I know some fragments, some episodes, but the whole complex - whence had he taken the endless physical and spiritual strength, the courage and luck, that allowed him to survive the Holocaust - the whole, I say, is up to this day an enigma to me. Cracow, ghetto, jails, bunkers, partisans, escape through the Carpatians to Budapest, living with Aryan papers, arrest, deportation, jumping out of the waggon, bunker again, the woods of Slovakia. Places, names, I mix them up all the time, ask him again and again, unable to understand, how could all this have happened. Especially when all these sufferings, or at least part of them, he experienced in company of his parents and an "adopted", strange, ten months old baby.

In 1942 - he told me - there had been a rumour in the Cracow ghetto, maybe a fugitive from one of the camps brought it, that not far from Warsaw there is a camp named Truplinka, where Jews are murdered. The meaning of the word in Polish is "death town", and it is possible they have meant the death-camp of Treblinki.

I seldom treat my husband's many sufferings and vicissitudes in my writings. He is a modest man, who doesn't like public appearances, doesn't like when I

publish something about him. On the other hand, even if it could have been material for a wonderful life-story,where would I take the strength to write it down?

* * *

Anyway, this piece isn't exactly about him, but about that baby, whom he had dragged in his arms through woods, hill and dale, amidst a thousand dangers, from Cracow to Budapest. Well, this sometime baby, who recently has become grandfather, has lately sent my husband from America a voluminous book as a gift. The author of the book was Chajim Shelomo Friedmann, who wrote it in Belgium and it has been been printed in Israel. Lamentably I couldn't read it, because it was written in Yiddish. My husband, on the other hand, coming home from work, instantly immerses himself in it, reads feverishly on and on, reliving once again the past. He reads out parts of it to me and expresses his respect mixed with admiration to the author, who was able to reconstruct so true to life the vicissitudes, the escape, the flight, the merciless bureaucrats of the Budapest KEOKH (aliens' controlling bureau), the Jewish informers, and the story of the Belzer rebbe's escape to Budapest. The tragic struggle, suffering and extinction of the 65.000 Jews of Cracow is reflected in this book.

The title of this book of one thousand pages is: "Ich will zei iberlebn" - I shall outlive them. Well, the author did survive the Holocaust, although by now he isn't alive any more. After hesitating for 30 years he had published the book just before his death. Chaim Shelomo Friedmann did his duty.

I am turning the leaves of this bulky book with its shocking photographic documents. Cracow, the ghetto, Budapest. Edicts, posters, certificates. Achievement of somebody who had suffered much and put his whole soul in simple words, but with the appalling force of reality. Anyone who like my husband had lived through all this, can vouch for the authenticity of every written word and sentence. And those who have been lucky not to be part to that, should remember with admiration and reverence Reb Chaim Shelomo, who has left an enduring document for the coming generations of Jews.

May his memory be blessed.

"THE EVIL SHALL BE PUNISHED"

We shall never forget Gideon Hausner's opening speech of prosecution in the trial of Eichmann 25 years ago, accusing him of the mass murder of Jews. The radio had broadcast all over the country Hausner's voice, ringing with the fervour of the Kaddish, with the commandment of pain and remembrance, but with the intoxication of revival as well.

One of the broadcasts of the trial had found me travelling in a bus, with my son David, ten years old at the time, sitting beside me. Gideon Hausner attorney-general was describing, how one of Eichmann's transports had arrived in Auschwitz, how they were sorted out at a "selection" and dragged to the gas-chambers. I shut my eyes and suddenly everything turned back into reality. I relived again each fraction of my own sufferings, until a terrible sobbing relieved my soul. David drew nearer, took my hand in his, caressed it and whispered something in my ear.

The moment we reached home he went into his room and a few moments later slid a small poem into my hand. "The evil shall be punished" was its title.

His childlike soul reacted through these lines to our people's tragedy. His poem is now resting in the archive of the Holocaust Research Institute at the University of Haifa.

* * *

A quarter of a century has passed by since. This is maybe the last opportunity to engrave in our grandchildren's memory the words: "You should not forget what Amalek did to you!" Let them follow closely the trial of Demjanjuk, accused with the murder of several thousands of our brethren. My twelve year old granddaughter, pupil of the Beth Yaacov school in Jerusalem, keeps a special notebook for this purpose. She pastes into it the newspaper articles and testimonies pertaining to the Demjanjuk trial. And on the margin, in drawings or in words, she adds her own observations.

During my last trip to Jerusalem granddaughter Chayele asked me to draw something beside an article, where one of the witnesses described the terrible atrocities committed by the accused. How sad that our little grandchildren have to learn, for their own good, the lesson of their grandparents' sufferings, so there shall never be an Auschwitz or a Treblinka again.

I take Chayele's copybook in my hand. How curious! She hands me just an orange-red crayon... and I draw flames at the bottom of the page, scattered playthings and dolls lying around, while their little owners are going up in flames.

Chayele becomes sad. It hurts to see her so.

I ask for a blue pencil and draw a big Magen David with a subscription: "Am Yisrael chai!"

Her eyes are now shining: she is pleased with the lesson - especially with its moral. I don't know what her teacher shall say - but I am contented knowing that I personally have been able to pass down to two

successive generations something of our People's history.

What shall become of Demjanjuk - shall he live or die - all this may be unimportant to us, but we must remember and draw the lesson from the meanest chapter of History, even if such a trial exacts a great sacrifice, as the remembrance tears those wounds open again. But we must pass it down, it is our sacred duty!

