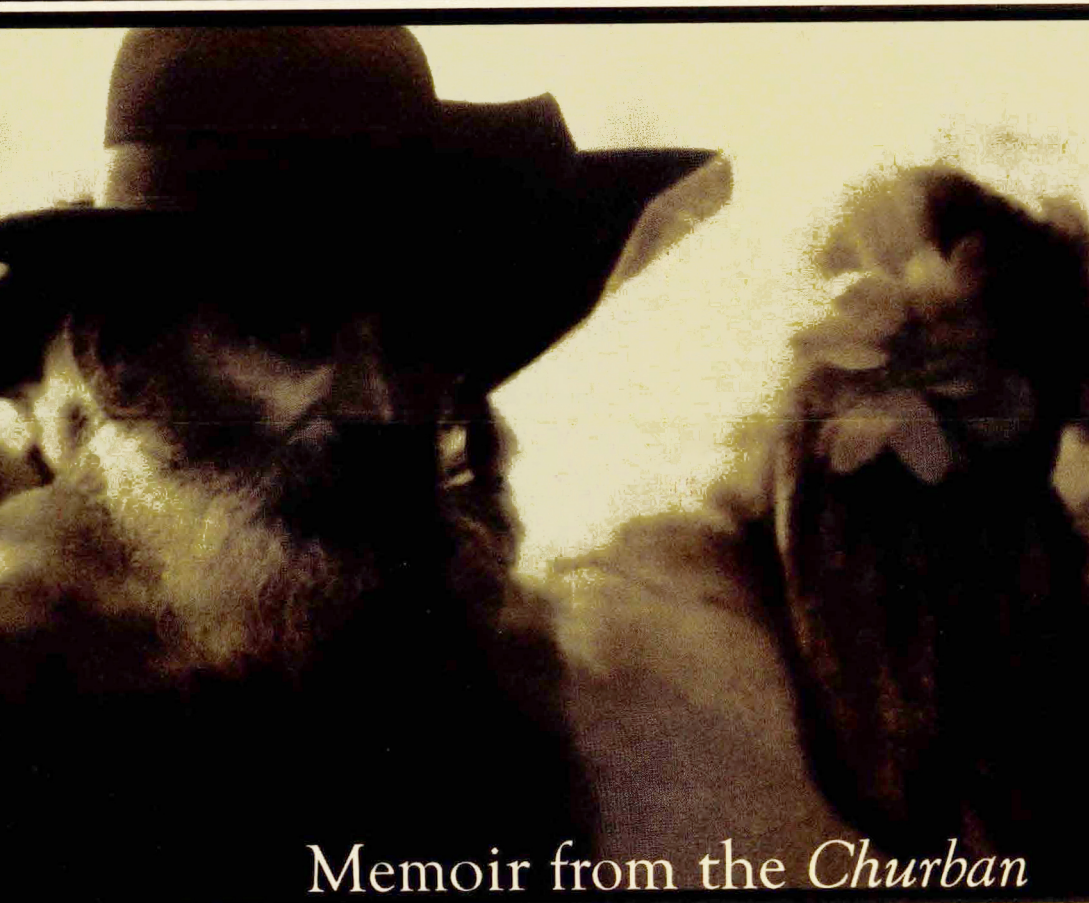
There are No Words



Memoir from the *Churban*

by Esther B. Schonkopf

as told to Azriela Jaffe

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If you wish to order more than 20 books in a bulk order, contact Azriela Jaffe at azjaffe@optonline.net or azjaffe@gmail.com

To reach Esther B. Schonkopf or other Schonkopf family members, please email josephschonkopf@aol.com

To reach Azriela Jaffe, author, please call 732-985-7613 or email azjaffe@optonline.net, or azjaffe@gmail.com.

Azriela Jaffe lives in Highland Park, New Jersey.
Esther B. Schonkopf lives in Lawrence, NY and Miami, Florida.

All media interest, or inquiries regarding hiring Azriela Jaffe to write a holocaust survivor memoir for your family, should be directed to Azriela Jaffe at phone or email listed above.

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I am honored to include two forewords written by revered and highly respected men connected to the family and myself. I thank them for their words and encouragement.

Rabbi Dovid Weinberger, Rav Shaarei Tefilla, Lawrence NY - I am a long-time and proud member of Shaarei Tefilla, and over the years, I've developed deep respect for Rabbi Weinberger. After seeing an abbreviated version of my life story and talking to me about my life over the years, the Rav encouraged me to have a full memoir written and published. This project is very much due to his encouragement.

Rabbi Yaakov Reisman, Rav Agudath Israel of Long Island, Far Rockaway NY - The Rav has known and guided our family for as long back as we dare to admit. His personal contact with all the family members, old to young, is indispensable. He inspires us to achieve greatness, yet still takes time to devote himself even to the younger members of his community and our family.

I also wish to express my gratitude to **Rebbetzin Shifra Tendler**, A"H, daughter of Reb Moshe Feinstein, who asked me often to make sure that I write down my

life story. Her encouragement is one of the reasons I decided to write this book. She felt strongly that it was important that I bring to the attention of the people in our family and the world what happened to us during the holocaust. I was as close to her as a sister. When I shared with her and her family some very painful memories from my holocaust journey, she and her children and grandchildren cried with me. I feel privileged to have had **Rabbi Moshe Tendler** review the manuscript and share his sentiments on the back cover of this book. Since becoming *Mechutanim* with the Tendlers, I developed a close relationship with the Rav and Rebbetzin that I will cherish forever.

In addition, I would like to thank **Dr. Moshe Katz** for reviewing the manuscript. Besides making lecturing on the Holocaust a life long mission and writing his own family's history in his book, "Nine out of Ten", Mr. Katz is also a fellow "landsman" from Ungvahr and a dear friend of the family for four generations. I am grateful for his advice and encouragement. Special thanks for his kind words on the back cover of this book. Having someone who knew my family testify to their greatness is very moving to me.

A bond of sisters is always a special one, but for me and my sisters, after going through so much together, it is ever more so. As you will read in this memoir, **my two sisters - Piri with her husband Shmilku, and Chanie with her husband Hershie**, were always there every step of the way. Being left with little in the way of family, we looked out for

one another. The relationship my husband and I have had with their children is as close as with my own children.

As you will read in this book, I had a very close, magnificent relationship with **my beloved, Yitzchok**. During our long marriage, I also benefitted tremendously from my in-laws, **Aaron Wolf** and his wife, **Rachel (Rosa).** My husband and I remained in close contact with his sister and her husband, **Zicu and Ferri Bergida, and their children, Dr. Robert Bergida, Gracy (Diena) and Ruthie (Seidenfeld).**

I named this book, "There Are No Words," because verbal communication cannot begin to convey the intensity of emotions that accompanied me throughout my journey of survival. On the positive side as well, the expression, "there are no words" also conveys my deepest, most indescribable feelings of *hakoras hatov* to the people involved in this book.

I would like to thank **my son, Asher** and beloved **daughter-in-law, Tova**. Asher is very much part of this miraculous story, as you will read. His devotion to my husband A"H and myself is truly remarkable. Being an only child isn't always easy, but Asher and Tova always treat me like royalty. This book would not have come to be without their help.

Thank you to **all my grandchildren** for taking on various projects associated with this book and for constantly being there for me whenever needed. My love for you knows no end. Seeing you walk in the way of

Torah is my greatest *Nekama* to the Nazis *Yemach Shmam* and is the most meaningful tribute I can do for my dear parents and ultimately, Hashem.

Special thanks to my granddaughter, **Chani**, for introducing me to the **author, Azriela Jaffe**, who helped me get my thoughts down on paper. Having Azriela on board was a special gift from Hashem. Somehow, Azriela was able to put not *only* my words down on paper, but *even*, my most private thoughts. I felt as if she was somehow able to read my mind! Her dedication to this project and its details was immense and heartfelt - I can never thank her enough. I tell her now, that she is part of the Schonkopf family!

Azriela introduced us to the **graphic artist, Kathrine Rend**, who did an exquisite job designing the front cover, and was a very reliable professional who helped us turn this project into a professional looking book.

Finally, I would like to thank ***Hakadosh Baruch Hu***. Going through such an ordeal, one sees the guiding hand of Hashem. Staying alive, reuniting with my husband and my son and meriting to rebuild a beautiful Torah family is beyond miraculous. As Rabbi Weinberger encouraged me, this book was written for Hashem; that is, to speak of His kindness and to inspire us all to live with a sense of purpose.

Everything has a plan, although the road can sometimes be so difficult that ... **"There Are No Words".**

Esther Bella Schonkopf

Forewords

PHONE NO. 516-239-2444 FAX NO. 516-239-2199

CONGREGATION SHAARAY TEFILA
CENTRAL AND LORD AVENUES
LAWRENCE, N.Y. 11559

DAVID WEINBERGER
RABBI

בס"ד

CHURBAN – the very word evokes thoughts and feelings of horror and mass destruction. When we speak of *Shoa* and the tragic loss of six million Jewish souls, we speak of a calamity that occurred not just in the past, but one that is still felt in the present and will have an effect for eternity. The ramifications of the loss of so much grandeur and glory no doubt impact directly on our perspective of life and our present day aspirations. How different it would be, had European Jewry not been erased from the panorama of Jewish history.

In truth, each individual life lived is a word unto itself and is part of the beautiful mosaic that was Europe of old. Decades later, fewer and fewer individuals remain to pass their personal stories to their children, grandchildren and future generations. Family stories have been told numerous times, yet each and every story is unique, and represents an entire world, as our rabbis teach us, "*kol hamekayim nefesh achas, k'eilu kiyam olam moleh*" (one who sustains even one *neshama*, it's as if he's sustained an entire world).

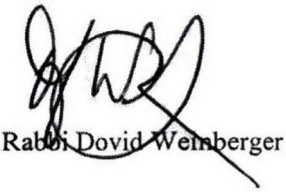
For the survivors who rebuilt their lives, it is not just a journey of change, but rather, a re-creation into a new existence. With the demise of so many family members and friends, they set out to establish a living testimony to the vibrancy and authenticity of the *Torah* of yesteryear. They are the true bearers of our *mesorah*, our link to a glorious past that was infused with courage, faith and enthusiasm in its very essence. Each and every personal tale has lessons of heroism and bravery that serve as a beacon to our generation

and beyond. In truth, we need to recount the story of each survivor, depicting his/her family struggles and conquests for the benefit of us all. Yet, many stories remain untold, and are known only to a select few and most importantly, to the One above. The present work by Mrs. Esther Schonkopf was written at my urging, after I heard segments of her fascinating tale.

The *Torah* says, "*zechor yemos olam binu shenos dor vdor she'al avicha v'yagidcha zekunecha v'yomeru lecha*," (Remember the days of yore, understand the years of generation after generation. Ask your father and he will relate it to you, and our elders and they will tell you). Mrs. Schonkopf fulfills this precept to the fullest, by recording, for posterity, her challenges and triumphs during one of the darkest periods of our history.

She epitomizes the words of *Shlomo Hamelech* in *Eishes Chayil*: "*oz v'hadar l'vusha*", (strength and splendor in her garb) through her regal demeanor and steadfast faith in Hashem. *Shlomo Hamelech* also says, "*va'tischak l'yom acharon*," (she rejoices to the last day), which in her particular situation represents the triumph over evil. This triumph is evident in the illustrious family of true *ovdei Hashem* that she has built, *l'shem u'l'tiferes*.

I hope all who read her story will be as inspired as I was to live a life of *Kiddush Hashem*. Such a life will serve as the greatest tribute and memorial for the lives of the *Kedoshim*.



Rabbi Dovid Weinberger

Rav Yaakov Reisman
137 Lord Avenue
Lawrence, N.Y. 11559

בס"ד

יעקב רייזמאנן
רב דק"ק אגודת ישראל
סניף לאנג איילאנד

The Torah (Devorim 32:7) says:

זכור ימות עולם בנו שנות דר ודר, שאל אביך ויגדך זקניך ויאמרו לך

Remember the days of old, understand the years of generation after generation. Ask your father and he will relate to you, your elders and they will tell you (translation by Artscroll).

1. The תורה teaches us that we have an obligation to "remember" our past. We have to realize that the world does not begin nor end with us. We are just another link in the world's historic events.

2. After realizing this the תורה tells us that it's not enough to just have this concept, that we are just another component in history. The Torah tells more. בינו - understand, study the days of old, delve into historical events, so that you "understand" the "years of generation after generation". You should understand how the generations followed one another. You should understand their "connection". They were not random events that "just happened" to come about. You didn't just happen to be at this time in history. There is a plan. There is a sequence. The "generation after generation" is all connected as links in a long chain. One generation is affected by other generations, no less than the single link is affected by the movement of the chain at large, whether it's long or short. If you yank one link, the whole chain shakes. If you remove a link, the chain is broken. If the link is weak, the whole chain is in jeopardy.בינו שנות דור ודור -Understand [this] the years of generation after generation.

3. After the תורה spells out our responsibility to think of our past, way back to the "days of the world" and to relate it to our generation and ourselves, the Torah gives us the key to attain this "understanding" - and if the Torah says so then that is the only way. שאל אביך ויגדך זקניך ויאמרו לך - ask your father] or mother] and [s]he will relate to you, your elders and they will tell you.

It's not the historian or the biographer who will give you this understanding, because humans have an agenda political or otherwise. They have biases and slanted views to fit their agenda.

Parents don't lie to their children (Kuzari). They realize that one of their responsibilities is to link the generations together, the past to the future and the תורה says that's the only way.

Mrs. Esther Schonkopf should live and be well. A survivor of a prominent family with an illustrious past, who together with her husband ybmcl"c R' Yitzchok ז"ל, a Kohein with an equal background and accomplishments, have B'chasdei Hashem, through Nissim, survived the war with their only child R' Asher נ"י with a different set of miracles, succeeded in planting a beautiful, blossoming, Torahdik generation.

In keeping with the תורה, which has been her and her family's legacy, she decided to commit to writing for her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, her בלע"ה generations and their connection to the previous generations. With the בינו שנות דור, with the understanding of a generation after generation through the eyes of a בעלת אמונה and בעלת בטחון, the Matriarch of an illustrious family transmitting to her offspring, חסדי נפלאות ה' - the benevolence and wonders of Hashem.

4. What a זכות for her offspring and what an opportunity for all those with whom she will share her testimony of thanks to Hashem. We owe her a debt of gratitude. We wish her that this private narrative will bring a better understanding of those dark years and teach us to see the light in middle of the tunnel. To be מחזק her generation, as well as ours, and most of all, to add כבוד שמים – honor to Hashem. May this serve her as a זכות for longevity with health and happiness to see further נחת from all her generations.

Rabbi Yaakov Reisman

From: Asher

"And he (Yaakov) will laugh on the end of Days"

Har Hacarmel
16 Tamuz 5769

I am now gazing at the magnificent scenery on top of Carmel Mountain, realizing it may be the same view that *Eliyahu Hanavi* saw in the famous showdown with the Priests of the *Avodah Zorah, Baal.*

As tomorrow is the 17th of *Tammuz*, on which we fast to commemorate the beginning of the *Churban Beis Hamikdash* (among other reasons), a few thoughts preoccupy my mind:

The reality of the holocaust permeated my upbringing, but I have always understood that the deep and vicious hatred of the Jews by the nations of the world is definitely not a modern day phenomenon limited only to our most recent holocaust of memory. In fact, what we call today anti-Semitism, has been in existence from the time of *Avraham Avinu*, almost 4000 years ago. King Nimrod threw him into the flames for his terrible crime of believing that it is G-d who created and controls the world - not the statues that were being worshipped by all others. Even his name portrayed this - *Avraham Ha'Ivri*. He was on one side (*aver*) with the entire world on the other. The Almighty sent an Angel to save him from the flames and subsequently, he not only survived, but

prospered and grew in stature until he became known as "The Father of many nations".

The Torah narrates many instances where various people tried to annihilate the Jews. *Yishmael* tried to murder his brother, *Yitzhak, Esav* and *Lavan* wanted to kill *Yaakov,* and thus prevent the Jewish nation from coming into existence. *Lavan*, in later years, became *Billam*, a member of *Paraoh's* advisory council. In this capacity, he tried to find a "final solution" for this troublesome Jewish presence in Egypt by killing all newborn males. However, the *Ribono shel Olam* had other plans, and after smiting the Egyptians with plagues and many other miracles, He transformed the Jews into a large nation.

Billam still made one last effort to accomplish what he had previously failed to do. With the help of King *Ballak,* he tried to curse the Jews and also to entice them to sin so that The Almighty would not save them. Again, the *Ribono shel Olam* did not agree to his plan, and *Billam* was eventually himself killed by the sword.