EPILOGUE TO THE DIARY OF THE LODZ GHETTO

The last entry in the newly discovered diary of the Lodz ghetto is dated from the 30th of June 1944. I happened to be an eyewitness of the following events, when the remnants of the ghetto were driven into the death-camp of Auschwitz. Those sights have been stamped as an ever burning wound into my memory. These were the first days of July 1944, and we were waiting under the burning sun, hungry and thirsty, in front of the of the children's block, for the Appel to begin. Although our heads were shaven, we haven't yet been divested completely from our human form, as we were still at the start of our sufferings. The reserves brought from home were still flowing in our veins, we were able to weep freely after mothers, sisters, who have been torn away from us. Then suddenly we heard the outcry of Viti, a 14 year old girl from Munkács: "Girls, look, our dead have been resurrected!"

...An emaciated, waxen-faced crowd, resembling nothing human, dragged itself along the barbed-wire fence. At the moment I too believed what our little comrade had said, and hiding behind a column began to look for my dead among them.

The ghostly vision didn't last more than a few minutes. Then a bold girl cried out at them in Yiddish:

"Frum vannen?" (Where do you come from?) From the mouth of a skeleton, wrapped in rags, came an inarticulate sound: "Lodz!"

Ever since, when I meet by chance somebody from Lodz, I take his hand, remember them and involuntarily break into tears.

I shall keep their memory forever and hand it down to posterity...

THE WOODS, THE TREES KEEP CRYING

Claude Lanzman's "Holocaust" film had finally come to Haifa. Naturally I went to view it, after having read several criticisms, reports and different evalutions from home and abroad.

From the start I have been moved by the fact that the gifted producer had invested twelve year's labor and a lot of money in this documentary. He wanted to immortalize a terrible period and its after-effects.

We, the survivors of the Holocaust still feel, that it's impossible to recount, to show everything.

It is difficult for me to write about the film, because some episodes, like the painful look on the face of the interviewed, are cutting too deeply in my soul. The scriptwriter of the film portrays the hunted and the hunter with enormous psychological understanding.

We see Auschwitz, not just the camp, surrounded by electric barbed-wire, and the crematoria, but the town itself. The town, where there were Jews living and working too. The town, whose people observed calmly or even became accustomed to the gas-chambers operating not far away. A Polish "goy" describes all this unmoved to Lanzman. Regrettably, the hunter hadn't changed a bit!

Elsie Breuer from Canada has written a moving article about the film. She portrays, whom is this film

addresed to, or whom it should speak to. The only thing she doesn't mention, that the film should remind those Jews living in the Diaspora, that Israel is the only place where Jews should live, even if this is the most important lesson of the film. The Jewish homeland is the sole comfort, the sole answer. The film addresses itself first and foremost to our children, so they may see something about the time, when their parents have been suffering so much, when their survival was close to a miracle.

During the film's showing, besides the sad experience, I was gratified to see that our youth, promise of future generations, was sitting among the audience. Let's hope they shall draw the lesson from it, so there shall not be an Auschwitz, a Treblinka, a Sobibor, a Buchenwald again. It wasn't easy to reexperience all this, but I felt I ought to do that much.

The lights went out in the auditorium, I was sitting comfortably in the air-conditioned hall. The waggons opposite me, on the screen, are coming creaking madly into Auschwitz . Auschwitz, where nobody is living now. I try to reconstruct the events: it is painful, but necessary. The same was Claude Lanzman telling to a resident of Holon, who is having a haircut, while he recounts his experiences in Treblinka. At one passage he feels he is unable to go on, his voice falters, he struggles with his tears - "it must be told, it is our duty... we have to pass it on..."

The interviews are going on unfailingly. The commanding S.S. officer of the Warsaw ghetto shirks all responsibility. His face is indifferent, unfeeling. Lanzman supports everything by exact data - then

finishes the questioning of the S.S.officer with a painful, hoarse "Yeah".

Lanzman takes with him the spectator to every place, where Hitler and his accomplices have ravaged. We see the island of Corfu, Saloniki, the handful of Jews, with their tattooed arms, who have survived. While they recount the horrors they have been through, the spectators may enjoy the artistic pictures taken of the city.

A touching scene in the recently rebuilt synagogue of Saloniki. They sing of the love of Israel. Flowers bloom on the blood-saturated ground. Birds are singing. Only we in the auditorium seem to hear the howling of the high-reaching trees.

Philip Müller, a simple Israeli citizen, controlling himself heroically, recounts the horrors he experienced in the Sonderkommando. There is no actor alive who could play this role like him... Every word a thoughtful, exact reminiscence - still, his words end in inarticulate sobbing.

Lanzman tours the world quietly, softly, picks out the most suitable witnesses. While seeking out diligently every little particular, he doesn't want to burrow into the wounds. On the contrary, I feel that he would like to put balm on them.

I wish I could retell this too to my grandchildren.

It is our sacred duty!

THE "IRREGULAR" PORTUGUESE CONSUL

In the spring of 1940, when the Germans occupied Belgium, one of their first steps was, like everywhere, to round up the Jews.

Rabbi Zwi Chaim Kruger, Brussels' chief rabbi escaped that same day with his wife and four little children to Bordeaux, in southern France. He went to the Portuguese consulate and asked a visa to stay in Portugal. The chief consul, Aristide de Soza Mendes expressed his regret, that owing to an order from above he cannot fulfil his request.

In the evening Rabbi Kruger rang the bell of the consul's private residence and asked to let him and his family find refuge in some small corner of the consul's home. Maybe when morning comes he will be able to find some solution, so they wouldn't be deported back into the hands of the Germans and to sure death. The diplomat took pity on them.

After the difficult journey the rebbetzen and the five children (the eldest of whose, Hanna, is now mother of my son-in-law) laid down trembling their heads to sleep. The rabbi and the consul continued their conversation till dawn. The rabbi depicted the doom the Jews were facing. Originally he came from Poland to Belgium. He sensed the catastrophe and let the consul

feel it too. He convinced the diplomat, that this is the time to perform feats that please Heaven.

The learned rabbi Kruger had that night such an influence on Soza Mendes, that by morning the decision had matured in the diplomat's heart to advocate the cause of the persecuted.