We see that throughout history, in practically every single nation, Jews have been expelled, murdered, burned, and tortured. We've known these murderers by many names - The Inquisition, The Crusaders, The Romans, Persians, English, French, Russians, and many others. They all had one common goal: to destroy the Jewish people! And although they supplied many different reasons for this ambition, the Talmud simply combines all these motives into one concise statement of fact: "It is a well known fact–it is a law–*Esav* abhors *Yaakov*!"

At times this hatred has been concealed under the guise of tolerance; other times it blatantly roars its ugly head, and the "mighty sword of *Esav*" is used against the children of *Yaakov*. Whether *Esav* or *Yaakov* will succeed depends entirely on the will of the Almighty. This cycle will continue until *Moshiach* arrives IY"H; only then will the sons of *Yaakov* know true peace.

Dear reader, this book that you are holding in your hand covers one of the darkest periods in our history. A time when the Nazi regime *Yemach Shmam*, used all of their vast, powerful, and modern resources to try to finish that which was started by their predecessors, *Esav* and *Lavan*. This time they almost succeeded! Their monstrous destruction machine trapped my parents and their entire families, but *B'ezras Hashem*, as you will read, the *Ribono shel Olam*, in His infinite kindness, allowed a very small part of our family to survive.

As you will read, my mother's story is not only an account of the numerous miracles that enabled them to survive, but it is also a guide for our children on how to survive.

Chazal in *msechta Sanhedrin* ask the obvious question: "What should a person do to be able to survive this cycle which will culminate in the 'labor pangs of *Moshiach*'?" Their answer is to immerse oneself in the study of Torah and be totally occupied with *G'millas Chasadim* (kindness and helpfulness to your fellow man).

My parents added an additional dimension to that advice: Always put your trust in the Almighty and he will support you. It is quite clear that Ma and Deddi

always had this complete faith and *bitachon* in *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* which kept them going throughout the darkest moments of their entire lives. Ma never became despondent or complained to Hashem, and she never gave up! She continues even today, to accept everything that Hashem sends her, with the complete belief that He intends only for her well-being.

This is her message and her guide to survival – At all times, trust in Hashem that, in spite of what you feel at that moment, Hashem knows best, He is in charge, and He will protect you.

As you read this story of the three phases in Ma's life – before, during, and after the war, you will see that she never gave up- even when she and my father had to begin anew many times, under extremely difficult conditions. The central theme of their lives was always the *bitachon* that everything is good, and will only be better.

The *Gemara* in *Avodah Zorah* recounts the story of how the Romans burned *Rav Chanaya Ben Teradyon* together with his *sefer* Torah for the crime of teaching Torah to his students. As the flames were consuming him, the disciples screamed, "Rebbe, what do you see now?" He replied, "I see that the parchment is burning, but the letters and the words are flying in the air".

When reading this book, which my mother named, "There Are No Words" you may appreciate a deeper insight into this story. The goyim who are the descendants of *Esav, Lavan* and *Yishmael* may succeed in burning the bodies, the parchment of the Jews. But, the words will

continue. There will always be the Torah and there will always be survivors to tell the story for future generations. We will continue to have *bitachon* in Hashem, inspired by those letters and the words, until the *Ribono shel Olam* will decide to send us *Eliyahu Hanavi* and *Moshiach* to bring the *Geula Shlema Bimhera Beyamenu* AMEN.

Then we will see what the *Shlomo Hamelech* said in his song, *Aishes Chail:* "And he (Yaakov) will laugh on the end of Days." (Mishlei 31:25)

Asher Schonkopf

From: Azriela

Author Sentiments

There are no words to describe how I feel about the incredible honor of being Esther Bella Schonkopf's biographer.

Surely, Hashem loves Esther, as you will learn from her story that gives witness to Hashem's personal intervention in her life in the most miraculous of ways.

Surely, Hashem loves me, for bringing me the opportunity, privilege, responsibility, and pleasure of bringing Esther's words to her family and the public.

Esther Bella went from stranger to friend in only a few short months. To know Esther is to love Esther. To spend any time with her is to hear her voice even when you aren't with her. From the first moment I met her, I knew I was in the presence of royalty – but Esther's gift is that she always insisted on making me feel like royalty!

I still remember the first time I sent Esther a chapter or two to look over. She said, "My darling, I don't know how you did it, but you read my mind!" *Music to my ears.*

And that is how this book went from beginning to end. I could read Esther's thoughts, not only the ones spoken, but the ones not spoken. It startled her, and it touched me, and we are both sure that Hashem was giving our *shidduch* His highest blessing.

As the writing of this book came to a close, I felt

ambivalence. On the one hand, I celebrated its completion and looked forward to sharing the finished work with Esther and her family. On the other hand, I felt pangs of selfish withdrawal as I realized that I would no longer have as many excuses to talk to this amazing woman who inspires and moves me with every conversation.

I am told that I am now considered an adopted member of the Schonkopf family.

Surely, Hashem loves me. How lucky I am to consider the Schonkopfs my *mishpacha.*

This was not a job. This was not work. This was love drawn down through the heavens, and through Esther Bella, and then through me, and on to the paper.

Thank you, Esther Bella, Asher, and your entire *mishpacha,* for inviting me into your lives and allowing me the great honor of being your scribe.

You are beloved to me.

With *Hakoras Hatov,*

Azriela Jaffe

Preface

By Esther B. Schonkopf

For fifty years I was carrying these terrible tragedies in my heart, but I could not talk or write about my suffering. This is hard to explain to you but it's as if, since my mind could not digest that it really happened, I could not put any of it into words or thoughts that could be communicated. It took years and years, but finally, I decided that solely for the purpose of making sure that future generations should know what occurred, (much like we insist when we tell over the exodus story over and over again so that all future generations will know it happened), I became willing to revisit the tragic memories you are about to read.

Hashem has done a kindness to me, and many memories, I have forgotten. Certain important details, such as people's names, or certain dates, or what we ate, or wore, or saw on any given day, I no longer remember, although once I did. Other memories will be seared in my mind forever, but they are simply too painful to tell you, or impossible to describe in the human language.

My loved ones and friends: *Do not ever think that you*

will, from reading this memoir, truly, completely, understand what my family endured. This is like saying that from looking at a photograph of the most terrible incident you've ever seen, you have actually witnessed that dreadful experience firsthand, and now, you truly understand it.

You will never understand. How could you? I don't understand it, and I was there! And this is why I have chosen to title my memoirs, *There Are No Words*. Truly, there are not.

This reminds me of a conversation I had with my cousin, five years younger than me, who lived in Slovakia. Slovakia was touched by the war earlier than our country. We had a big warehouse built by my father for mineral water – thousands of bottles of water were stored there in the winter, and before we were ordered to the ghetto, I was counting how many water bottles were there. My cousin had a glimpse of what was coming our way and he sternly said to me: 'Esther, don't count what is in the warehouse. It won't make a difference. You can't imagine what is coming. Just tell your parents and the family to think of somewhere that you can hide.'

I lose my mind when I think about it. Where could we run or hide? So, we did try to hide, but we were captured, and you are about to read the tragic results. You must keep the following in mind as you read:

What follows are my holocaust recollections, and the chronicle of what happened to my parents and siblings. This story must be told, and appreciated, and remembered,

at the Seder night, on their yartzeit, all throughout time, and in all future generations. Please, never forget that what I am about to tell you, as horrible as it will sound, is only a fraction of the reality that we endured. These are just words; they don't even come close.

My brother-in-law who thankfully survived, Mr. Deutsch, was always sitting and learning. I remember all his life, he would be leaning over a book. He was such a reader. He would say to me, 'Esther, the holocaust is the biggest tragedy in human history. Never in the history of the world, has anything ever happened like this, which is why it can't be believed.'

One recent *Pesach*, Asher and my grandson Eli, a big learner and a very capable lawyer, were telling over this story at our Seder, and I listened, but I was burning up inside. I was sitting next to Asher. Finally, I couldn't stand it anymore. I said quietly to Asher, 'If you don't mind, I'd like to say a few words.' He encouraged me to continue. I said to him and the other family at the table: 'My heart is bleeding that Asher talks so much about *Mitzrayim*, yet we don't even mention what happened to my mother and father, like it never was, like it never happened!' I continued with more feelings from my heart about how important it is to remember this historic event in the history of our people, as much as, surely, *Yetzias Mitzrayim*.

My words touched Eli in particular. The next day, at the nearby synagogue, he gave a speech where he told over my remarks to the congregants gathered for the

Pesach service. The Rabbi commented to him when he finished, 'how right your grandmother is. This story, the accounts from the Holocaust, must be told as well.'

And so it is, that you are reading my memoirs. Even though there are no words, my story must be told. And then, you must tell it to your children, and grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, so that it is never forgotten.

Esther B. Schonkopf

Chapter One

I was born on March 16, 1920, named Blima Esther Rubin, Blima after one grandmother, and Esther after the other. I was born at home with a midwife and a doctor assisting, which was the accepted practice of that time. I grew up in the town of my birth, Uzhorod (Ungvar), Czechoslovakia. The name of the town derived from "Uzh", meaning "river", and "rod", meaning "castle". (The castle still exists on the top of the hill.) The town of Ungvar once consisted of 45,000 inhabitants; 15,000 of us were Jews. Today, in the city of Ungvar, it is scarcely possible to find a minyan of Jews. This is the tragedy of the holocaust, which brought indescribable destruction to our town, and to my family and people.

To understand what was lost, first, I will try to describe to you the beauty of my life before the Nazis took so much of it away. Please know before I begin that I am humbled by the impossibility of two tasks: I cannot possibly, with only words, convey to you the exquisite beauty of my city and my family, and the holiness of my parents, A"H, whose neshamas were fully dedicated to serving Hashem and raising our family to be Torah Jews. To say that we were a "close family", and that we lived in a "beautiful city", does not even come near to the truth that was mine; my daily life before the war was so much more precious than words can ever convey.

The horrors we experienced during the War can only be spoken and written about in language that does not come close to accurately describing its reality. Some memories I choose not to tell. Others, I have blessedly forgotten. And that which I remember, and wish to tell to you, will always be just an outline of what we really endured. All of my grandchildren, and great-grandchildren and so on, should know my story, and the miracle of Yitzchok and Asher's story as well. I must also accept that no matter how much I write or talk about it, you will never fully know the story. That is how it is with all holocaust survivors. What we experienced is beyond imagination, and impossible to fully explain. But I will try my best, especially so that you should know the miracles that Hashem, in His kindness, gave to our family.

I have never changed my basic personality, which I'm sure was shaped in part by my parents. I was born an optimist, and I have always painted an optimistic picture, even when everyone told me this was crazy. Terrible things happened to my beloved family, and to me, and still, after all these years, every day when I say my *tefillah*, I cry. I will never stop crying when I recall what we lost, and when I remember my precious family. But bitterness does not define my life. I am still the optimistic, grateful, joyous person that I was in my youth. The Germans could not, and did not, take that gift away from me. I only hope that I have been able to pass some of this nature on to my children and grandchildren. Hashem has blessed me, and I have tremendous *hakoros hatov*. Allow me to tell you of the beginnings of my blessed life.

Before 1938, my family lived a calm, peaceful, joyful life in Ungvar, Czechoslovakia. My parents, Reb Yaakof (Jonas) Rubin, and my mother, Gittel Stern, A"H, raised seven children. My oldest sister, Leitchu (Leah or Lenke in Hungarian), born in 1905, was 15 years older than me. Then I had my sister, Perl Bashe, born in 1910, ten years older than me, one brother, Usher Yeshiya, born in 1908, twelve years older than me, and Chana Lieb, two years older than me. There were ten years between my oldest siblings and me, and my birth was treated as if I was a miracle from the day of my birth. My parents merited seeing five of their children married under the chuppah, including myself, and then, they were blessed with fifteen splendid grandchildren. My younger two sisters, Shifra Zlata (Zarlota), age 19, and Dvora Frimet (Deborah), age 18, were still single at the time of the War.

The Nazis, *Yemach-Shemam*, murdered all of my precious family *Al-Kiddush-Hashem*, except for the miraculous saving of myself, and my sister, Chana, and our husbands, with one child each of us, Asher and Bashi, and my sister, Piri and her family who lived in Romania during the War. What follows is the story of my miraculous life, with the utmost of gratitude and appreciation to Hashem that I am alive today to tell you my story.

Most readers of this memoir will focus on the terrible tragedies that befell our family and all of the Jews in our country after the war began. Certainly, this story must be told and it is for this reason that I am willing to revisit such painful memories in order to be sure that my children,

grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and their children's children should know the esteemed lineage from which they come, and the kindness that Hashem gave to me in my time of need. But also, besides telling over the tragedy of the loss of so many beloved family members, and the suffering that we endured, what also must be shared is the beautiful life that we had as a family, a community, and a country, before the Nazis took it all away from us.

My mother and father were very successful business persons. My mother worked in the business alongside my father all of their married life. They were in the wholesale wine and liquor business, and the distribution of bottled mineral water. My father had a special cellar built to store 1000 bottles of water in the freezing cold of winter (without the bottles freezing and the corks exploding), and this made us the only water distributor for the entire region.

My father started the business, and ran all the details of it, even though he had only a very limited elementary school education. He taught himself from watching his father, my grandfather, who had a vinegar factory, which unfortunately burned down. My father was a proud man, as was his father. When Papa tried to help his father with money after the vinegar factor burned down, his father returned the money and refused to accept help from his son.

In many ways, Papa was a self-made man, just as his father was. You cannot imagine the reputation that my father had in our city. He was known to many as a

"doctor", because in those days, people would often sip some wine or mineral water every morning to recover from a medical ailment, so they would come to my father for not only wine and water to drink for pleasure, but even in ill health. This was much like Papa's father, whom they called, "the lawyer", even though he was never educated as a lawyer. People in the community simply had such high respect for our family, they consulted them on all matters.

We were considered very wealthy, but my father insisted that we live modestly. Papa always said, 'I don't like a show-off'. I remember once when he bought me and my sisters beautiful Persian coats and fox cuffs for a wedding, but then he told me: 'I wanted you to have it but don't go out on the streets with it. I don't want the goyim to see.' This lesson has remained with me all my life – don't show off, always be modest.

My family owned two houses, one on *Masaryk Street*, occupied by our family with two tenants, and the other was a four-family dwelling, which was also rented to tenants. Behind our home was the liquor business, located on the main street, *Masarykove Namesti*. The water business was located in a different large building nearby, on *Bozdos Ulice Street*. Everything for our home and businesses was within an easy walk.

Our houses were very modern, with all of the latest conveniences and luxuries. We had electricity, running water through faucets, a well, and normal bathrooms

– many people did not have such luxuries at this time. We had many bedrooms, a dining room, living room, and two kitchens. We also had a very simple front door made out of wood. Why would such a beautiful house have only a simple wood door? Again, that was Papa's decision – always modest. Our houses were brick, with a huge garden in the backyard, and apple and pear trees, with grapevines growing near the windows.

We had a large staff of people working for us. We had two Jewish girls who cooked, and one Jewish man, who lived in a special apartment for the help. For the little children, my busy mother had no time to take the babies for a walk, so we employed nannies, who helped with younger children. We had a gardener, and cleaning help, too. We didn't have any central heating for water, so first you had to light a fire to warm the water. We hired two women just to do the laundry, which was very difficult work. They would wash the clothes in kettles of boiling water, and then take the clothing to the river, *Uzh*, to rinse them. They would bring the wet clothing back to the house and dry it on a string in the backyard. There was a joke: "Because the husband loves his wife, the sun is shining!"

My mother was too busy in the business to be always in the kitchen, but she supervised the help, and my siblings and I helped the cooks in the kitchen from time to time. I learned how to cook and bake, and our cooks were kept busy from dawn to dusk. My mother supervised the kitchen help and she cooked, made bread, and baked

from time to time. In fact, she was famous for her stuffed cabbage! Just to show you how much I learned from being in my mother's kitchen growing up, here's a story:

When my sister, Chana got married in 1939, she didn't have any idea how to make a fire for the oven. She was the bookkeeper in our family and she helped Papa in the business. I, however, loved to bake cakes and I was quite capable in the kitchen. After her wedding, she lived a two-hour train ride apart from our home. I went to live with her for two weeks to teach her how to make the fire, and to cook and bake. Her husband, Mr. Deutsch, joked, 'I got married and now I have two wives!'

These days, when you want to bake a cake, you just turn on the oven. But when I was growing up, it was a whole production. Special wood had to be gathered and brought into the house. Then, you couldn't just pile up the wood and light it. You had to assemble the wood in a precise way, with an empty place in the middle, which is where you would place the newspapers for lighting. The fire needed to be tended until it was fully burning, and once this "stove" was ready, then we could get busy with cooking and baking. There was no such thing as preheating the oven to 350 degrees and waiting just a few minutes until the oven is ready!

To understand how incredible my Papa was, I must tell you about the abundance of fruits and vegetables that were growing in our backyard garden, and what he did

with them. Papa was always thinking about feeding the poor, which he learned from his parents. (Mama was the same way). So yes, our backyard was full of fruit trees of all kinds – but can you believe this? We children did not eat from these trees! My father employed a full-time gardener who capably tended to our very large garden. When the fruit was ripe, it would be harvested and distributed to the poor people in town. How could this be? Papa said, 'I have the money to buy fruit, Baruch Hashem, but the poor people don't have anything. So I will give all of our fruit to them, and then I will buy fruit when I need it, because I am blessed with the money to buy it!'

(Later on in my life, when I was imprisoned in Auschwitz, I had a job cleaning for an S.S. woman. One day she asked me to bike with her from one end of the town to the other, and we passed orchards with pears and apples fallen on the ground. I said to her, 'I must tell you a story.' I told her about my father and our fruit all going to the poor. She was so touched, she asked me if I wanted to pick up some fruit from the ground to eat. I did. Perhaps telling the story of my father's kindness also saved my life).

Growing up, during our long winters, we would store many fresh fruits and vegetables in our large cellar. We grew, and then processed and stored, Jonathan apples, potatoes, onions, jam and jelly, pickles, csalady (pickled tomatoes), and cabbage. All winter long, we ate from our garden.

There was never a day without fresh bread in our house. We did not have a fancy mixer – everything was done by hand. Even vermicelli and other kinds of pasta were made by hand. On Shabbos there would be challah, and all the other days, a variety of breads. I was so fussy about food as a child – oh, the trouble I gave my poor mother. Because I saw the bread being made in our kitchen, and the helper's hands in my food, I refused to eat our homemade bread. I insisted that my mother purchase a special loaf of bread for me from the town kosher bakery. Mama would say to me, 'do you think they use rubber gloves at the bakery? Their hands are in the dough there, too!' But, I insisted. Only if I didn't see a worker's hands in the bread, would I eat it!

We were a large family, so as you can imagine, there was a lot of cooking necessary just to feed our family every day. Back then, you didn't just go to the supermarket and bring home a package of kosher chicken. You had to go to the shochet to get the chicken ritually slaughtered, and then the women at home plucked out the feathers, and salted and kashered it. Then, of course, my Papa had to have the chicken inspected by our Rabbi to be sure it was kosher! Cooking kosher meat and chicken was not as easy as it is today, and still, our kitchen was always producing a steady stream of stuffed cabbage and fresh bread. Most of this food was not going to our family! I will explain this to you:

Mama and Papa opened their home to streams of visitors, dozens of poor people, yeshiva *bochurim*, and

rabbeim who were coming through town. I don't mean just for the occasional Shabbosim. I mean every day, all week long, and every Shabbos and Yomtov as well!

There was one large yeshiva in our city for boys, age 18 and older, and they came to our home for meals all week long, as well as on Shabbos. My parents even converted a couple of rooms in our house into dorm rooms so that some *bochurim* could stay by us for an entire term, and, they had a special kitchen, separate from the main kitchen, with Jewish women employed just to cook and feed the poor and the bochur! (That way, they could eat whenever they came for a meal, and our family could eat together in the dining room, according to my parents' business schedule and our school schedule).

I will tell you something funny. Until I came to America, I never saw a paper plate. We served every meal on the nicest of dishes. Because my parents served so many visitors, the help would complain: 'The poor people drop in anytime, the house is always open, dishes, dishes, dishes, every day, it never stops, we are never done doing the dishes!' So Mama would ask my sisters and me to help the maids clean the dishes, so that the maids wouldn't complain so much!

My mother was famous for her stuffed cabbage, which was prepared every single day, except Shabbos of course. My mother loved watching the poor people come into our house, their cold faces turning red as they enjoyed a bowl of delicious, hot stuffed cabbage and fresh homemade

bread. I have so many wonderful memories of the favorite foods of my childhood home. We would coat potatoes in flour and fry them - shlishkela. On Shabbos, there was cholent, kugle, chicken, and homemade gefilte fish - the goyim used to bring fish to us, or my father was so strict about the requirement to have fish for Shabbos, he would go to the river before Shabbos to make sure the fishermen caught a fish for us for Shabbos! Then, the Jewish help cleaned it, grinded it, and made it into gefilte fish! For dessert, we looked forward to compote, made with cooked homemade peaches and apples, and always plenty of cakes and cookies from the kosher bakery or our home kitchen.

On Shabbos, we invited many refined, well-groomed and elegant guests to our table. We served the food, always, on the finest china, a famous brand, "Carlesbad" from Czechoslovakia. We also welcomed many people who were not well to do, who came from out-of-town, collecting *tzedekah.* All of us children would sit on one side of the table, and the yeshiva *bochorim* and guests would sit on the other side. My father would sit at the head of the table. There was never an empty chair at our table. When my father went to shul, he would keep inviting guests until our table was full!

My parents did not *daven* in the very large, main synagogue in the city (which is still standing and used today as a concert hall). Although it was for religious Jews, it was more modern than the smaller *shteible* where my father *davened.* It wasn't customary for single girls to

go to synagogue, so my sisters and I would *daven* at home, but then we'd walk 4-5 blocks to the synagogue, to visit with my parents while they were *davening*!

To really know the kind of man Papa was, you had to look at the religious commitments he kept every day. Father got up every morning at 4 A.M., said all the *tehillim*, then went to the mikvah every morning (including before Shabbos). After immersing in the mikvah, he *davened* with the morning minyan, all before arriving at his business at 9 A.M. Papa *davened Mincha* and *Ma'ariv* every night; when I think of Papa, I always remember him sitting at the table late into the night with a Gemara open in front of him.

Another memory brings tears to my eyes when I think about my Papa. Later on, in America, Yitzchok and I were quite successful in the life insurance business. I cannot tell you how many times a customer would come to me and say these words: 'Oh, you are Rubin's daughter? I knew your father, and I will buy from you because you are a Rubin. If you are your father's daughter, I know that I can trust you!'

We were a close-knit family and it wasn't like it is today, with families not sitting down to a meal together unless it's Shabbos. In our home, we had lunch every day together with the family. The business was closed from 12 - 2, and we came home from school for the main meal of the day, which was at noontime. It was usually fleishig, cooked fresh every day, and served on a tablecloth

on plain white china. We didn't have refrigerators, so we didn't keep over food for the next day. Any leftover food went to feed the poor. In the evening after school, between 6-7 P.M., we would usually eat much lighter meals, often dairy, such as cheese, bread, butter, and jam. Still, we always ate together, even if it wasn't as fancy. (Breakfast was usually eggs, cheese, milk, cooked farina, tomatoes, green peppers, and radishes, before leaving for school and work).

One of my fondest memories is of our evenings as a family after school. We lived across the street from a gigantic and extraordinarily beautiful park, named *Park Masaryk*. (Named after the President of our country). It had a big monument and it was jammed full with flowers. Every evening the family, which included my mother's three brothers and their families (coincidently, they also had seven children), got together at the park. My father always said, 'for what do we need to go on vacation? We have the park!'

In the summertime, my mother would often go away to the spa for 4 weeks, which was very expensive, but a common activity for well-to-do women in our community. We did just fine when Mama went away because Papa never left, our hired help took care of us, and we had the park to play in! There was a lot of music in the park as well. I tried learning how to play piano as a child but I didn't have the patience for it. Still, we enjoyed listening to the musicians who played in the park on springtime evenings. We also took good advantage of being within

walking distance of the forest, and the river, and we spent many hours in the spring and fall playing outside and enjoying the beautiful nature in our midst.

We couldn't play in the park all year of course, because the weather in our town was bitter cold from November through March. We often experienced below-zero cold, with everything freezing and a lot of snow and ice. January and February were so difficult, when I would complain - because I terribly hated the cold (and still do!), my mother would say, 'soon, it will be March, don't worry!' Spring was so beautiful in Ungvar, with the stunning trees and garden, the green grass, shining sun, birds chirping, and the incredible park across the street, we would yearn for it all winter long.

Many of our friends would make the most of the winter by ice-skating for fun. I didn't ice skate but it was a very big sport, since we had so much snow and ice. In fact, the weather got so cold, the ice would become very thick and strong, and school children would ice skate to school, taking short cuts to make the walk much shorter. Papa was always afraid that the ice could melt, so he did not permit us to ice skate. He was a cautious man, not even allowing us to swim in the summertime, especially after a young boy drowned and the whole city mourned. He was especially overprotective, wanting to prevent any accident or injury that was possible. He finally softened and allowed my sisters and me to walk to the river and put our feet into the shallow water!

My memories of the *Yomim Tovim* in my childhood home are very precious to me. Hundreds of Jewish boys visiting during the High Holidays needed to be fed and cared for. Our family and the Sterns – the three brothers of my mother, were famous for being open houses in town – especially our house. My mother was very unusual, because it wasn't just that our house was open – the guests were all fed the very best chicken and beef as well! I have a clear memory from my youth that tells you who my mother was. The Jewish girl who worked for us in the kitchen was given instructions: For every animal you cook for our family's dinner, you must cut off one quarter of the meat and designate it to feed the poor and any guests who arrive.

All my life, I carry with me these beautiful memories of our home being like Abraham with his tent open on all its sides, not just awaiting guests, but also searching them out. That was Mama and Papa. The *Yomim Tovim* were not just delicious, holy times for our family to *daven* and eat together, but also, they were opportunities to do mitzvot, and we sure did! Can you believe this – our home was furnished with lovely Persian rugs in all of the rooms – but one. That room, my father left the floor bare. Why is that? Because he was worried that there might be an instant that we would be uncomfortable inviting in a poor Jew with dirty feet, so to be sure that this could never happen, he left one of our rooms bare on the floor!

Sukkos started at least four weeks before the holiday.

We used the summer kitchen as a *sukkah*, and weeks before, we made our own decoration pieces. We made the body of a bird by blowing out the egg yolk from inside of raw eggs, and saving the shells. We made an airplane from paper and wood and that was in the *sukkah* when you opened the door. It said *Baruch Haba* (welcome). Some years, it was very cold in the *sukkah*, and it was customary for the very religious Jews to sleep in the *sukkah*, a very big mitzvah. I remember so well my dear mother arguing with my father not to sleep in the *sukkah* when the weather was too cold, so that he wouldn't catch sick! The *sukkah* was big enough to eat all our meals there, something like 16 x 16; however, the ladies were not obligated to eat in the *sukkah*. We still did, but the ladies sat on the side where the *sukkah* was not fully covered in accordance with *halachah*. Although it was often icy cold outside, it was always warm in our *sukkah*, because we had the luxury of an oven in the *sukkah* that even kept a kettle of water hot for tea!

Come Chanukah, we would gather around one large silver menorah with olive oil and sing Chanukah songs with my father. This was always followed by delicious meat suppers with chicken soup and *knedeilach*, beef, goose, potato *latkes*, string beans, many side dishes, and dessert. Gifts were not the focus, although my mother would get all of us a souvenir or a small gift, often the same one. In fact, I remember one year when Mama bought all of us, and all of the tenants, a white apron, and we all wore them on the same day!

Do you know what I loved most about Chanukah? Not the special cakes, or the gifts, or the menorah. I loved Chanukah and looked forward to it all year, because even though Papa was such a busy businessman, on Chanukah, he would make the time to sit on the floor with us and play dreidel and the card game 21. Can I tell you – it was like the minister of America was playing with us! What a big joy for us this was.

Purim was very highly celebrated in my town. Business was very good of course for whisky and wine. We loved dressing up in homemade costumes and I so clearly remember, as a young child, dressing as a man, in my brother's clothing. When I entered the room, I went straight to my mother and picked up her hand to kiss it. She pretended that I was really a man and said, 'No, I am a woman and you are a man. I can't kiss you!' Oh, what fun we had.

Pesach, in many ways, was a joyous time as well, especially because it was the only time during the entire year that we saw my older sister, Perl Friedman and her husband and three children from Romania. We would be counting down the weeks and months before her visit; we missed her so very much. Even though Pesach was a happy time, you can't imagine how busy we were. People now complain about how much work preparing for Pesach is, but really, they have no idea!

Pesach was very hectic for different reasons. Our business was liquor and wine, so preparing for the

business was a very big endeavor! My parents were so busy with the business, and on top of that, they had to prepare the house. We had plenty of help but it had to be guarded by my parents. My parents were very careful about making sure that *chometz* was removed from the home and the business. My father would stay up most of the night for many nights to supervise the help covering up all the bottles and merchandise in the business. Regarding the house, the house was painted white, and it was painted brand new, inside and outside, for Pesach every year. Can you imagine how much work that was? Also, we had Persian carpets on the floor, and we didn't have vacuum cleaners at that time, so we had to schlep the heavy carpets outside where we would hit them with a special tool you don't see anymore, to remove the dust. In the house, my parents were very strict orthodox, so everything had to be checked thoroughly, including all of the seforim – of which, thankfully there were many hundreds! My father did this big job outside on a big table.

The food was always planned to be a special feast for the *Sedarim*. We had a lot of poor people at our *Seder* from town and of course the entire family, including my married sisters and their families. We also prepared packages for the poor people in town that contained eggs, and matzos, and so forth to help them keep Pesach during the week. My father of course conducted the *Sedarim* and we never finished before 2 A.M. The most beautiful dishes, silver and china were brought out for

this special occasion. My sisters and I were always very excited because every Pesach, we received new clothing, from shoes to hat pin - everything! Our home was filled with poor people all week long, because many poor Jews came to town collecting *tzedekah*, and they didn't have any place to eat or to sleep, so they would stay with us in a separate part of the house that my parents prepared.

As a child I attended public school for 10 years. I was fluent in German and Czech, which I spoke in school and in the home, and then I also spoke Yiddish in the house on Shabbos. (Papa insisted on only Yiddish on Shabbos!) Later on in my life I would also learn Hungarian and English. I also took business classes, and private classes such as sewing, and believe it or not, an etiquette class on how to properly use a knife and fork! I learned how to sew because my mother said, 'you never know what the future brings; it's good to know how to sew a button back on if it falls off!' I did manage to sew a beautiful dress for my mother, and I have a picture of her in this dress. I never made any clothing after that, but all my life I have relied on my sewing abilities for repairs on my clothing and that of my children.

We did not wear a uniform for school. I always wore a skirt and blouse, (primarily white, as is my preference to this day), and I could wear ¾ length over my elbow, made to order. On Shabbos we wore very elegant suits and white shoes, and during the week I wore colored shoes. For some reason we would never wear black shoes, and I remember one of my favorite shoes was a pair of

red shoes. We were always dressed very well, and even now, a neighbor once remarked: 'Mrs. Schonkopf, all these years, I've never seen you even take out the garbage without wearing a hat!' This is true, and it comes from my upbringing, which has always been with me. I still never use paper plates or go out in public dressed in a *shmatta!* High-class, educated people surrounded me, in fact - even, my city was known as elegant and classy! The buildings were modern and beautiful, with escalators in all of the government places.

I did not attend a religious Jewish school, as there was not any such thing available for my sisters and me. But we learned a great deal at home, from Papa and Mama, from private tutors, and from one another. *Yiddishkeit* infused every inch of our home and every moment of our lives. It isn't like it is today, where we have to insulate our children from the secular world, and dedicate half of their day to learning Hebrew and *halachah* so they will have a stronger chance of growing up frum and raising Orthodox children. When I was growing up, it would never have occurred to me to marry outside of the faith, to not live a religious Jewish life as inspired by my Papa and Mama. I had no desire to relax their standards one iota. For this, I did not need to go to religious school - my parents drilled it into me so solidly!

Although there were thousands of Jews in my city, we were not in a neighborhood where only Jews lived. Many of our neighbors were goyim and for that reason,

Papa was particularly concerned about us making a *Kiddush* Hashem and not showing off and incurring envy or jealousy. The automobile was just becoming popular at this time, and although we could easily have afforded one, Papa would never buy one. My brother was away at yeshiva in Vienna, and women didn't drive, so for what did he need it? He never even learned how to drive. Instead, he walked wherever he had to go, and if this wasn't possible, then hired himself a driver.