First he provided the necessary documents for Rabbi Kruger and his family, then helped several thousand Jews to escape. Some time later the Portuguese government discovered de Soza Mendes' "irregular" behavior. The diplomat was deprived not only of his post, but of his civil rights too and he was ostracized by society. Even his sons, John Paul and Philippe, weren't permitted to finish their studies in Portugal. Aristide de Soza Mendes died in poverty in 1954. He had never asked for help from those he had rescued.

Lately an international committee has been set up to perpetuate the memory of the humane diplomat. Mario Soares Portuguese president accorded him the highest civil distinction.

One of his sons settled in California, the other in Canada. Rabbi Kruger's children and the other rescued persons looked them up and invited them to Jerusalem, where they were received by the prime-minister Yitzhak Shamir and in Yad Veshem they were presented the decoration due to the "Just of the Nations". "It is the least we can do, when we perpetuate his memory" - said the prime-minister.

The rescued, their childen and grandchildren (my son-in-law among them) visited the two de Soza Mendes brothers. These were deeply touched, listening to the stories about their heroic father, who challenged the whole indifferent, dumb world. The rescued wish to

name a street after Aristide de Soza Mendes and believe that his name shall be written with gold letters in the history of our people.

Rabbi Kruger, great-grandfather of my grandchildren, wasn't content with the rescue of himself and his family. He sent thousands of Jews, who were languishing on the streets of Bordeaux, to de Soza Mendes' house. But his mission hadn't been finished by this. After staying a year in Portugal he procured ships from the Americans and in the midst of the war those refugee ships reached a safe haven in freedom.

At the end of his bountiful life rabbi Kruger was laid to rest in the Har Hamenuhot cemetery in Jerusalem.

A TESTIMONY IN YAD VASHEM

Reb Mordechai, the shoemaker of Visó had a nice little family - but his greatest pride was his wife, the fair Rachel, who has been blessed with all the ornaments of Rachel the Matriarch. Heaven had presented them with two sons and two daughters. But the Horthy-horde and the Nazis destroyed their home with the rest of the Jewish families and dragged them to Auschwitz. Reb Mordehai and his wife had been separated by force. Rachel went with her two grown daughters, Mordehai with his two sons. Chaim was almost 19, Efraim a bit over 17. Only Heaven may know, what happened to Rachel and her daughters, because they never saw them again.

Reb Mordechai and his sons went on the path of suffering. They suffered for themselves and from seeing the others" sufferings.

It happened in a lager called Stettin. The Germans took the prisoners to task, because somebody had lighted a lamp when it had been forbidden. They accused Chaim for this and presented him as a scapegoat before the whole camp. Chaim, the nice, good and clever Chaim had been the apple of his mother Rachel's eyes.

Chaim was beaten to the verge of death by the German hangmen.

Reb Mordechai came to the camps with two sons, but left with one only. Spiritually he has never been really liberated, because the painful look on Chaim's face stayed with him all his life.

During Chaim's last days one could still read in his eyes the hunger for a piece of bread... Efraim carried with him, beneath his rags, his last bit of bread, from which he could not part: he assuaged his tormenting hunger by knowing it was still with him.

Chaim finally sanctified the Creator's name with his departing soul and went up straight to the nearness of his mother. But the piece of bread, that he hadn't given over to his dying brother, went on scorchig Efraim's soul as before.

Reb Mordechai has remained an invalid, but lived quite long. Efraim had fought for the liberation of Eretz Yisrael and went on building, serving his homeland - but was still a prisoner of that little piece of bread.

Lately the Yad Vashem asked him for a testimony. Efraim told them about all the stations of his sufferings from Visó to Auschwitz and the rest of the camps.

Shira, the official of Yad Veshem asks questions, the taperecorder runs on, recording and perpetuating the horrors one is compelled to hand down to posterity. The shocking memories rush forth from Efraim like as many scorching firebrands.

During the hum-drum weekdays Efraim works as storekeeper for a big supermarket. The huge lorries line up by the crack of dawn at the warehouse, supplying the merchandise our land of milk and honey produces. The fresh, fragrant loaves of bread take their place on the shelves. Efraim lists, records, reckons, as his job

requires. But sometimes he startles up - and remembers: a thin to the bone child clasps tightly in his hand a piece of dry bread, being unable to part with the bit that could have saved his life.

Now all these emerging memories, that were burning Efraim's soul like firebrands, are put into the service of the perpetuation. This is the tombstone Efraim puts up for Chaim and the other innocent youngsters whom the Nazis had exterminated. A tombstone on which their name, sanctified through the Kiddush Hashem, sparkles in golden letters.

We appreciate very much the co-workers of Yad Veshem, who tour the country untiringly, collecting testimonies like this one...

DEEPLY MOVED...

The title of Honorary Doctor has been conferred upon Elie Wiesel in the Assembly Hall of the University of Haifa. The speech he had held there was an unforgettable experience. With aching heart, without pathos, he reiterated again and again: "There is nobody I could talk to! I have no audience any more! They don't want to listen. Still I go on recounting, don't become disheartened, tour the world making known, teaching the Holocaust." His hushed words sound like an oath.

After he had finished his speech, I went up to him and asked, what message he would like to send to the Hungarian Jews of Israel. He answered with just two words: "My emotions! "

Then he was swallowed up by the surrounding crowd.

Elie Wiesel, a professsor of Boston University, answers every letter concisely and punctually. He encourages, supports the publication of every writing that deals with the Holocaust.

When he had received the Nobel prize, the world press summarized his life work. He has written 27 books and obsessedly reminds everybody of the Holocaust - he doesn't let anybody forget it.

Wiesel knows that there are some in Israel who censure him for not living here and for choosing

America as his home. Still he is a lover of Israel. When he had confronted personally Ronald Reagan because of the President's imminent visit to the S.S. cemetery of Bittburg, he conveyed through his step the dismay of Israel and the whole world.