There was one large cemetery for the Jews in Ungvar. My mother's brother, my uncle, died at the age of 65 and he was buried there. Also, we are told that my grandmother, my mother's mother, Liba Esther Trietel, was buried there, although we have never found her gravestone.

Before the War, everything in our family and community life was very sunny and happy. The town of Ungvar was part of Austria-Hungary until 1920, when it passed to Czechoslovakia. Under the governing of the Czech people, before the country was taken over by the Hungarians in 1938, we did not experience any real anti-Semitism and the non-Jews and the Jews lived comfortably with one another. My father employed many goyim in his business, and we enjoyed pleasant relationships with all our neighbors. From 1938 - 1945, when Ungvar was under Hungarian control (before passing to the Russians), everything changed for the Jews in Ungvar.

I am very blessed to still have with me the glorious memories of my youth. Although we were about to

enter many dark years, and that pain has always been with me to a certain extent, I attempted to bring the sunshine of my youth and my beloved childhood home into my marriage to dear Yitzchok, A"H, and the life of Asher, my grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. I believe I succeeded.



Esther with her mother on vacation, before the war.



Esther on her wedding day with her father, Yankel Rubin. Usually found smiling and cheerful, this photo captures him in a serious moment.



Right to Left. Esther, Shmulku Friedman and his wife, Esther's sister, Piri. In the photo one can see the fur coats mentioned in the book that Papa forbid wearing in public.



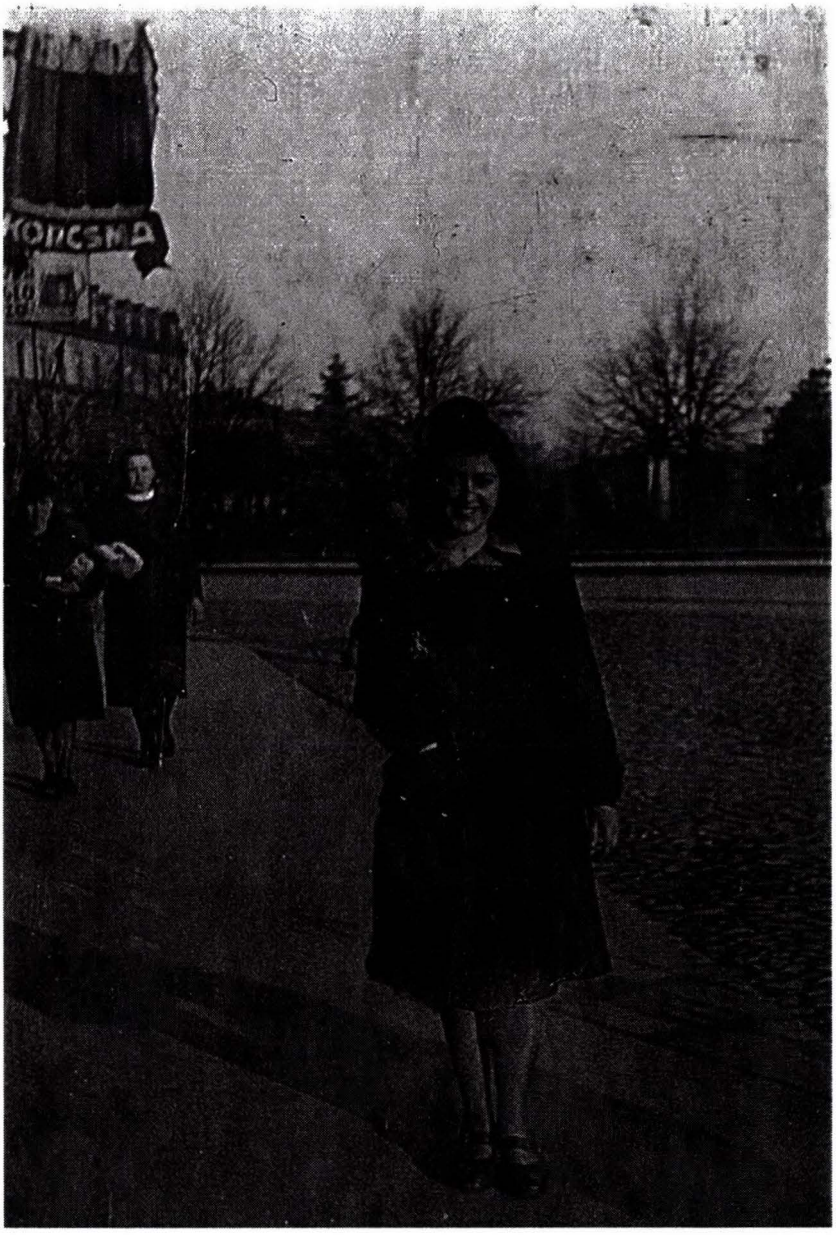
Yitzchok and Esther while engaged, 1941.



This photo was taken in the sukkah mentioned in the book that was used as a kitchen during the year. While engaged to Chani, Hershi Deutsch bought pocketbooks and gave them to the girls in the family.

Right to left – Esther, Shifra, Chani, and Devora is at the far left.

Other two girls not identified.



Esther's sister, Shifra, at the park in Ungvar, seen wearing an apron that was used in the business which is close by.



Usher Yishaya, Esther's only brother before the war.



Esther before the war at a summer vacation resort.



Esther's sister, Chanie at Bardiov, a summer resort town.



Rafuel and Ralie Stern, Esther's uncle, her mother's brother. They immigrated to Israel on the last boat before the war.



Esther's mother is second from right, wearing the dress made by Esther as described in the book. To the left is her sister, Devorah Lorber and Devorah's husband Moshe with their daughter Leitchu. To the far left is Libu Berkowitz, her first cousin. The older child is Esther's sister, Shifra. Others in the photo are unnamed.



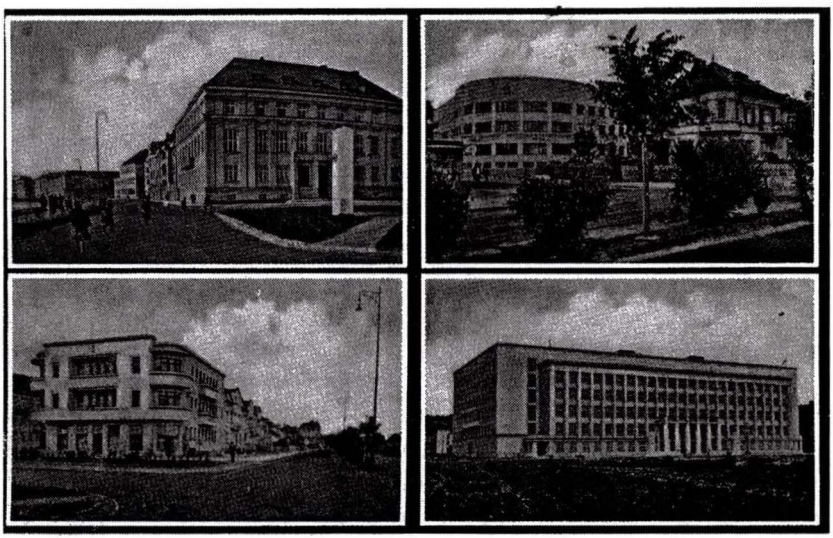
Wedding of Libu and Tibor Berkowitz. Libu is the daughter of Esther's uncle, Rafuel Stern, featured in previous photograph. Her mother, Ralie is to the right. Her mother-in-law is to the left. Esther is seen in the back row to the left wearing white. Her mother is seen below her wearing a hat, partially concealed by another hat.



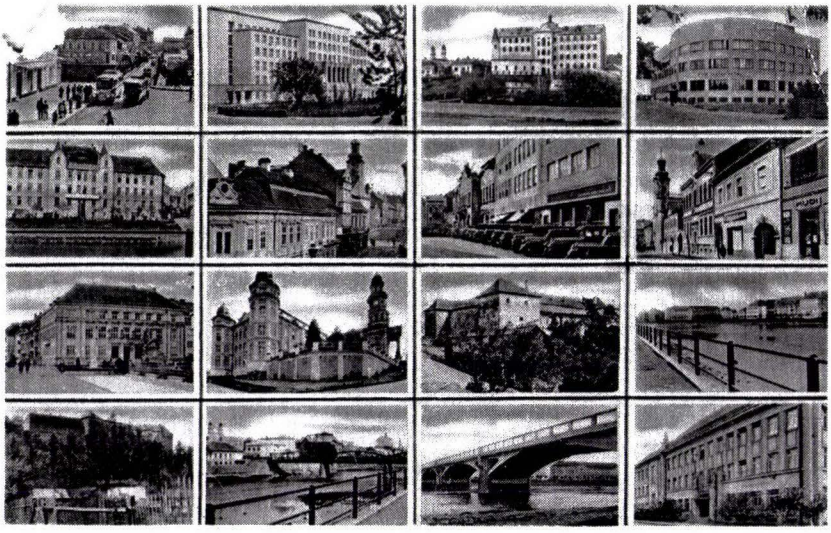
Wedding of Chanie and Hershi Deutsch. Number 12 on bottom row, is daughter of Litchu Zahler, Gitel Rubin's sister. Number 1 is Shifra (about 18 years old), to the left (sitting) is wife of Moshe Stern, her aunt. Above her with white hat is Matel Rubin, daughter of Libush Rubin. Number 28 is Hershi's sister, Esther. Above the Chasson is Rachel Schonkopf, the Chasson's aunt, and Esther's future mother-in-law. To his right is his mother. To the kallah's left is her mother. Number 6 is Devorah, to the left with the white hat is wife of Yehezkel Shonkopf, Sheindel, and between them is Beru Stern (son of Moshe Stern). Number 8 and 9 are Hershi's sisters, and above them is a brother. Number 11 is Etu Schonkopf, Yitzchok's niece, and number 10 is Esther, the future Mrs. Schonkopf.



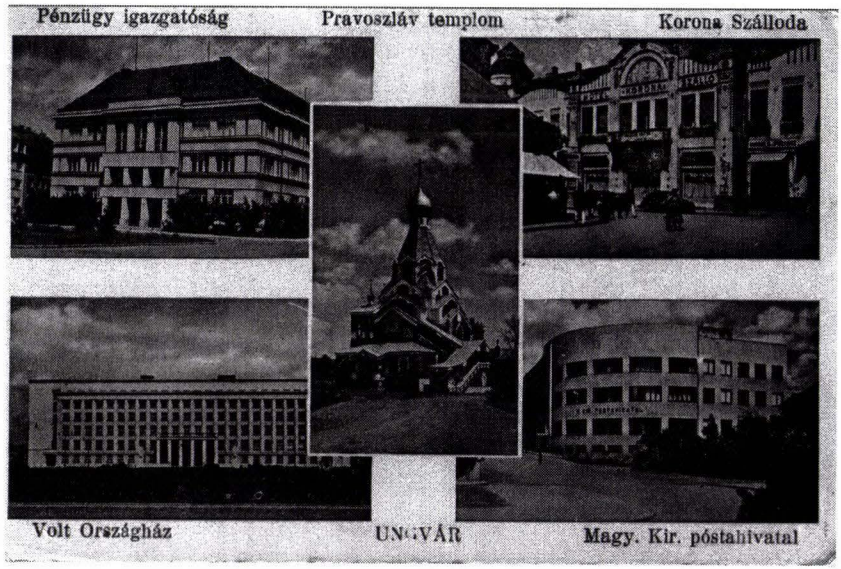
Bashi (Goldbaum), daughter of Chanie Deutsch in the ghetto of Munkatch during the war.



Ungvar postcard.



Postcard from Ungvar.



Ungvar postcard.

Chapter Two

At the time of this writing, in 2009, I have been widowed from my beloved Yitzchok of blessed memory for thirteen years. We celebrated our 50th wedding anniversary with a beautiful gathering of forty close friends and family in a Miami hotel in 1992, and he was *niftar* in January of 1996, the 17th of *Teves*, after 54 heavenly years of marriage.

Many people presume that the hardest experience of my long life was being imprisoned in Auschwitz, and enduring the destruction of my family by the Nazis. Certainly these tragedies were unbearable, and they still cause me much pain today. I must tell you, however, that the love between my husband and I was so beautiful, the *nisayon* of widowhood has actually been my greatest challenge in life.

The *Ribono Shel Olam* has blessed me with our son, Asher and many grandchildren and great grandchildren who take such good care of me; all make sure that I am not alone. This, I appreciate very much. Even so, the loneliness that I feel, living the last years of my life without my husband and life partner is so pervasive and all encompassing, no words can describe it. This is not a pain that diminishes in time, but really, I feel

it more and more each day. It says in the perek, 'you can't judge anyone unless you are in the same boat'. I remember once meeting a woman in the hospital, when my husband was ailing, who wanted to take her husband home, as sick as he was. I asked her why. She said, 'I want to take him home, but they don't want me to. He is deaf, he doesn't eat, but at least I have two eyes in the house with me.' I didn't understand it then. I understand it now. What I would give, for even one more day with my beloved, Yitzchok!

In this memoir, I will try to tell you of my marriage to Yitzchok and how incredibly close we were in our life together. From the miraculous way that Hashem reunited us after the war, it is clear that we were intended for one another. But first, before we get to that part of the story, I will allow myself the joy of revisiting our first days together, when Hashem placed Yitzchok into my life. Who could imagine, from those earlier moments, where our life journey would take us!

I first met Yitzchok at the wedding of my sister, Chana Lieba to Ahron Tsvi Deutsch, July 17, 1939, which took place in a hall in Uzhorod, across the street from my Uncle, Mr. Stern. In this memoir, I have provided a picture of the reception in the garden of his house where we took a lovely picture that I'm happy to tell you includes my wonderful Mother, A"H. I am so very fortunate to have these pictures; most survivors do not have any photographs from which to remember the beautiful faces of their family whom they lost. This day, and this photograph, is very special to me in my memories.

Yitzchok is first cousins with my brother-in-law, Mr. Deutsch, and he was invited to the wedding. Actually, he thought he was coming to the wedding to be introduced to my cousin, another girl named Chana. Chana's mother was niftar and Papa took an interest in helping her find a *shidduch*. Papa said, 'I hear there is this nice man, Schonkopf, coming to the wedding, and I will introduce you.' Actually, isn't this funny? He suggested that I make the introductions! Well, when Yitzchok came to the wedding, I tried my best to do what Papa wanted of me, but Yitzchok didn't care for Chana; instead, he followed me! That was not the plan that Papa, or I, had in mind, but we make plans and G-d laughs!

Yitzchok was very good looking and an unusually well-dressed young man, and I must admit I went for that. I was flattered by his interest. Yitzchok was about 26 years old, and considered an old boy for still being single. It was time for him to get married – and he set his sights on me! He told his mother, while still at the wedding, 'I like this girl, Esther, how do I proceed?' His mother approached me at the wedding reception and said, 'My son is very choosy. No one is ever good enough for him. But he met you, and he likes you. Are you interested?' I didn't know what to say or do. I was very surprised! I said, 'my sister is just getting married, so it's not right that I should be thinking of getting married. It's her turn, not mine!'

The next day my husband's brother, Heskel, spoke to my parents at the *sheva brachos*. Again, he told my parents that Yitzchok was interested in me, and again, I repeated

that I was not ready for thinking of getting married yet. We let the whole matter drop, and I mostly forgot all about Mr. Schonkopf!

But thankfully, he did not forget about me.

A few months later, the Hungarians were starting to make our lives difficult. We had a license for selling whiskey and wine and in order to keep the special license for that, we had to prove that my grandfather was a 'good Hungarian guy', so that we could stay in business. We needed to get a piece of paper that said: 'Yosef Rubin fought in the army for the Hungarians' and Papa very hesitantly sent me by train about three hours away to secure this piece of paper. I went with my friend, Adel Friedman, also from Uzhorod, who survived the war and is living in Israel now.

Yitzchok had a sister who lived in the town where I got my papers and who do I find sitting in the train station when we got there but Yitzchok, reading a *sefer*! (That always impressed me, that he was reading a *sefer*!) The story is even funnier than that. My friend, Adel, was the first to spot him, and she says to me, 'hey, look at that handsome man sitting over there, so I look, and I can't believe it – I say to her, I know that guy!' So I went over to him and said, 'How are you, Mr. Schonkopf?' He looked up and smiled and put his hand immediately to his face, saying, 'Nice to see you! Had I known I was going to see you today, I would have shaved! I didn't shave because I took my sister and her children some place.' I laughed

and said, 'Oh, don't worry about it!' I told him why I was there, and I went to the building to take care of the paperwork for my grandfather.

Well, Yitzchok wasn't going to let go of me once he'd found me again! He rode the train back to my town with my friend and me.