In spite of his previous commitment to make the trip the President appreciated the poet's challenge. As a proof of this appreciation Elie Wiesel was one of the ten honorary guests at President Reagan's reception in honor of the 100th anniversary of the Statue of Liberty.

What could be the meaning of the Nobel Prize for a scholar of the Holocaust, when an antisemite French student receives a Ph.D. degree for his thesis, in which he denies the very existence of the Holocaust? We ought to understand, that as long as Jews are living in the Diaspora (and a lot more than in Israel), we really shall need such extraordinary, generally esteemed, inspired Jews, who shall champion us in face of the world. Instead of criticism, appreciation and thanks are their due!

Through these modest words now I would like to convey **my** "emotions" to Elie Wiesel. Together with whom, there in the shadow of death and calamity, I too "could never become sixteen".

We congratulate Elie Wiesel from Israel on occasion of his receiving the Nobel Prize of Peace, and wish him further fruitful activity.

A CHANCE MEETING

It happened in Brooklyn on a Shabbat afternoon. My husband went out to Mincha in a nearby synagogue. We agreed to meet in front of it after prayer. I had been there in the morning, so I took it for granted I would easily find it.

Well, it didn't happen like that at all. I had remembered the number, but I had mixed up street with avenue. I lost my way. The farther I went, the less I could find my bearings. Finally I was only tip-topping around in one place. The sun was setting slowly. Three dark-skinned gentlemen were coming in my direction. I turned quickly into a side street. My heart was thumping crazily, I was in panic. My husband is waiting for me in front of the synagogue - but where could it be? The most logical step would be to return to the hotel- but where could it be?

The street, the whole city looked deserted.

I couldn't have gone very far, but I lost my way completely .

Suddenly, like a rescue team, four white people appeared. Two men and two women. They could even speak Hungarian, something I never would have imagined right in the middle of Borough Park.

- Could you tell me, please, where is the Park Hotel - I asked them, a lot more calmly by then.

They surround me, ready to help. No mistake, these must be Jews too - I think. We start, this time in the right direction. They weren't surprised a bit, that I came from Israel. They enquire, where I have come from in Hungary. While I stutter out the word "Kiskunfélegyháza", I am thinking of my husband, who by now must have gone to the police because of me, and of the family who had invited us to the "Shalesudes", who are waiting in vain.

- Oh, Félegyháza! - exclaims one of the women. - My younger brother had married a girl from there! - Her eyes fill up with tears. She has been already in America at the time and since 1940 hadn't heard of him. Baruch Pollacsek was his name.

Hearing the name I too began to weep, but was unable to tell the elderly woman about Baruch's tragic fate.

In the thirties, Pollák the baker's exquisite daughter, Cilike, had been married off to a young bocher - Baruch, a very nice boy, complete with payes and beard, as it should be. Uncle Pollák had brought him down from Sub-Carpathia to be his daughter's bridegroom, because of the boy's fame as a Talmid Chacham. The young couple had opened a small grocery in Félegyháza, that provided them with their daily bread. Baruch had even helped out in his father-in-law's bakery. In the shop, the holy books were always open in front of him. When there were no customers, Baruch went on studying.

It could have been three or four years since they have been living in our town. Cilike had already had three little childen, when my mother sent me down to their

shop to buy some coffee and margarine. My little basket on my arm I took a short-cut through the cattle-path, even if my heart was thumping, thinking, what could happen if the bull broke out of his pen and stabbed me with his horns - stories the like of which I had heard often from our servant-girl.

One more ditch to jump over and I am there. I clutch the money tightly in my fist, ready to finish the transaction of my mother's bidding. But in front of the shop a group of strangers stood gaping: "Look, they are taking the Galitzian Jew away!"

- They aren't Magyars really, these! - says one of the peasants. Baruch, Cilike and their infants are already sitting on a cart, surrounded by gendarmes. She waves frenziedly to her father (her mother has been dead for some time). The father keps shouting: "They are Hungarian citizens, please!"

It is no use. The cart disappears. Uncle Pollák collapses. I go home without coffee and margarine. But the sights made their mark in my heart for ever...

Poor old uncle Pollák! He ran to the gendarmerie with the citizenship papers, hoping to bring them back. He was born here, his father too. The gendarme-officer, in his cock-feathered hat, only shrugs his shoulders.

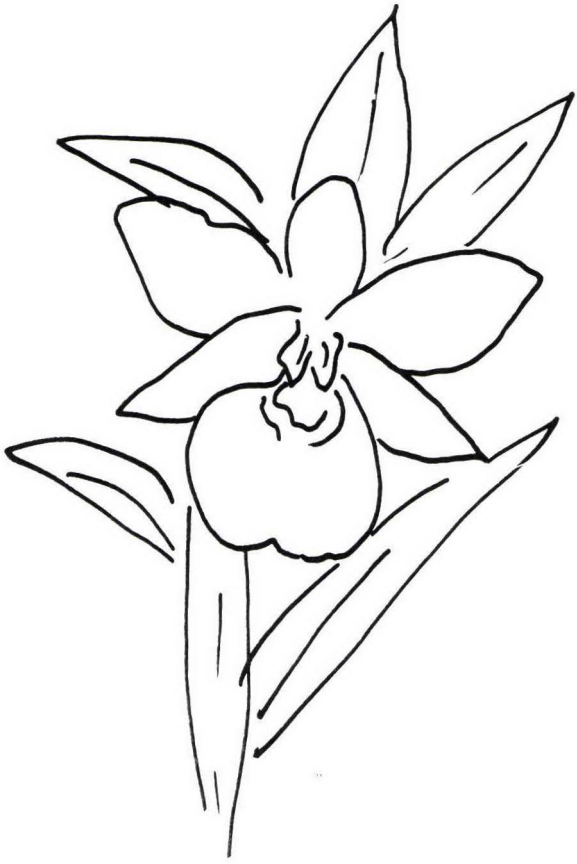
On Friday eve my father comes back from the synagogue with a long face. He mentions a foreign name to my mother, the name of a Polish frontier town. I couldn't notice it at the time. Baruch and his family had to dig their own grave there.