The story gets even more amazing. Not only was it a miracle that I ran into Yitzchok when I did, since Papa rarely let me leave Uzhorod, but the story continues in only a way that the *Ribono shel Olam* could plan! Although Yitzchok had been so interested in me, when I did not respond in kind, he kept looking for the right woman to marry, and that very day, he had a date planned with a family who had a beautiful, single daughter in the town of Ujhel, a town near Uzhorod. On the way back on the train with me, he tells me that he really wants to marry me, but that it's not fair to the girl who has been looking forward to the date, to cancel on her, so he plans to keep the date with her. He says to me: 'It looks like something serious is coming up between you and me, because I had no intention to visit my sister, and then it just happened suddenly and I ran into you, and now I have plans to meet this girl, but I'm not interested anymore, because I have found you!' He told me that he would keep the date with the girl, and he got off of the train when we got to her town, but he told me when he left that he had no expectations that anything would come of it, and that he would be in touch with me very soon.

It impressed me that Yitzchok was a man of his word and that he was not going to break the date with this girl, just so that her feelings would not be hurt. I was, I must admit, starting to warm up to the idea of marrying Yitzchok! But I was still very frightened. I came home and told the episode to my parents. Mama joked with Papa, 'see, you let her out of the house and she comes home with a proposal! I told you not to send her on the train!' Still, I think they were very happy about the idea of me marrying Yitzchok, even if I didn't feel ready for it. They liked him very much.

A few weeks later, Yitzchok came to my house to finalize the *shidduch* with his parents, Aron Wolf Schonkopf and Rachel (Rosa). When I saw that he had arrived with his parents, I knew this was serious and that they were planning to arrange the *shidduch*. I panicked and begged my parents not to agree. I was young, and I said, 'I know that Yitzchok wants to get married, but I'm not ready. Please don't let them squeeze you.' So even though he came with his parents, and even though my parents liked Yitzchok and would have accepted this *shidduch*, they loved and respected me, and my parents did not agree to the marriage. Greatly disappointed, Yitzchok and his parents left. Fortunately for me, Yitzchok knew what he wanted – me! – and only me – and he wasn't going to give up. (I saw this in his nature all of our life together – when he decides that he wants something, and puts his mind to it, there is no stopping him!)

A few days later, Yitzchok visited me again and we

had dinner together in the house and he asked to speak to me privately. He begged me to marry him and this time, I had *rachmanos* on him and I couldn't say no. He approached me so elegantly and with such feeling, and I was touched. I agreed to get engaged.

As impressed as I was by Yitzchok, and as eager as I was to be his wife, I wasn't sure I was making the right decision. I was young, 20 ½, and the war had started and they were collecting the young men to go to labor camps. Whomever went to these camps, they never came back. I did not want to be a young widow. Papa agreed to the *shidduch*, but he too did not want to see me widowed, so for a full year we were engaged, because if Yitzchok wasn't a married man, they wouldn't send him away to the labor camps. Our long engagement was very unusual of course, because Orthodox couples did not stay engaged for such a long time; usually they were married very quickly after engagement. Finally, after so many months, Yitzchok was getting impatient; he was worried that he would lose me, and his parents were fretting about him not being married, and everyone decided that enough with the waiting, we must get married.

Yitzchok and I were married in a civil wedding ceremony on May 13, 1941, in Munkacevo, the town of my husband's birth. The ceremony took place in the town hall, with only Papa and two friends of Papa's present. It was not legal according to Jewish law to live together as an Orthodox Jewish couple, because we hadn't completed a Jewish wedding, so we continued to live apart, and were

not living a life as a married couple in any respect. This was very upsetting to both of us, but you must remember, everything in our life then was not normal, because we could feel the beginnings of the war, and we were very frightened, even though we didn't have even the slightest idea how bad it was going to be.

Finally, on January 27, 1942, we had a Jewish wedding for the public and all of our friends and family were there. In fact, Papa even invited the goyim he worked with – his employees and his customers – so it was a very big wedding. There was something very special about my wedding day that tells you once again about the special nature of my father.

My wedding ceremony was held in a huge elegant building in the city. This building was normally used as a place to provide poor people with meals. My father was the first person to rent this building for a wedding; no one ever did this before him. My father paid for the entire wedding himself, with no help from Yitzkok's family. Not only that, but he said that he would not have my wedding ceremony until a very poor girl was also married in the wedding hall on the same day, with her ceremony before mine, and he would pay for her wedding as well! So there we were, calling everyone whom we sent invitations to and telling them that my wedding would be changed to 4 P.M. following the other girl's wedding ceremony. I wonder sometimes, if perhaps this incredible kindness of my father is why Hashem allowed me to survive.

Typical of the times, after we were legally married according to Jewish law, once we could live as husband and wife, we moved into my parents' house and lived with them.

Our beautiful son, Asher, was born on May 1, 1943, a little more than a year later. My thoughts about his birth always bring me to tears, first, because I am so grateful that Hashem granted us our son, and second, because Yitzchok was not present for Asher's birth or his bris.

At the time of my pregnancy, they were starting to send the husbands out of town to the labor camps. If you recall, that is why we postponed our marriage for so long. We were anxious to save Yitzchok from this fate. My husband made a connection with someone who was able to fabricate paperwork so that Yitzchok could be designated a "crazy person" and be jailed in a mental hospital. (You see, at that time, married men who were in the mental hospital were not forced to go to the labor camps.) We had no choice but to send Yitzchok away to this terrible place in Budapest. I remember that he was there for many of the months of my pregnancy, and through Pesach, because we went through such a tumult to get matzoh to him in this jail so that he could observe the Pesach laws!

So, now you see, Asher's birth was very frightening for me because my husband was not with me because of the war. Yitzchok was not at his bris, either, which always makes me cry when I think about it. But at least I had

my very special parents there to care for me. Fortunately, Yitzchok returned from Budapest a few months after Asher's birth, and oh, what a happy reunion that was! I had no idea then, that this reunion and the joy we felt, would pale in comparison to the reunion we experienced after being separated from the war. But I am jumping ahead of myself.

I would like to stay here only with the happy memories of my marriage to Yitzchok - of what a very special, *adel* person he was - so refined, elegant, good-natured, and kind. I want to tell you only of our happy years together, of how we built up a life insurance business, as partners, that was very successful, and the reputation we had for being trustworthy, good people. I want to reminisce about how thoughtful Yitzchok was, never a forgotten birthday or anniversary or mother's day. (Even one year, when Asher was in Israel, he gave me two cards – one from him, and one he bought and told me it was from Asher!) He was the man who opened a door for a lady, and he made me feel lucky every day to be his wife. He was a prince, and that made me, his princess.

These memories are happy ones, and as I told you before, widowhood being so painful for me, I desire that I could just stay with these joyful memories and none else. Oh, I wish that I didn't have to tell you what was to follow, and how the terror of the war almost ripped Yitzchok, Asher, and me apart, and how it did steal from me my parents and most of my siblings and nieces and nephews.

You know the happy ending - that Yitzchok and Asher and I were reunited. I will get to that miraculous story shortly. First, I must leave these happy memories of our early dating and marriage, to tell you when the trauma first began - when Asher was only 11 months old, and we were forced to give him up - temporarily- and to go into hiding. For the next several chapters of this memoir, I regret, I will have to revisit a journey that still brings me to tears whenever I think of it. Telling over this part of my life story also reminds me, once again, that it is an astonishing miracle that I am alive to tell it to you. *Baruch Hashem!*

Chapter Three

As I have described to you, my early life in Uzhorod was truly joyful and blessed. The Czech people were very, very kind and easy-going, and they were very cultural and education-minded. We did not experience anti-Semitism by them.

It was not until 1938, when I was eighteen years old, that the Hungarians occupied parts of Czechoslovakia and we started to feel the impact of the war. The occupation drastically changed our town, economically and socially.

First, the money was devalued. So then people needed a lot more money just to buy a single liter of whiskey from my father's business and they didn't have it, so his business suffered terribly. There was much less entertainment and performances in town because no one could buy a theatre ticket anymore either. In Uzhorod, there were wonderful theatres, and that all turned to zero. The Czechoslovakian element was completely different in life-style, culture and education, than the Hungarian life-style, and Uzhorod was no longer the city of my youth.

Even so, life went on as we made our best effort to adjust, and we were completely oblivious to what lay ahead. As I mentioned, Yitzchok and I endured certain

hardships, such as our prolonged engagement, and Yitzchok's absence from Asher's birth, in order to avoid Yitzchok being sent away to the labor camps. Perhaps it is because our life became so terrible starting in 1944, that when I look back on the years from 1938-1944, it seems relatively okay. Perhaps also, it is because I was happy as a new bride, and a new mother to Asher, and these are the memories I prefer to think about.

After our wedding, my husband built a beautiful house for us in Munkacevo, and we lived there for a short while. I didn't like it there, as the standard of living was not as cultural and elegant as I was accustomed to, and I requested of Yitzchok that we return to Uzhorod, to live with my parents and he honored my wishes.

As difficult as all these adjustments were, it paled in comparison with what would come next. In 1944, not long after Asher's birth in the spring of 1943, the Germans occupied Czechoslovakia. Soon the rules of the Germans took effect, and believe me, the adjustment to Hungarian occupation was nothing compared to what happened when the Germans took control of our city. Overnight, the Nazis took away all Jewish businesses, and my father's business was shut down because he no longer had a license to operate his distillery. Nazis posted signs on the street that Jews must be off the streets after 5 P.M., and that ghettos for the Jews were ordered. Meanwhile, we were forced to wear yellow Jewish stars on our clothing when on the street. We had less than a week to prepare to either go to the ghetto as ordered or to go into hiding.

Life was bearable because we still had food, and each other. But soon after the Nazi occupation our family was torn apart.

At first, the Germans picked up the teenage girls and boys and sent them off to an unknown place. The understanding was that they went to a labor camp to work. My father went to speak to the head of the Germans and he begged them to have patience with him and to allow my sisters to stay with us for a short while. We were hoping that in the meantime, the Russians would occupy us and the war would end. These men knew and respected my father, and they listened to him and we are able to keep my younger sisters from being sent away, at least in the beginning.

In my city, the Germans formed two ghettos. The larger one was established in a very large place called "Brick Factory". The second, smaller one was called "Gluck". First they captured Jews from the suburbs, and then the residents from Uzhorod.

We had an uncle by the name of Rafael Stern, my mother's older brother. His house was directly across the street from ours in Uzhorod. My uncle was the *Rosh Hakahol*, the President of the Jewish community. Due to his warm personality, he was very popular with the Jews and Gentiles. He often provided "Protectzia" (favors) for the Jewish people who were in trouble. (He also helped some residents acquire a license for a liquor store and other concerns that required the permission of the town officials.)

Fortunately for our family, one of my father's personal friends was the Hungarian Chief of the Police. When the Jewish people were forced to enter the ghetto, the Hungarians requisitioned their houses to be occupied "temporarily" by the Hungarian soldiers or people. Never forget that the Jewish people were promised that the requisition would be only temporary! Both of the houses we owned are still standing there, occupied by others, but I haven't had the willingness to go through the emotional pain of returning to Uzhorod to reclaim what is legally ours.

The house of my uncle Rafael Stern was a two-story villa with a business on the main floor. Even though my uncle and my father were so esteemed by the goyim, nevertheless, they requisitioned my uncle's house as well. However, because my father and the Chief of Police were close friends, he gave permission to my father to convert the top attic of my uncle Stern's home into a bunker for Jewish families to hide in, so that they could avoid entering into the Ghetto. (Remember, we thought this horror was going to be over in a week!)

My parents and my two younger sisters, Shifra Zlata (or Zarlota as she was called), age 19, and Dvora Frimet (or Deborah), age 18, were still home with us and we had no other choice than to hide in the attic to avoid going to the ghetto. There was no time for preparation! We didn't know when this would end, but we hoped and prayed for the Russian occupation. We ran out of our homes in the outfits we were wearing, taking nothing with us but some

prayer books. This was a matter of life and death, so we didn't concentrate on the possessions we were leaving behind, or what it was like for a family as elegant and well-dressed as ours to be wearing the same clothing for a week, or as it turned out, for close to three weeks! We couldn't have known that when we left our homes, and all that was in them, it was the last we would ever see of everything we owned and treasured.

My sister, Chana Liebe and her husband, Aaron Hersh Deutsch and their 3-week-old little baby girl (Bashi) traveled to Munkacs, Romania with a gentile neighbor who offered assistance a couple of days before we left for the bunker. Asher and Bashi were the only children in our family to survive this tragedy. Both of their stories are miraculous.

Before Yitzchok and I could move into the attic bunker with my parents, my husband and I had a terrible problem we had to solve. Our 11-month old son, Asher, was a normal baby, and so he cried from time to time. Under the circumstances, we couldn't take the chance that his cries would give away the hiding place. Although there would be many children hiding in the bunker with our family, none were babies, and it was felt that the other children and teenagers could be forced to control their noise, but we could not expect the same of a young baby.

My dear father, A"H, is responsible, with Hashem's help, for Asher's life being saved. Papa was well known

as a businessman and was respected by all. He came up with a solution to my terrible problem. He instructed me to bring Asher to a lady pediatrician in our town, Dr. Brastiko, a goy, and to ask her to care for our baby boy. We were sure at the time that this would be only for a very short while, because the Russians were only a few miles away. Surely, when they entered Uzhorod we would be freed. That was the thought. . .

I will never forget this date. It was 4 P.M. April 19, 1944 when my family decided that we must go into the bunker to hide. Only my husband, Yitzchok and I were left with the baby at home. Remember that no Jew could be on the street after 5 P.M. For the last couple of weeks all the Jews were wearing yellow stars to identify our religion. Anyone caught on the streets after 5 P.M. could, G-d forbid, be captured and murdered. We were terrified. Yitzchok and I agreed to the plan that my father suggested. I was despondent about having to give up my baby, even if I thought it was only for a few days.

Wearing the yellow star, I ran with Asher in the carriage to Doctor Brastiko, whose office was four blocks away. Thankfully, she was there, and she was not busy with patients. I gave her a message from Papa asking her to care for our baby until our return. I told Dr. Brastiko that Papa blessed her that she would always be saved from all her troubles because she was doing this incredible favor for us. We owned two homes at that time, and I told her that Papa said that if she did this favor for us, both houses would be hers. She agreed to take Asher but she

insisted that she was doing it because of the reverence she felt for my father, and not for any material reward.

There was no time for a long conversation. I was sobbing, practically hysterical, but I knew Papa was right and we needed to protect Asher and all of us in hiding. I handed Asher to the doctor, and for a long time afterwards I couldn't even speak because of the trauma of it. When I left Dr. Brastiko's office I took off the yellow star, as it was after 5 P.M. when I left and I was frightened that they would capture me. I ran the four blocks to the bunker. Yitzchok was waiting for me in the attic and he tried to comfort me, but it was very difficult. I was distraught.

I shared the hiding place with Yitzchok, my dear parents and two sisters, Shifra Zlata and Dvora Frimet. Also there were my Uncle Refael Stern's sons, Chezkel and Moishe with their wives and 7 or 8 teenage children, their sister Libu[1] (Edith) Berkowitz, and our cousin Lorber from Kosica (Kashau) with 2 teenage daughters, my mother's cousin from Poland, and the greatly esteemed, Likever Rebbetzin. (My Uncle Rafael Stern, through Protectzia, had brought her from Poland to Uzhorod). Uncle Rafael and Aunt Reaile Stern were not in the bunker with us. They emigrated to Israel a few weeks before April, 1944. They had three married

1 *Libu's* husband left for his native Budapest. Libu escaped from the Bunker dressed as a nun with a big Tzelem on her neck. Even though she was well disguised, they got hold of her on the train. They recognized that her "Identification" was false papers, and she was sent off to Auschwitz. She luckily survived and returned home. I shall get back to her, as in the Concentration Camp she was together with my 2 younger sisters Shifra Zlata and Deborah, and that is why I know her story to tell.

children who had also emigrated to Israel a few years before them.

The situation in the Bunker was incredibly difficult. We were staying in the attic, which was a "Magazine" (warehouse). Margarine was stored there, as well as a kind of cracker, which had been manufactured by a cousin of ours named Lorber, originally from Kosica. Our nourishment consisted mainly of crackers and margarine, but we ran short on that and we were very hungry. Honestly though, although we were all hungry, we were so worried, and everyone was crying so much, hunger was the least of our problems and not very much on our minds. I did not have any appetite because I was so upset about being separated from Asher. I cried and worried all day long. My Papa spent the entire day saying tehillim and reassuring us, as we were quite hysterical not knowing if we were going to be killed. I had a few friends who married before me, (some with babies) and their husbands were sent away and never came home. This possibility frightened me terribly.