From that time on I hadn't feared the long-horned bull any more. I feared only the gendarmes in their cock-

feathered hat. The gendarmes, who three years later carried us away too .

Who knows the ways of fortune? There on the Brooklyn street-corner I remembered with reverence Baruch Pollacsek, who had been dragged away and had died a martyr's death, and his perished family.

Be their memory blessed!



WHY DID THEY DETAIN MY GRANDFATHER?

I have met my three cousins by the grave of Grandma in the Zichron Meir cemetery. They might have been 5-6 years old, when they were deported to Bergen-Belsen with Grandma. So we stood by the grave, when Kati put her prayer-book before me. "There it is, the Psalm for Sunday" - she said.

But I was staring at the marmor slab. Grandma was carrying something all her life: never-ending chores, worries, pains - and now, after her death she has to support this marmor slab! I try to spell out the words on it. Her husband, Majshi Klein of blessed memory, was interned at the Kistarcsa detention camp, his son taken away to the snow-fields of Ukraina, his daughter, his son-in-law (my parents) and grandchildren - to Auschwitz...

Kati recites the Psalms devoutedly, until I cut in:

- Tell me, why did they detain my Grandfather?

She doesn't answer, puts her finger at her mouth, as if to say that I should go on with the prayer.

- Kati, why did they intern Grandfather? - I want to know right now, after four decades. - You should know, you were there in Makó!

But she goes on undauntedly with her prayer. Kati is a teacher in a religious school. Several thousand pupils

have gone through her hands during thirty years of service, some of them such as the psychologists have definitely given up hope for. Kati works wonders: she turns every problem child into a man. She teaches from morning till evening. Meanwhile she has raised four children, but first of all - herself. Because Kati wasn't more than eleven, when she arrived in Israel all alone, with her two little brothers. That is - through the Youth Aliya. Now she finishes the Psalms, as is due; her brother Gabi, a grandfather himself, says Kaddish. Then we just stand there in silence.

- Maybe he was listening to the B.B.C.? - I keep pestering Kati. But she remains silent, her tearful eyes wander away into the past.

Anybody who knew my Grandfather, Majshi Klein, one of the seven Klein brothers, was aware that there was no better, more honest man on the whole globe. He hadn't been dragged away by the Germans, but by his Magyar "compatriots". Nobody has seen him ever since. Why, why did they intern my grandfather, the flower of the Makó kehille, the good-hearted, dear old man?

There is no answer to this question. I finish the Psalm, put pebbles on the slab of marmor, so heavy with sad memories...

Later we sat down in a small coffee-house in Bnei Brak.

- Tell me more about Grandma! You have been with her in Bergen Belsen. What can you remember about it?

Kati smiles.

_ We used to pester Granny about being hungry. Mari was six years old, so weak she could not sit up. As for Meir, who was past nine, he climbed up once on the

plank-bed, like some dramatic actor, and threatened Granny, in his Makó dialect:

- Granny, if ya donna give me sumpin to eat, I'll eat up me hat!

Dear old Granny and her famished grandchildren! The heart goes out for them, we shall never forget them.

This is a day of remembrance. We speak softly, but the soft words still sound heavy. The woman at the Presso-machine makes coffee for us. While pulling the handle, one can see the tattooed numbers on her arms, witnesses that she has been there too. She keeps looking at us, knowing, understanding the question nobody in the world, least of all myself, shall receive any answer for.

Why, why did they detain my dear Grandfather?

MENGELE SHALL ANSWER FOR IT !

Is Dr. Josef Mengele, the death-angel of Auschwitz alive, or had he died - and if so, where and how - all this remains a riddle up to this day. The only sure thing is, that any news about him tears open many never-mending, painful wounds.

One gray morning the phone rings. It's aunt Irén from Beer Sheba.

- I just wanted to tell you, - her voice becomes constricted, - maybe you haven't heard yet - the radio had announced at dawn that Mengele went finally to hell. If only it were true!

She stops speaking, waits for answer, then a click! - she has put down the receiver.

I was unable to say a word. These are the times when your voice fails you.The memories envelope me like dark shadows, memories I couldn't, wouldn't be freed from.

I have been together with aunt Irén's 14 year old daughter in the children's block in Auschwitz. She was able to get in touch with her mother, who was detained in a far corner of the camp, and sent her a small note. Aunt Irén had kept this yellowed piece of paper in a silver box for 42 years. That is what has remained from her daughter, nothing else.

And this heroic mother, with her ever-smarting heart, has been going on building the Negev for decades with her husband.

Zsuzsi became one of Mengele's victims. My little camp-sister, beautiful, good-hearted, slender Zsuzsika. There is no hell enough to pay for your mother's sufferings, for the children you haven't been able to bear, or just for the horrors they have committed against your person. May his name everlastingly be cursed for murdering so many thousands of Zsuzsikas, Erzsikes, Judits, Miriams and the like. Maybe Mengele **will** pay somewhere, somehow for it. Even if he succeeded, with the help of his villainous accomplices, to evade the arm of Justice on Earth, history shall write down his infamous name and deeds with bloody letters.

We don't, we can't forget!

COME YOU TOO!

Year by year we prepare ourselves, with some unutterable feeling, for the Memorial Day of our beloved ones, annihilated during the Holocaust. We, the survivors subconsciously wish to feel the martyred souls being among us, hoping solace will come for our wounded souls.

With the passing years, while I am nearing the Heichal Shlomo building, while I greet my comrades, a sort of sad joy fills my soul.

The year before the last, meeting some old ladies leaning on their walking sticks, had I noticed for the first time that their grown up children and grandchildren didn't come with them. Last year I have already met some of these occasionally, but still far too few...