Luckily, downstairs in the warehouse there was a faucet, which provided ample water for all of us, so thirst was not a problem. There was also one bathroom downstairs, which we all shared. We were unable to bathe or shower, only to wash ourselves with the bathroom sink, and we wore the same clothing we arrived in for our entire stay, which of course was a terrible hardship and especially difficult for a family like ours that was always well presented, but this too was not uppermost on our

minds. All of us were squished into a very small space and there were no beds – we were just sleeping on the floor with no blankets, and it was bitter cold.

I remember a big honor I was given. We were taking care of the esteemed Rebbetzin, and she offered my mother to sleep next to her to keep warm, but my mother said, 'No, take Esther, she is cold in nature and I want her to sleep with you instead so she should be warm.' That was my beloved mother, always thinking of others before herself.

Of course I missed Asher so very much, so my brother-in-law, Mr. Deutsch tried to make it better by arranging for him to be walked once a day in his carriage on the sidewalk that went by our home, so that I could peek out of the attic window and catch sight of him. Unfortunately I never saw him, only his carriage, and it made me miss him all the more.

After about three weeks, we were in a state of shock because remember, we thought that this whole business was going to be over with in just a week, and now we realized that it was getting worse, not better. We were beside ourselves with worry. Then the police chief reported us to the Germans because he became frightened about the consequences if the Germans found out that he permitted us to hide. Suddenly late in the afternoon, the police came up to the attic and captured us. It was so frightening, to this day, I cannot even think about it, and I do not wish to talk about it.

The police took us all to jail. As my dear father, A"H wore a beard, I was afraid they would persecute him in the jail because they would identify him as a religious Jew. I was holding on to him for dear life as we walked to jail. I kept telling my father, 'I will tell them I have a baby by goyim, and they will bring him to me so I don't have to worry about losing Asher.' Papa kept saying, 'be strong, don't say anything, and let the child be there. No, no, no, don't tell them anything. Asher will be safer there than with us.'

It was my father, and Hashem, who saved Asher; I take no credit. I trusted my father and I did not tell anyone about Asher, and Asher lived.

When we got to the jail, they separated us into jail cells for the women and men. Two days later we were taken to the ghetto.

Chapter Four

On April 19, 1944, we had no choice but to go into hiding, and to place our dear son, Asher into the care of Dr. Brastiko.

On April 20, 1944, all the Jews of my city were prohibited by edict from going outside the ghetto. We knew nothing. The signs were very simple, and didn't explain anything to us. They said nothing more than: 'All Jews are required to report to the ghetto immediately.' Now this will seem extreme to you in isolation, but please remember, that the Jews of Uzhorod had been harassed beyond imagination for some time now, so this was really, just one more thing!

When the Polish refugees arrived in Hungary, they tried to warn us about the evil Nazis and what was coming to us, but we dismissed them and found what they were telling us to be too unbelievable. Then we watched as the Hungarians and Germans, together, put in place so many laws to strip away from the Jews our livelihood and our security, it was incredible. All male Jews between ages 18 – 45 were conscripted into forced-labor gangs, which is why we fought so hard to keep Yitzchok from being sent away. As I've said before, many of these young men never returned.

The Hungarian government took away our livelihood by removing business licenses from all of the Jewish tailors, shoemakers, storeowners, etc. Overnight, good business men were put out of business, including families that had worked hard all their lives to establish a positive reputation and a parnussa. We were forbidden from shopping in the markets until the best produce was already sold, and we were forced to wear the Jewish stars. We were harassed, and viewed like dirt - venom that the city wanted to get rid of - they were determined to clean the city streets of all of the Jews.

The Hungarians and Germans did not think of us, or treat us, like human beings, but rather, like dirty animals. We never imagined that the Nazi's evil plan was to murder all of us, but the notion of the ghetto was consistent with their attitude - the removal of all Jews from their daily life. They treated us as if we were no better than a pesky mosquito, even though the city of Uzhorod was thriving in large part because of our contribution. So, in this environment, it was not shocking to us that the final step was to remove us from the city and from our homes, and place us like cattle in the ghettos. In our minds then, this was the final step until we were liberated. We could not have imagined the Nazi's cremation plan - their "final solution", for such an idea could not have registered with us as possible.

Our normal existence became filled with terror. The cries of families being separated, with children torn away from parents, and families losing everything once dear

to them became a daily occurrence. Food was scarce, but none of us had any appetite anymore.

The only reason we didn't completely panic is because we still believed with full hope that the Russian army, just over the border only 2 hours away from Uzhorod, would liberate the entire area, and we could soon return to our homes and our previous lives. The Russian army waited six months, until October 1944, to advance, and in that short six-month period, the German and Hungarian Nazis murdered millions of beautiful yidden.

One single day before the requirement to relocate to the ghetto, we went into hiding, hoping that in 2-3 days, the Russians would save us and we would never have to go to the ghetto at all. We went into hiding with nothing much but the clothing we were wearing, and the men had, perhaps, their *tallis* and *tefillin* and a *siddur*. In our case, my father, who was so smart he must have sensed the dangers ahead, gave us each some precious jewelry to carry in hidden places, and we stuffed paper money in the bottom of our shoes. My father, Z"L, told us that there may come a day when we would have to trade these valuables for a slice of bread. Of course, we didn't believe him.

Sadly, we were not the only Jews to try hiding from the Germans, and within a few weeks, most everyone, like us, was captured, and brought to the ghetto, after all.

After spending a few days in the jail, the Hungarian soldiers marched us about five blocks to the larger of the two ghettos, "Brick", which was on "Radvanc Street". I

walked with my husband, two younger sisters, Shifra and Dvora, and my parents. The entire way, I spoke to my father and begged him to let me get Asher, but he was firm with me: 'Esther, don't even think about it, he will be safe and secure there,' he said, and so finally, I gave up my pleas and accepted this plan.

Thousands of Jewish families from Uzhorod, and some surrounding towns were already in the ghetto when we arrived – remember, we were two weeks later than most. Fortunately, we were allowed to stay together as a family in the ghetto. Everyone there had suddenly been forced to leave their home, and they brought nothing with them; there was no time. Probably some of the men took a *tallis* and a prayer book, and that was really about it.

In the ghetto we slept as families in big wooden rooms, where we were always dressed (in the one outfit we had since we went into hiding). There were about 50 families in each barrack. There were very few toilets so we had to stand in line for hours to get into the bathrooms. Food was very scarce but somehow we always managed to get a little bread. Sometimes the people who left the ghetto to work would bring us back a bit of food, but believe me, at this time, few of us cared much about eating. We were too frightened about what the morning would bring.

'The Russians will be here soon,' was the general comment you heard over and over again, as we prayed to Hashem that we be rescued speedily from this terrible anguish.

The young people ages 18 – 30 were required to go out in the daytime to work. The work was mainly sorting clothing articles collected from the houses of the Jews. That lasted about 2 to 3 weeks. This order included my two younger sisters, Shifra Zlata and Dvora Frimet, ages 19 and 18. They were beautiful girls, slim, attractive and capable. They came back later in the afternoon and when they still had money, they brought back a little food. I went out for one day and I don't remember why I didn't go out more. When I was out the one day, Hungarian soldiers said to me, 'you should know what is waiting for you,' but my mind would not allow me to register such a terrible thing. My husband left the ghetto only a couple of times, and once he met my brother in law, Mr. Deutsch, who was walking around, and Yitzchok got money from him.

We believed we would return from the ghetto to our homes, but the Nazis saw the ghetto as a temporary holding place until we were transported to our deaths. Eventually, there were no Jews left in the city. As far as they were concerned, once they liquidated the ghetto, all the Jews would be gone forever.

You cannot imagine what a *Kiddush* Hashem our people are. Even in the midst of such horrendous conditions, so many of us kept the *mitzvahs* as best as we could, and continued to *daven* to Hashem with all of our hearts. I remember one day, there was an urgent feeling that we must obtain a very special holy book because in it was a certain document that gave permission for the surviving

half of a couple to remarry should they survive the war. We were all starting to realize by then that we could be killed. It was on our minds all day long, that we might lose our lives, and that children would lose their parents, and sisters would lose their brothers and sisters, and that we would lose our husbands, wives, and children.

It was a big problem getting a hold of this particular book. It was in one of the homes we had been thrown out of, and no one was permitted to leave the ghetto to go get it. My very courageous cousin, Beru Stern, age 16 at the time, risked his life to sneak out of the ghetto, return to his home, climb over the fence and then through the window of his house to obtain the book. Can you believe this – he was reduced to sneaking into his very own home, as if he is a *ganiff!* He returned safely to the ghetto with the book and the cries that stormed the heavens that night as people prayed that that they should never need such a document – it was so heart breaking. Hundreds of Jews blessed Beru for his act of courage.

Now comes the part of my story that I have so much trouble telling, so I will tell it to you briefly, and you will understand why it must be so that I keep it brief. Every time I think about the last time I saw my beloved mother and father and my sisters, I cry. Do you know that I do not exaggerate when I tell you that I still cry, every time, and how many years has it been? It doesn't matter; It never leaves me. It is tattooed on my heart forever.

In the ghetto, they took my two younger sisters away,

and we didn't know what would happen to them or if we would ever see them again. We didn't know what happened to my brother and his family. Then they took away my oldest sister with her six children. We were very bitter and terrified. My parents were among the last Jews left in the ghetto. I was fretting, what do I do about the baby, should I bring him to the ghetto? I missed Asher so much. Remember, we still didn't know that we were being taken to our deaths, so I was always trying to figure out a way to get Asher back with me.

There was a big garden in the ghetto and I sat with my mother, crying, asking her to tell me what to do. Among the people in the Ghetto was a woman named Winkler who had a son whose name was Moishe. She suggested that I escape from the ghetto and go into hiding with her 18-year old son in his Bunker in a basement. I discussed this with my mother, and she told me, 'go my dear, go. You might be saved and you can have your baby back after we get liberated.' I told my mother, 'I'll risk it. I want to be with my child.' Hugging and crying, I couldn't bear to say goodbye to my dear mother. Then I went to say goodbye to Papa. He was saying his *tehillim*. I ran over to him, and managed to kiss him, but I couldn't talk. I was so distraught, no words would leave my mouth. We just looked at each other with tears running from our eyes and down our cheeks.

This is a very sad memory for me. It was the last time I saw my father or my mother, Z"L.

Yitzchok and I set up a plan that he would follow me out of the ghetto, but not right behind me in case I got caught. One of us had to stay alive so that Asher would have a parent! I don't know how I found the courage except that I was just so sick in my heart and desperate to be reunited with my baby. I did not really sneak out of the ghetto. I just marched out of there, passing by two Hungarian soldiers, who, praise Hashem, ignored me. I climbed over a small fence, and looked straight at the two guards, and kept on walking. I was so frightened that they were going to shoot me, but I did not stop walking. I don't know if they didn't notice me leaving, or if they just chose not to act on it.

I was so dehydrated; I couldn't even move my tongue. I prayed to the *Ribono Shel Olam*, 'we have thousands of bottles of water in our cellar, and I'm going to die of thirst?' When I got out of the ghetto I went to my neighbor and signaled that I needed water and she gave me some and this helped. Then I went to another neighbor and begged for more water. I knew I was risking my life by doing this, but I had to get water or I felt I would die, and I could not talk to anyone about my baby until I got something to drink because my tongue was literally, stuck to the roof of my mouth.

Since this moment in time, I am very *medakdek* to make a *bracha* on water, because I know first hand what happens to a person when you don't have any water to drink.

I found the address of the basement and I entered the

Bunker. Moishe was lying on the sofa. There was no air except trying to catch a breath over the water pipe coming from the roof. I immediately thought of the Belzer Rebbe who emigrated from Poland to Uzhorod, when we were still in a fairly peaceful life. As he arrived in Uzhorod, he visited for a few minutes with our parents. He remarked that he was hidden in an attic where there was no air and when he left the bunker for this trip to Uzhorod, he had to say a *Shehechiyonu* on the air! Only then was I able to understand what he meant.

This bunker was about a half hour's walk to the doctor. It had a very low ceiling, and I am a tall woman, and I had to lay down there for many days, which was exceedingly uncomfortable. I wanted to go see my baby right away, but I was in contact with Mr. Deutsch, and he convinced me that it wasn't safe yet, and that he would keep his eyes on the situation for me since he had false papers as a goy and could walk freely in the streets.

A few memories make me cry every time I summon them. Even though I know that Hashem has a plan, it still hurts my heart every time. A few days after I was settled into this bunker, I heard footsteps entering the apartment above. I was too frightened to think logically that it could be Yitzchok, just as we had planned. I feared that it was the Germans looking for me, and I was in such a terribly frightened state, I couldn't think logically, so I hid from these footsteps. Yitzchok couldn't find me, so he went back to the ghetto where my parents were. It is an absolute miracle that even so, we were reunited

after the war. I don't know if I could ever forgive myself if he had been taken from us because he returned to the ghetto. But our reunion after the war comes much later.

Finally, one day, I just couldn't take it another minute – I had to see my baby! I decided to go visit the doctor early in the morning. I figured that in the very early morning I was not going to meet many people. As we were active in our parents' business, which was on the main street *Masarykove Namesti*, we were well known by many people and I was afraid of being recognized. I placed a kerchief on my head, and another kerchief covering my nose and mouth, and I undertook the trip, running through the streets without my Jewish star on of course, praying that I would not be captured.

It was 7 A.M. when I rang the bell, and the servant answered. I asked to see the doctor, and the doctor appeared. Her hair wasn't combed; I thought she was excusing herself because of the grooming when her first response was, 'Oh, what happened to me'. But then she told me that someone had reported her for holding a Jewish child, and she couldn't take care of Asher anymore so she gave Asher to an impoverished non-Jew by the name, Semere Antalne. She told this woman that the baby was born with a hernia and that he needed surgery (to explain the circumcision), and that he needed frequent check ups for his medical condition. She told the woman that she must pretend to be the child's mother because the actual parents lived in Budapest, and that it was important that she

bring the baby every week for a check-up.[2]

The good doctor was in big trouble. Her life was at risk because she was under suspicion of helping a Jew. In the meantime, she wrote letters to a friend of hers in Budapest, asking the friend to write to her posing as the parents of the child, so that it would look like Asher was under the care of Dr. Brastiko for a hernia. Until this was clarified, Dr. Brastiko was permitted to work in her office during the day, (because they had sent away all of the Jews and the city of Uzhorod was in desperate need of doctors), but after 6:00 P.M., she had to return to jail.

As she told me this, Dr. Brastiko was crying. She ended with the remark, 'I hope it works'. Then she said to me, 'all the newspapers are writing about your parents. They were hidden and they succeeded to find them.'

'Where are you hiding, Esther?' she asked me. 'Actually, wherever you are hiding doesn't matter. They are looking all over.'

'Then they can look even by the President of the Country!' I remarked. I made this remark in a jocular manner; I was so upset to learn that my baby was not there for me to see and to hold, and to learn that the newspapers were writing about my family and the search for me. I knew that it wasn't safe then to look for Asher,

2 In the future, the doctor coordinated with Mr. Deutsch for him to be at her office at exactly the same time as this woman's weekly visits, so that Mr. Deutsch could see Asher every week. It was an incredible blessing to me that I was able to hear, through Mr. Deutsch, that my baby was well.

because they would capture me, so I had to go back into hiding. I just couldn't go back to the bunker I had been in for the past several days although I was very upset about not being with my parents and Yitzchok. Now that I was free from the ghetto, I didn't want to go back. I was afraid that if I went back to the ghetto, I would never see Asher again, and I couldn't let that happen. I was so terrified; I thought I would break down completely.

I made up a plan to go to the 70-year-old mayor, Pastor Ilnicky Sanddor, who was a priest and a close personal friend of my parents. Papa had told me that the mayor was holding money for us in case we needed it. My father had the foresight to sew the money into the shoulder pads of clothing that he brought to the mayor's house before we went into hiding. My father made sure that all of his children knew about it. He told us, 'Whomever will return should go and take what they need.'

I returned to the bunker and waited until after the mayor got home from work. Then I went to his house and knocked on the door. He answered with his sister, Ilanka who was about 65 and unmarried. I told him, 'I am Rubin, Jonas' daughter. Please, please could you keep me for a few days? Please I don't mind where. . . in a room, basement, garage or bathroom. I must live. My parents and the rest of my family are in the Ghetto. I escaped and I don't have anywhere to stay.'

The mayor was very hesitant, but my persistent begging moved him. He told his sister, 'put Esther in the garage,

hide her there in the night, and during the day, let her sleep in your room.' She agreed reluctantly. For about two weeks I slept in the garage. I had told Mr. Ilnitzky that this would only be for a few days, while I figured out where to go next, but honestly, I had no plan, and no idea what to do.

They provided me with food and water but nothing went down my throat. One day they bought me red radishes, as it was springtime, and that gave me a little appetite, enough with a small amount of other food and water to survive.

One evening the mayor said to me, 'Esther, I want to talk to you. I must show you the daily paper.' In the newspaper was an article printed about my family. We were a prominent family in Uzhorod, and what happened to our family made the news. This newspaper article reported that the Germans had found my parents, but that the daughter Esther and her baby were still missing, and that they would find us too. The mayor then said to me, 'I had to give them an article in the paper and then in my statement, I had to say these words: 'Finally the City is Juden Frei'. And here I am hiding a Jewish woman! Can you know how I feel? If they find you, they will kill me!'

I reassured him and begged him to have pity for another few days. He agreed. A couple of days later in the daytime, the door to the garage opened while I was lying there. I was sure that the police were going to get a

hold of me again. What a surprise when I saw the mayor and my brother-in-law, Mr. Deutsch! This was another incredible miracle for me from Hashem.

Mr. Deutsch told me that he did not know that I was hiding by the Mayor. He only came to get some money from the suit as we had agreed to do. He entered the Mayor's home posing as a Hungarian soldier and then he told him that he is Mr. Rubin's son-in-law and he had come to take something from the clothing. The Mayor said, 'fine, but you must do me a favor. Your sister-in-law is hiding here and you must take her away. I am sick from fright and so is my sister. Please, please, can you imagine what risk I am running?' Oh, the mayor was so happy to see him. To Mr. Deutsch's big surprise, he told him that I was hiding in the garage, and that he must take me away immediately. The mayor said to him, 'take all the money you want; just take her away.'

I was shocked when the garage door opened and there was Mr. Deutsch. I immediately asked him, 'where is our family, our parents?' He told me they were all taken away to the labor camps. I was upset to have escaped because I thought that I would rather be in a labor camp with my family. Of course, nobody had a slightest inkling what kind of labor camps they were.

Mr. Deutsch was living in Uzhorod disguised as a Hungarian soldier, as he was originally from Breszna and was not known in Uzhorod. So he walked along the

streets free.[3] Mr. Deutsch told me that he had promised them that he would take me away and that he was taking me to another attic where my cousins were. He brought me bread and milk but I was too traumatized to eat. We didn't know how we would get to the bunker without being seen on the streets but then suddenly there was an alarm, Russian fliers were flying overhead, and sirens were blaring. The streets emptied, as everyone descended to shelters for their safety, and during this moment, we fled to the attic where our cousins were hiding.

In this attic were my cousins, Moishe Stern, A"H (Uncle Leibish's son) and his wife, Malka (he perished in concentration camp, she survived), Rafael Lorber and his wife (he survived, his wife and children were murdered), Rosz Vogelman, (daughter of Icu Lorber) and her family from Kezmark Slovakia, and a single, elderly man named Kraus who made so much noise, we were afraid of being discovered. In this bunker, we only talked by voice or prayed out loud if it was pouring rain; that's how frightened we were of being captured. They had all been hiding in this attic from the time that the Jews were sent to the ghetto.

I stayed with my cousins in hiding for several weeks in this bunker. Mr. Deutsch provided provisions for us by throwing the food into an empty apartment below the attic, and we'd climb down and pick up the food. The

3 Mr. Deutsch's life story is found in the biography by his wife, my sister Chanie, entitled, "So Much to Say."

bigger problem for us was how to get water. My other uncle, Lipold Stern, a brother of Rafael, had a beautiful house across the street from the bunker, which was now empty because the family had been forced out to the ghettos, and thankfully, it had not been occupied by the Hungarian soldiers, (another miracle!) Moshe snuck into his house to get water, (he had a key because he used to live there) and when he did this, so that the neighbors wouldn't hear his footsteps, my cousin, Malku went to the window and imitated the sounds of a cat meowing, to cover the sound of his footsteps. We used this water for cooking, drinking and washing a few plates, and then we recycled it to wash the floor and dust around.

Except for me, the rest of the people were a little prepared for the hiding place, so they managed to have some covers and linen. Washing the linen and our clothing was nearly impossible, and so we lived in filthy conditions, which as you know, was so contrary to my nature. One day, we decided that we just couldn't live like this anymore and my cousin, Raphael Lorber, risked capture by leaving the attic, removing his yellow star and bringing the linens to a Laundromat. The man in charge of the Laundromat was suspicious because the linens were much more filthy than normal, but he was so happy for the business, he chose not to say anything. This practice went on for several weeks. I cannot tell you how pleased I was to receive back my linen clean. It was a small pleasure in the midst of such devastation. To this day, I have never taken for

granted, or stopped appreciating, the *bracha* of clean clothing and fresh linen.

Meanwhile, I had to live with the incredibly difficult frustration of being so close to my baby, and not being able to touch him, hold him, and raise him as his mother. Mr. Deutsch made friends with Mrs. Semere, the woman caring for him and he would try to walk by our window with her while she was walking Asher in his carriage, so I could catch a glimpse, but I never saw his face, only his carriage, and this only served to make me feel even more bitter. I am sure that there was not a single day that I didn't cry over this loss.

We were waiting out the weeks in the attic and praying for salvation from Hashem, and from the Russians, and then one day, our plans were shattered. It was on a Friday that Mr. Deutsch threw a live carp into the apartment below us and we hadn't picked it up yet. (Before I got to the bunker, they had set up a little electric stove and this is where they cooked our food). Someone reported the fish to the newspaper, as evidence that someone was helping Jews who were in hiding. It wasn't long after that when the Hungarian police came and captured us, bringing us to the same jail I had been sent to the last time I was captured. (They tried to force out of us the name of the person who was providing us the food, but we never gave away Mr. Deutsch and thankfully, they finally accepted our insistence that we had no idea.)

We were in the local jail only a few days, and during

that time, I was so emotionally sick, these days, you might call it a "nervous breakdown." I was all alone, and I didn't know where Yitzchok or my parents or Asher were. I had been separated from all whom I loved, and who loved me, and I was petrified. I hadn't eaten real food in weeks, and I had been lying down most of my days in the attic because I was too tall to stand there. I was surely on the verge of completely crumbling.

How is it that I survived these terrible conditions? I imagine that what kept me going, so that I did not give up entirely, was my burning desire to see my family again; the embers of hope burned in me that this day would come. It is good that I did not know at this time about the fate that the Nazis had handed my parents, or I suspect I would have been too overcome with grief to continue living.

A doctor, Dr. Hanziros, who worked for the city, came to see us in the jail and I begged him to mark me as sick so that the Germans wouldn't send me off anywhere. My brother in law had warned me that I was going to be transported out of Uzhorod, like all of my family before me. Dr. Hanziros remembered me, because he had visited me the last time I was in the jail, and when he was giving my father a shot of antibiotics, I was so close to Papa, I couldn't bear to see him take a needle. He remembered this about me and was touched by me. As I begged him to please save me, he responded, 'My dear little girl, my hands are tied; I wish I could help you, but there is nothing I can do.'

After a couple of days they shipped us to Hungary. First, we were sent to a jail in the Hungarian town, *Debritzen*. We slept a few nights on the floor without anything to cover us with. The decision was then made by the Hungarians to transport us in a small truck to the railroad, where we would be sent to Auschwitz. Mr. Deutsch followed behind us, because he was afraid for us. When we got to the railroad, he told me that I should try to escape, but there was nothing I could do. I managed to scribble a note to him as my last will, to take care of my little boy and make sure he's well dressed, always.

On the way to Auschwitz, they made one stop along the way in the town of Nyiregyhasa to wait for a connecting train. We were sitting on the grass outside of the train, and I remember that it was a beautiful spring day. It was such a strange feeling to be experiencing the beautiful sunshine, while so many of our people were dying. In this area, many gypsies were selling large white cherries. Even though I had been in hiding so many weeks, wearing the same clothing, and I'm sure that my physical condition was terrible, somehow these gypsies could tell from my elegant clothing, (even if it was soiled) or my demeanor, that I was from money, and still beautiful. One of the gypsies, a man, approached me and said, 'you have money, you are pretty and I could hide you in my attic and you could be safe. Don't get back on the train. They are going to kill you.' I still had a little money with me so I bought some of the cherries. It would be the last delicious fruit I would taste for a very long time, but I did not know this then.

I remembered my childhood stories about gypsies stealing children. I was too frightened to go with the gypsy. I thought to myself, 'I'd rather die than to be with the gypsies.' I said, 'no thanks,' and when it was time to get back on the cattle car that came to get us, I was on my way to Auschwitz.

We were put on a train to take us to another ghetto named "Manor" in Debrecin, Hungary. There were still thousands of Jews in this ghetto because it was one of the last ones to be liquidated. The conditions there were really impossible. There was no food; many of the people were sick. It was just a place to hold us until they transported us to our deaths. Yitzchok and my parents were not there. I presumed they were in a labor camp. I wanted so much to be with them, wherever they were.

As mentioned, in the bunker I had been with my cousin Moshe Stern and Moshe's wife Malka. Her maiden name was Hassenfeld. She was from Satmar and after her marriage to my cousin they lived in Uzhorod. We tried to stay together as much as possible. In the Ghetto in Monor they needed nurses. Malka volunteered to be one. She was shipped along with the sick people in order to help the sick that were in the train. She arranged for me as her cousin to go along with her. As her husband Moshe said, 'no matter what happens, see that you stay together.'

We were only in Manor for about a week, and then the time came for us to be transported to Auschwitz. I

cannot really put into words what the conditions were inside of this train, but I know that all of you reading this memoir have heard of, and read about, the cattle cars, and how so many Jews died in them on the way to Auschwitz. We were not treated as human beings. In the freight train, so crowded with women and children, there was a woman giving birth on the floor right near me. She had another baby, 16 months old, and this baby was so filthy, no one wanted to hold him. I picked him up and held him for the entire trip, praying to G-d: 'You watch my baby, and I'll watch this one.'

Chapter Five

The entire time on the train to Auschwitz, I held on to this stranger's baby, and prayed tearfully to Hashem that He should save my baby, Asher, and the rest of my beloved family. My cousin, Moshe told me that when we arrive there would be Jews there already, and that I should ask them: 'What do you have to know in order to stay alive?'

Sure enough we arrived in the evening to that "unknown place". There were Polish Yidden who worked for the Germans who helped us out of the train. They spoke Yiddish and Polish. As I speak both languages fluently, I remembered what my cousin, Moshe told me. As I stepped out of the train, one Yid said, 'give the child away to someone'. I said, 'I can't. They won't know where it belongs.' He didn't argue with me.

As we stepped from the wagons, the sky was red and there was heavy smoke. I asked the Polish Jews, 'what is that?' They answered, 'well that is. . . WHAT?' What they said to me at that time, did not register with me. My mind could not comprehend that such a thing was even possible!

We were lined up in three separate groups: Men,

women alone, and women with children. I carried the baby of that anonymous woman from the train. I rightfully belonged in the group of women alone, but I would not let go of this baby. As we marched, five people in one line, Mengele *Yemach Shemo* stopped each line and selected who would live or die.

He stopped me and said to me, 'you are young and still can work. Give the baby to the woman standing next to you with her children'. I again replied, 'I can't give the baby away; they would not know where it belongs, it is not mine'. It is a very good thing that I did not realize at that time how evil this man was, so I had the courage to speak to him this way. He grabbed the baby out of my hands and handed him to the woman next to me, who wasn't even the baby's mother.

Again they lined us up, and brought us to a place where we had to undress fully except for shoes. They shaved our heads bald. They gave us an inmate dress to wear. I do not remember anything about it, but I distinctly remember they removed from me the simple human right of being able to wear underwear, and this condition troubled me greatly. I am often asked if I have the number tattoo on my arm that survivors from Auschwitz have. I don't know why, but fortunately for me, by the time we, the Hungarians, arrived in Auschwitz, it was much later in the war, and they had stopped the practice of tattooing inmates.

All that we still had, our very few personal belongings

– a little bundle perhaps - we left there and we were marched into Auschwitz and placed into barracks. We were allowed to keep our shoes, and many of us had stuffed paper money into the lining of our shoes. Later on, we would use this money as toilet paper!

Haftlings (concentration camp inmates) who had arrived before me threw a whole bread of about two pounds through the window. It landed right near me. I should have been grateful, or excited for the food, but I hadn't been in Auschwitz long enough to understand the starvation that would be our daily reality. This bread lay before me, and I picked the bread up off the floor so as not to step on it. (As my dear parents had taught us, one has to watch not to step on even the crumbs on the floor after meals.) I offered the bread to another inmate because I would not eat it from the floor. (Can you imagine? I didn't understand what I was about to suffer). In response, she said, 'I will give you a kerchief and panties in exchange for the bread; we don't have enough food here.'

That was the first moment when I started to realize that we were not sent to Auschwitz to work. I naively said, 'oh no, you can have it for nothing!' She eagerly took the bread, but did give me the kerchief, no panties though, which I would later regret. I immediately placed the kerchief over my newly shaved head. Remember this, but still you cannot imagine, no one can. I am a married woman and therefore, always with a head covering over my beautiful head of hair. And now I am shaved and

bald, with no ability to cover myself? I cannot tell you what this was like for the married women there who had been *tznius* all their lives. It was an impossible situation to live with, and yet, we had no choice. We were prisoners.

Instead of working, we just sat piled up on wooden floors like sardines. In a way I was pleased that I was no longer alone, hiding in an attic and afraid for my life. I didn't yet understand that my life was in grave danger, nor how horrible the conditions would be. Being immersed in a sea of humanity, surrounded by Yidden, was actually a comfort for me. I felt so terribly alone, separated from all of my family. I very much needed this human contact to give me strength and courage.

My thoughts all day long were occupied with the hope that my husband and my parents and siblings, nieces and nephews, were alive and I would find them. This idea was not preposterous – it actually happened frequently enough to women in my barrack. Parents coincidently found their children in different areas and different bunks, before the Nazis sent virtually all of the children to their deaths.

As I had arrived later than the people from Uzhorod because of my time spent in hiding and the ghetto, I inquired from everyone I saw about people from Uzhorod. The word spread that the Rubin girl came in with relatives, and many girls from Uzhorod. I kept asking everyone naively, 'how could I find out where my parents are, where my sisters are, my only brother, etc?'

No answer came. I believe now that this naivete was *gam zu letovah*, because I don't know how I would have had the strength to survive, had I known the truth then.

I was always hoping to return, and to see my child! My *bitachon* gave me the willpower to live. Wherever I found a man I asked if they knew my husband. 'No,' was always the answer I got. Often I dwelled on how I have a baby whom I left behind and that I must stay alive or else my child will grow into a goy and our Jewish lineage would be destroyed for generations, *chas va shalom*!

I did not meet my two younger sisters, Shifra and Dvorah, in Auschwitz. I was hoping they really were sent to work somewhere, and under better and safer conditions than in Auschwitz. I always searched for them, but in vain. (Only after I was liberated, my cousin, Anisha Klein who was with them in Auschwitz, told me that they were taken for a transport on a forced march and they got sick from typhus. They collapsed while marching and apparently they were shot, as were many others.)

Our gigantic wooden blockhouse held about one thousand women and teenage girls to a block. Yes, that's right. You can't imagine. One thousand women all torn from their families. One thousand starving, bald, freezing, dirty, terrified, distraught, ill, grieving women squished into one blockhouse. You understand why the name of this book is, "There Are No Words?!" We didn't have real mattresses to sleep on. What they called a bed was really a flat board. We slept ten of us in a space that

would normally suit two or three. If you had to turn in your fitful sleep, five of us had to turn with you. There were so many sick people, coughing, groaning, it was truly a nightmare beyond description.

The soldiers fed us only one plate of so-called soup per day. They called it soup, but if you were to taste it, you would not even consider it edible. It was bitter, with no salt or taste, just a dark brown liquid with some green leaves floating in it. Most people couldn't eat it. Those that did, got diarrhea and became sick. I tried to eat it but I couldn't eat it. They took the sick ones away and murdered them. We knew we had to avoid diarrhea if we were to survive.

Everyone kept saying to each other, 'we shall be freed hopefully. Just try to keep yourself going, eat if possible, live another day.' The only really edible thing they gave us was a slice of stale bread. Some women ate it all at once, others savored little morsels of it all day long. I ate all of it at once, just so I could have a moment of feeling a little bit full in my stomach. Then, because I had memorized the *bentsching* prayer, and we had no *siddurim* there, all day long, I would recite the prayers of *bentsching*, whenever I could.