* * *

Last year I made a pilgrimage to Auschwitz in the company of 3000 Israeli high-school students on the "March of the Living". I have seen them weep while kneeling over the stones of the crematorium. I've seen the Miriams and Yuvals pray among tears on the place where their great- grandfathers were executed. And then I understood, that it wasn't heir fault they didn't come to

the memorial services with their parents and grandparents.

It was our fault! **We** didn't share our pain with them. **We** didn't open the secret compartments of our souls before them. Because... because we didn't know better. We thought it is possible to keep all this a secret. We have never thought that those feelings may find a way to get out into our day to day living and the secret shadows shall cover up the light.

Now as I have met those dear Israeli students on one of the most horrible spots of the tragedy, I became acquainted with them. They ask, demand from the still living parents, grandparents, survivors of the Holocaust, they should share their pain with them, open their hearts, acquaint them with the sad history of the Holocaust, so they may draw the lesson from it, to appreciate even more Eretz Israel, their only home, that never fails its children.

* * *

And to those who are coming to the yearly Azkara I say: let's take our children, grandchildren with us! Let us have them sit beside us, so we shall be able to say - we have found solace in them!

GRANDMA 'MAKES ALIYAH'

It was always very nice to visit Grandma. Everything had a special, delightful taste there. She was able to solve cleverly any problem, even in the years of misery she could magically create fine cakes. If there was a shortage of something, she could replace it adroitly with something else, like when she used chicory for cocoa - and still, her cake came out light as a feather.

Her recipe is still valid: she used to add the warmth of her heart to it.

It is of human nature to bear in mind consistently what life has taken away from us, and appreciate less, what it has offered us.

I have been fortunate that my Grandmother lived with me in my adulthood, hiding her broken heart from us, her eyes radiating only love towards us. She had known and cherished my three children. Her "Yahrzeit" coming up recently we, her four surviving grandchildren in Israel, surrounded her grave in the Zichron Meir cemetery and spelled out from the marmor slab the long list of the names of her children and grandchildren, who had perished in Auschwitz, who don't have a grave, whose beings that went up in flames weighed heavily on her soul in her old age.

The broken-hearted woman, survivor of Bergen Belsen, might have served as a symbol of the two

thousand years long Jewish suffering. She embodied the gist of the five Megilloth: the Book of Esther, the Lamentations, the Song of Songs, the Book of Ruth and the wisdom of King Solomon's Kohelet.

In the Book of Ruth she could have played the part of Naomi. She stood by the wife and children of her son, killed in the forced labor battalions, until years later, in Israel, the Youth Aliyah took over their care.

* * *

Coming back from Bergen Belsen Grandma stayed for some time in her Makó house with her only surviving daughter, her son-in-law and their three children. At the beginning of the fifties the authorities didn't let the family emigrate to Israel. My cousins who tried to emigrate illegally were brought back by force several times from the frontier. (Why didn't they do the same with the trains going to Auschwitz, one could ask).

Grandma decided to follow her orphaned grandchildren to Israel - ,by herself, if necessary. She had put on her lace-collared Shabbat dress and went up to the passport office, where, not knowing exactly how to begin, she opened the doors of several offices, fretting loudly:

- How do you mean there are no passports, why can't I emigrate? Who do you think you are? Haven't you let me be dragged to Bergen Belsen, where my son and daughter perished eventually? I want to see my orphaned grandchildren. Where are they? In Israel. What shall I do there with myself? If necessary, I'll sleep on the streets. I want to follow my grandchildren, gentlemen, don't you think I'm entitled to it?

She didn't have to argue any more. They had let the elderly Jewish woman go - especially as she had left behind in Makó her nice mansion.

* * *

There we were standing, four cousins, on the wharf of Haifa port. The once well-to-do Mrs. Mór Klein, who used to visit the elegant spas of Europe, the well beloved aunt Julcsi, our dear Grandma, whom the "nyilas" deprived of everything, whom the communists didn't give back a thing, came down from the ship leaning on her walking-stick.

She embraced us gladly: "Here you are, my darlings! Shall you ever need me again?" Thanks Heaven Grandma made herself useful till the end. She was never a burden to anybody.

The Sochnut people didn't have to "absorb" her, there was no need for a Beth Olim, an Absorption Center, official help. We took Grandma home. Since then the three children were sleeping on two beds in our cramped home, the third served Grandma.

She held out heroically during her wanderings from one grandchild's house to the other's. She had never misssed her old home, where she had to suffer so much pain.

Later on, at my cousin Kati's in Bnei Brak she was able to secure an iron bed (nicknamed "Sochnut-bed" at the time). So had we received her as a gift for a few delightful years, so did Grandma pass her last years among her grandchildren and great-grandchildren. And so could she finally turn to rest in the earth of the Holy

land, under that marmor slab, where the long list of her perished family members' name had been engraved...



ON MAMA'S YAHRZEIT

When my husband-to-be dared to present me to her mother, she summed up the only blemish of our interview in one sentence: "Sie kann kein Wort Yiddish". Yiddish used to be the "mamaloshen" of the family, who fled from Cracow to Budapest. Besides, not only her language, but her heart too was that of a true "yiddishe mame".

Mama was an intelligent, educated woman, she knew perfectly the Gothic characters too, so I preferred to communicate with her in German, although my German had a specific Félegyháza tone to it. All this didn't throw any shadow on our relationship, although, to tell the truth, many a time they laughed at me for my slips of tongue. In spite of my numberless errors in Yiddish everybody thought she was my mother. Only when they tried to speak to her in Hungarian, did they realize their mistake.

Had she had any joy in her life? She had to flee from country to country, live through two World Wars, her life was mere struggle, poverty and hiding. She had only one victory in her life, that gave her strength to live on: Her son and her husband came back to Budapest, where she lived with Aryan papers.

During the 25 years Mama has spent in Israel she kept reading faithfully the Yiddish newspaper, founded

by J. M. Tzanin, whose editorials she always agreed with. Day by day she acquainted me with Tzanin's opinion of the world, his aesthetic remarks and his essays. By and by Tzanin wormed his way into my cultural cycle, I was almost looking forward to his festival articles, whose meaning Mama had conferred on me, until the language became almost intelligible for me.

It is over two decades now, that Mama isn't with us any more. There is nobody who can interpret Tzanin to me. And it was something like a message from Mama, that just on her Yahrzeit day had a Tzanin short story come into my hand. I read the small masterpiece with interest and emotion, and embracing its heroes to my heart kept thinking of Mama, wishing I could tell her all about it.

At Mama's grave I take the Psalm-book in my hand, read it aloud, but would like to add something of my own to it. Should I thank her for helping out during the years of struggle? Should I ask forgiveness, for not heeding always her words? Maybe I wasn't tactful enough wih her, maybe I just took her for a mother-in-law?

Ten adults recite the Psalms, one paragraph for each one of her name's letters. When they came to the letter "Yod" I suddenly noticed a teardrop, fallen from my eye, between the lines...

And then I suddenly have found the words I wished to add to the prayer: Look, mama, since you passed away, I understand a lot quite differently, than before.. Because I have become a mother-in-law too...

I feel Mama's smile on me. She understood - and I thanked her foor it.

IT HASN'T BEEN IN VAIN...

In the synagogue they are blessing the new month, my husband is honored to serve as cantor, as is due, it being his father's Yahrzeit day.

"Papa" I called him from the moment I met him. He was thankful for it and I knew he loved me as if I were his own daughter. The prayer drones on, but I can't follow it, thinking of Papa's life, reviewing even those years I knew only from hearsay.

He studied at the yeshiva of Wizhnitz and was proud to have been in company of the later famous rabbi Baruch Hager. He was barely twenty, when he was wounded in the trenches of World War I. I don't even know, with whom and for whom was he fighting then. Anyway, he had to flee all the time. Finally he had settled in Cracow, where he founded a family. He made no money, but always guarded the old traditions.

When because of Hitler they fled to Budapest, besides the false papers, where he became Adam and his son Jan, his prayer-bag was his most precious treasure. But it was no use: Adam and Jan were captured during a synagogue raid and sent to Poland. They escaped again - this time from the onrushing train.

By the end of World War II the bitter struggle for life carved deep wrinkles around the scar from the first one on Papa's face. Still, the smiling eyes shone with

love every time he looked at me, when I called him "Papa".

We made aliyah together. He stood by the machines with youthful energy for another decade and half, with a strength superior to many a youth, till the day of his death. When my son Yitzhak was born, he invited his one time yeshiva-mate, the Vizhnitzer rabbi Baruch Hager to be his "kwater".

Bowing over the prayer-book I am thinking of Papa. While he is smiling at me, I would like to send a nice message to him in exchange of the love he radiated towards me, filling thus the place of my father. I would like to tell him, how one of his great-grandsons is called Yaacov Moishe after him. And how this Yaacov Moishe can cite every time a verse from the Scriptures, that fits exactly the actual situation.

So Papa dear, listen to what I have to say on your Yahrzeit day: **nothing has been in vain** - not the trenches, nor the flight, Cracow, Budapest, the hiding in the woods, the sufferings of the ghetto - because in Jerusalem there live your great-grandchildren, who, and whose children had arrived finally home and shall carry on the traditions of old. And they shall never forget that Yaacov-Moishe was their great-grandfather's name.

EACH ONE A HERO

All those who, after coming out alive from the most dangerous of all times, had strength enough to begin all over again, are heroes, each one of them. But we the survivors, the eyewitnesses - did we, could we pass on to our children and to posterity even a minute fraction of our hellish agonies?

Well, we didn't, couldn't. And maybe it is impossible too, because though many have tried, it is difficult to portray "the thousand faces of death". The Holocaust literature could fill a whole library, thousands of scientific treatises have been published about it, and even some films have been made lately on this inexhaustible theme - and yet all this is nothing but the tip of an iceberg emerging from the ocean depths.

Although this literature depicts innumerable facets of the experience of the Liberation, very few mention the struggle of the survivors to rebuild their life. To recover again, to make the first step, to overcome the agony, the trauma to learn to live again!

Yes, we must hand down - yet not the horrors of destruction only, but the struggle of the survivors, their faith in a better future too. Let me recite some examples of this:

A younger sister of my mother has been Uncle Haim's first wife. Now he is 83 years old and still

working. A daughter and seven grandchildren can attest to his new life. Our neighbors told me that when uncle Haim got back, ill and clad in rags, from the forced-labour battalions to Félegyháza, he threw himself on the door-post of his old home and before entering he wept in mourning over his wife and three children. Then he began everything all over, faithfully serving his people.

Rachel Arnstein, one of my mother's friends, returned from Auschwitz - but her four children had perished there. She didn't have children of her own any more. She is one of the founders of the "Mother and Child" charitable society in Bnei Brak. Where did she find the strength to begin all over, and even to help others?

Uncle Greger from Balmazujváros is the grandfather of Yitzhak Newmark, an active member of the presidium of the World Union of Hungarian Jews. I would like to tell him sometime about the heroism of his grandfather, who was comforting, helping others, although he too has lost one of his daughters and her whole family. He became grandfather of every orphan. After so many decades I still seem to hear his comforting, heartening voice. But later on I spied him sitting on a bench in Hajduszoboszló, shedding tears. "You discovered my secret, lass," he said then - "I am able to weep too!"

Uncle Greger has been buried in the Holy Land. These few lines were meant as a single flower on his grave.

And how many others are living among us, fathers and mothers, whose children were committed to the

crematories! These are the real heroes - Hitler's victims, who had survived.

When I am talking to Lily, who conducts with such love and care a Hungarian lending library in Haifa, we are speaking of quite other matters. But her husband's and little daughter's name are engraved in gold on a marmor table in Budapest. Lily serves quietly, without lament, her fellow Hungarians.

And then there is Zsuzsi S., an educational officer in Kiryat Motzkin. When we meet somewhere, who could be on our mind, if not Palika, her one and only four year old son, who had been with us on that fateful journey in the waggon?

Ali Kovács is devoted to the elderly. For years he has been directing with untiring enthusiasm the Golden Age club of Haifa. His son had been twelwe at that time. "What a wonderful child was my only one!" - he sighs. - "How well did he play the piano!'

And I could go on and on like this... How many heroes! And they are living among us. On them, and on all of us, rests now the holy duty to remind, to warn the world and posterity, so Amalek shall not prevail again!

MIRACLES IN THE FAMILY

Some people believe there are no miracles. Others feel that every passing day is a miracle in itself. Anyway, you cannot dispute feelings. My heart overflows because of the wonders that happened to the members of my family, and I'm not speaking of some wonder-kids, but of touching events that really happened. My cousin Yossi is the family chronicler and has already published his first book with the title "Joseph's dream". I have no intention to write another chapter in that book, but to reflect on a get-together with some cousins at a marriage-ceremony in the family.

* * *

My grandmother on my mother's side had three children. Each one gave birth to three others, so Grandma had nine grandchildren altogether. Then came the Holocaust and snatched away two of my brothers - but, wonder of wonders: six of my cousins managed to survive! What makes this miracle even greater is that they have been inmates of the infamous Bergen Belsen and Theresienstadt death-camps. And when we remember that one of them was barely two, and the others five, six, seven and eight years old at the time, and only the eldest, Zsuzsi, was near my age, sixteen - then we must admit there have to be miracles. We are in

close touch with each other, but as three of them are living in the United States, there are only rare moments of all us seven getting together, nice hours of meeting and remembrance.

How glad I have been then, when one of these cousins married a girl from nearby Kiryat Atta! And this was the ocassion of the coming together of all the seven: the two threesomes and myself. How much have we been longing to see each other among the festive crowd of good old friends and dear relatives! Later, in the nice spring night we assembled, all the seven, in the courtyard of the wedding hall, under the star-studded canopy of the sky.

No matter where I happen to meet my cousin Cathy, I always remember first of all her parting to her aliyah, after the war, on the train in Budapest, with her little sister Miryam and brother Gabi. No sooner have they arrived in Eretz Israel, that they asked the Youth Aliya officials to send them to an observant institution. And now they are standing before me as living miracles. I swallow down my tears of joy. True, they have been robbed of their childhood, but lived, thank God, to become grandparents. Looking at tall, broad-shouldered cousin Sender I notice some gray strands in his beard. I also take notice, that his hazel eyes are just like Grandma's were. And to think that cousin Sender had been sent to Bergen Belsen when barely two and was liberated later from Theresienstadt! Isn't this a miracle?

* * *

It is the year 1941, a very hard winter in Kikunfélegyháza. The fate of the jews was already doomed, still they didn't want to believe so. The

Hungarian soldiers who had invaded Yougoslavia began the massacres. Jewish family men, after being deprived of their work-permits, were sent to the forced labour batallions.

During that gloomy winter did my mother's sister come from Makó to visit us. She was rather embarrassed, as the signs of pregnancy were quite obvious on her. Mother looked at her anxiously, as her husband, who won a medal of bravery during the first World War, wasn't exempted from the labour service and his family remained without its breadwinner. Petite aunt Bashka put her hand on her protruding belly, as if to protect the child in her womb, and said: maybe this child shall protect all of us?

And that same aunt has came back from the camps ill, bent from suffering, but alive, with all her three children. Cousin Zsuzsi was sitting in the waggon among the deportees, holding little Sender in her arms, when a bomb hit the waggon and shattered her arm that sheltered Sender...And that same Sender is now sitting across me, telling about aunt Bashka in America, her grandchildren and her life in general. Life that is a miracle in itself, that only those who lived through those times can grasp its true significance...

POSTSCRIPT

For several years now I have been putting my thoughts, my feelings in writing. At times these words come into being because of a heavy stuggle with pain. At other times they form themselves into sentences out of sheer joy. And now there stands the store house containing the treasures of my soul.

As the short pieces grew in number during the years, a natural wish arose to see them bound together in a book.

I would like to reveal before my readers, that if publishing a book were a bed of roses, there would have been more thorns in it than flowers. Even if we, who write in Hungarian, are able to wrestle with the publication in our mother tongue, I have to admit that in spite of the wonderful efforts of the translator, during the work on Hebrew or the English version I have wept quite a lot. The helplessness that comes from not knowing the language of the translation enough caused me a lot of pain. I hope my readers will bear with me - maybe I should have been born in another era...

As I have remarked elsewhere in this book, I never grew up to be sixteen. So receive it, please, as I have written it: with forgiveness steeped in love.

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How glad we were when we heard, that Grandma publishes her writings in a book!

We, her grandchildren, have known the treasure of her writings from our early childhood. We grew up with them, learned from them and lived them.

Her stories about her and her contemporaries' survival during the Holocaust, and their dedication in coming to Israel and fighting with a thousand difficulties filled us with wonder. We welcomed all this with love and firm faith.

We were born into another age. There is no scarcity any more and the world tries to forget the horrors of the Holocaust. Grandma's articles gave us an aperture towards the recent past. They opened our eyes, taught us morals and right conduct.

We derived wisdom from Grandma's stories about everyday occurrences, that seem to be trifles, but they are really quite important.

We think it is a welcome idea to bring this book before the public, so they too may learn, understand and benefit from it. As for us, we are bound to thank Grandma for the wonderful lessons in all areas of life she transmitted to us through her pen.