Every night, at about 2:00 A.M. we were woken by the S.S. – if we were fortunate enough to be sleeping at all - and lined up five in a line to be counted. You are not reading the time wrong – this is not a typographical error. It was not two in the afternoon. It was in the middle of the

night. There were many who fainted and other episodes while in line. It was freezing cold and we tried to stay close to each other to avoid the cold. There was no way to escape from Auschwitz, and although we all dreamed of escaping every day, we had neither the strength nor the means, and even if we did escape, where would we go? So, really, what was the point of waking us up in the middle of the night to be sure no one had escaped? It was preposterous.

Once a week the block of one thousand would line up and march to a bathhouse, five women in a row, with the S.S. closely watching so that we could not escape. We undressed and were put into showers in brutally cold water with no soap, while they took the dresses to wash. We shivered in anguish waiting for our clean dress to be returned to us. It was a small pleasure at least that once a week to receive a freshly washed piece of clothing. When we were ready to return, the dresses were washed and piled up, all wrinkled. As we stood in the line, one dress was handed to each of us. These dresses were dresses that once belonged to the Jewish women. The men had prison uniforms, but the women and girls wore the dresses that had been stripped from other women when they arrived. We never knew what size dress we would receive, and this created a big problem for me, being a tall women.

I remember once they gave me a dress and I put it on to leave and it was a drop over the knee and I was upset about this because my legs would be cold, and also, if I were ever able to see my husband, I didn't want to be

uncovered like that in front of him. *Even in Auschwitz, can you believe it, I was worried about wearing a shmatta!* I spoke a few words of French because my mother believed we should learn languages, and I asked in French, 'what kind of dress do you give me?' and the man asked me if I speak French, and we spoke a few words. He liked that, and he searched through the pile of dresses until he found a brown, beautiful velvet dress that was long enough for me and once I found this dress, I wore this dress almost the entire time I was in the camp, until liberation.

Few positive memories come to me from this nightmare, but one stands out: The moment when I discovered that my dear husband, Yitzchok was not only alive, but was nearby. You cannot imagine, you really can't, how this moment was for me. When I was hiding in the attic, I had a dream once when I vividly saw my husband on a truck. This dream was about to come true.

As we were marched to the bathhouse, we saw many Jewish men on trucks, and they were wearing the inmate uniform and they had all lost so much weight, many of them looked alike. I was with a friend from Uzhorod named Rose Abraham, and I kept saying to her, 'that's my husband, no, that's my husband!' I wanted so badly to find Yitzchok, I was going out of my mind. Then suddenly my friend Rose shouts, 'There he is. That's your husband, standing on the truck!' My heart practically stopped. It was him! Yitzchok saw a group marching so he called out, asking where we were from. When he heard there were some from Uzhorod he asked about me, 'the Rubin girl'.

Rose, my friend called out, 'Yes, Esther (Etuka) is here!' The women passed down the word line by line until I got near to my husband. I stepped a bit out of the line and he came running to me from the truck to come closer to me. *Such a moment, such a moment. Once again, there truly are no words.*

Yitzchok managed to ask me what I needed. I requested a toothbrush and a mirror as I had not seen myself for a long time, and I was a very hygienic person. The inability to brush my teeth for so many days and weeks was a terrible thing for me. To this day, a toothbrush and a warm bath is very precious to me, and often when I am soaking in a warm bath, I talk to Hashem and I thank him for this comfort. For some inmates, the starvation was the worst part of our imprisonment, for others, it was the lack of privacy. For me, besides the unbearable separation from my family, because of my nature, the lack of cleanliness and hygiene was a great trial for me.

I only got the chance to speak to Yitzchok for a quick moment. After too short a time, the S.S. women guarding us smacked me on my face saying, 'how do you dare talk to a man here?'

'That's my husband', I replied. But she did not show me any kindness. My husband asked me motioning with his hand, 'where is the child?' I motioned with my hands, 'he remained home'. We were so close, and it was such an important question, I knew what he was asking and he knew what I was answering.

I later found out that my husband Yitzchok was on the truck because he was an excellent driver. He owned a car in Munkacz since the age of 20. In Auschwitz they asked for auto mechanics, so he volunteered. He worked at the garage which was called in German "Forbreitshaft" and that gave him privileges. When he fixed the soldiers' cars, they reciprocated with food or needed articles. This is one of many miracles that Hashem gave to Yitzchok, and me, for in our day, there were few men who had the mechanical skills of my husband, and these skills spared his life.

Yitzchok had been at Auschwitz before me, for about a month, but I don't remember being alarmed by his appearance when I saw him because I was so relieved that he was alive.

One day, to my utter joy, while I was near the bathhouse, I noticed my husband arriving to the bathhouse with a car with some German S.S. in it. He managed to come close enough to me to tell me that these soldiers were nice to him because he took care of their cars. He dared to ask them the favor of speaking to me, and so we were permitted a few moments of conversation. Spending even a few moments in conversation with my beloved husband was for me, like drinking a full glass of water after days of excruciating thirst.

Yitzchok had obtained the two things which I had asked for, the toothbrush and the mirror, (which was a broken piece of mirror), and I held this mirror up to

my face and I thought, *thank G-d I can still recognize myself!* Miraculously, during the time I was imprisoned, over a year, I never went down to skin and bones like most of the Jews, and there is no logical explanation for this. I believe that it is in the *zechus* of all the food that we fed the poor people who came so frequently to our home in Uzhorod.

Along with the toothbrush and mirror, Yitzchok also brought me four large onions. These onions were a very large asset in Auschwitz because onions could serve as an antibiotic when eaten raw, and so many were ill. If someone reported us sick we knew what would happen – immediate death in the gas chambers. So these onions were seen by me and others near me as, no exaggeration, life savers. I took them from Yitzchok and tearfully asked him where he was, and he reassured me that he was well cared for by the soldiers he worked for, and he urged me to get myself assigned to work. He left all too soon and I was very anxious for our next conversation. I tore all the onions into pieces and handed them out to my fellow prisoners. My fingers and hand smelled like onions for days.

Believe it or not, I did not have any onion myself. I had *rachmanos* on the women who were so ill, and so far, *B'ezras* Hashem, I had been blessed with sturdy health, so although I was run down, exhausted, and hungry like all the rest, I had not become ill, praise G-d, and I gave the onions to those who needed it. I can say, looking back at this decision, that once again, this was coming from what I had learned from my dear parents.

It was very reassuring for me to know that my husband was alive, and that he was managing in the best of our terrible situation. Another wonderful moment was when I discovered that Yiztchok's sister, Zisu, was in Auschwitz. We were both only in our early twenties. (She was single, and also survived. She married after the war and lives in Toronto and has three married children, and many grandchildren and great grandchildren.)

I asked everyone around me, *what should I do to get back to my baby*? The answer was always the same. 'Do whatever you have to do to get a work assignment!' I knew that in order to be spared from the crematorium, I had to prove myself useful, and stay healthy enough *not* to be sentenced to death because of illness. I noticed that a certain number of girls left Auschwitz every day to work, usually at the factories. I was determined to get this same opportunity. Isn't it incredible that at this time, I would consider it an "opportunity I couldn't pass up", to work as an unpaid slave for the S.S. under such deplorable, dangerous, and painful conditions. But these were the times we were in, completely *meshugana.*

I had to wait a long time for this so-called opportunity. One day, almost a full year after I had been in Auschwitz, the S.S. came in to our bunkhouse and asked, 'who ever worked in a factory?' I raised my hand immediately. I was among the first to volunteer! They picked 13 girls, but needed only 10. All 13 of us were taken to Mengele's Y"S office. We were stripped naked and he looked at our bodies to see if there was any rash or infection. This

seemed like an impossible thing - to exist in the *gehenom* that was Auschwitz and be completely free of all infections, rashes, or injuries. He selected 9 of the 13. To this day, I don't know what possessed me to have the nerve to say, 'Doctor, please look at me. I am fully clean.'

Now I must tell you, I am, as you already know, a very *tznius* person. All of my life I've always been very nicely dressed, never going out in public without being well put-together and refined in my appearance. These were my mother's ways, and my upbringing, still very much with me. You can only imagine the conditions I was in, that I would actually tell a stranger, an evil man, to stare at my unclothed body. This is unbelievable to me, or anyone who knows me. But I had to get back to my baby, this was my burning motivation, and to this end, I found the strength to do what I had to do, even though it was completely against my character - I would do anything in my power in order to survive and to be reunited with my family.

Mengele looked me over with his evil eyes and praise G-d, he selected me as the tenth. Again, another miracle. With no ability to properly wash, and in the most inhumane conditions, Hashem had protected me from getting any pimples, sores, rashes and infections. Mengele could easily have sent me to my death in that moment, for no other reason than having the *chutzpah* to speak up to him that way. With the point of his finger, and with no hesitation, he sent thousands of yidden to their deaths in the crematorium. What if he

was filling the quota for the crematoria, and not looking for workers? Somehow I sensed this time that it was beneficial for me to be selected. We would be sent to a factory to work, and I would be one step closer to being reunited with my baby.

I was right. This time, Mengele's selection was in my favor. I felt very strongly that I was in Hashem's hands.

Chapter Six

I was so grateful to leave Auschwitz, after so many terribly brutal months there, even though the hardest part was separating once again from my husband. It was very reassuring for me to know that my husband was alive, and that he was managing in our dreadful situation. I got *chizzuk* from knowing that occasionally I might have the joy of spotting him nearby, or snatching the briefest of conversations. I was at least reassured that he had a job working for the Germans and they respected him, so I thought he would survive, but I had no way of knowing for sure if and when we would be reunited. It was a painful goodbye, mixed with gratitude to Hashem that I was getting out of Auschwitz. I knew that my chances of returning to my baby were far greater once I left that inhuman place. I never forgot the advice that was given to me when I first arrived and asked: 'What should I do to get back to my baby?' I was told then, to do whatever it took to get out of Auschwitz alive, and now I was doing just that, so I was relieved, even though it worried me to leave Yitzchok.

When I arrived at Auschwitz, it was spring, and when I left, it was a bitter cold winter. I was transferred by a four-hour train ride to a munitions factory in

Reichenbach, Germany. In Reichenbach, the conditions were still terrible, but isn't it strange, the way the mind works. Because the conditions were so much better than Auschwitz, it seemed like a hotel in comparison, even though it was also quite horrible, very far from anything luxurious. This time we slept only four people in a room, with a real mattress, compared to hundreds of us crammed into one large barrack in Auschwitz, where we slept on flat boards instead of anything like a real bed.

We still only received one slice of stale bread daily. We never saved it till the next day because none of us knew whether there would be a next day. The real difference in the food between this new place and Auschwitz came down to a simple potato-peel soup made out of nothing but peels, imitation salt, and water. This soup saved me, *B'ezras Hashem*, even though now, as I describe what it was – just peels and water, it amazes me that it could ever have tasted so good to me.

I roomed with a polish woman, Marusha, who was sewing dresses for the Germans and it was a big privilege for me to be in the room with her because they heated the room for her so she could do her sewing during the day. Every evening, Marusha prepared this soup for me so that when I returned from my work, freezing, exhausted, and hungry, and so terribly dehydrated, I would come in from the cold to this warm room and hot soup, and then, partially because of the hot soup, and also, because of Marusha's kindness and friendship, I felt hopeful that I could make it another day.

Today, in New York, we experience the cold of winter and we bundle into our scarves, gloves and winter coats, then we warm ourselves with a hot tea and turn up the thermostat, and within a short while, we are relieved of the cold. The frigid conditions we were subjected to that winter is hard for me to adequately describe to you. I honestly don't know how any of us survived it. As I sit now in my warm Miami apartment so many years later, I am once again infused with *hakoras hatov* for the simplest of things – a new pair of shoes that fit my feet, a hot drink, and the privilege to warm oneself inside a heated room, or in the sunshine that *HaKadosh Boruch Hu* provides for us.

Not only were we enslaved and forced to work in very difficult jobs, but also we were marched five miles by the S.S. to work every morning in a group of about 150 women. The trip took at least two hours of walking each way from the place that we were stationed. The snow was way over our knees, and all we had to protect ourselves from the elements were our thin dresses (with no underwear or socks), and if we were fortunate, perhaps a light jacket. I was able to obtain a pair of gloves from a man who knew me, and I shared this pair with my friend, Miriam. We walked together arm in arm, each of us wearing one glove, and then holding hands with our ungloved hands.

None of us had the privilege of a warm pair of winter boots. Such an indulgence did not exist. We were all wearing borrowed shoes given to us by the

soldiers who had removed them from the Jews they had captured and murdered. Many of these shoes were full of holes, so worn over time from all of the walking we were forced to do. We would stuff our shoes with newspapers in a desperate attempt to keep the snow from flooding our shoes and most of us worked with wet feet all day long. The cold was as bitter as our experience and many of my fellow prisoners died as a result of these impossible conditions.

Lest you think that once we were at our jobs, we could warm ourselves inside the factory, I must tell you how we managed to wear a somewhat clean dress every day instead of wearing filthy clothing all week long.

Often, when our dresses would become too filthy to stand it one more day, we would go into the washroom of the factory and remove our dresses, wash them with the soap and water available in the washroom, and then, (*you're not going to believe this*), we would put our wet dresses back on, and work in the factory with our dresses drying on our bodies. Often, these dresses would stay wet all day long, and so now, you can only try to imagine why, when I returned from the two-hour frigid walk back to our barracks, and Marusha greeted me with a cup of hot soup, it did not matter to me that what I was really drinking was hot water and potato peels. To my frozen body, I was drinking life-saving nutrients. I suggest to you, when you throw away your potato peels and think of them as merely garbage, that you feel *hakoras hatov* for even this small item which kept me alive.

The very first job I was given in the munitions factor required that I hammer glass until it was reduced into small pieces. The S.S. gave me goggles to protect my eyes, but very often pieces of shattered glass got so close to my eyes, it was very frightening and painful, so much so, that I summoned the courage to ask for a different job. Of course the soldiers were very cruel and often we were placed in jobs that were arduous and life threatening, so my request was unlikely to be honored. In fact, often, the Germans delighted even more when they saw that we were in pain. Again, the *Ribono shel Olam* was kind to me, and I was transferred out of this job to different work in the factory.

It was this transfer to different work that led me, I am happy to say, to one of my closest life-long friends. As I was working at a machine, (I no longer remember for what purpose), next to me was a very presentable girl my age. I was 24 at that time. The girl told me her name was Miriam Zupnic.[4]

While we were in Reichenbach, I saw a man I recognized who was a tenant of my parents, a dentist named Morritz Gross. He was so happy to see me, he told me, 'I work for a man in the kitchen and I can help you with food.' Now, I have told you many times that I was and still am, a very *tsniusdic* person. Even in the concentration camp, on the verge of death every day, I never forgot that I was

4 After the war, I found Miriam and I helped marry off four of her girls to special people. Miriam lived in Lakewood, and she was a close friend to Rebbetzin Kotler. We stayed connected all of our lifetime, until I lost her when she was niftar just a couple of years ago.

a married woman. Therefore, I was not willing to accept a gift directly from Mr. Gross just for myself, no matter that it could be life-saving, because it could possibly be construed as giving him a message that I was interested in him. I was a very straight girl, and Yitzchok never had to worry about me. But I figured out a way that I could accept his gift without compromising myself.

Mr. Gross sent me a package to the factory where I worked, and in it were cigarettes, butter, bread, and some jam, along with a silver cigarette holder. I shared the package with my friend, Miriam, so this way it would be proper for me to receive a gift from a gentleman other than my husband. Although I enjoyed very much the food that he sent me (try to imagine please what bread, butter, and jam tasted like to me after a steady diet of potato peel soup), I refused to accept the cigarette holder. My husband had a similar item with the inscription, "I.S.", and coincidentally, this silver cigarette holder was also inscribed "I.S." It was too painful for me to own an item that was so similar to that of my husband's, so I gave this gift to Miriam. (She managed to hold on to it throughout her imprisonment until liberation, and upon her death, her children inherited it). Miriam and I became as close as sisters. We even exchanged dresses because each of us was wearing the same dress every day for an entire year, and so this way we could wear something different once in awhile.

Even as I tell you about the difficulties we were enduring, I want you to know that I never lost my optimism that soon, this ordeal would be behind us, and we would regain

our lives. In fact, because *bitachon* was, and is, in my nature, the girls would love to sit around me at night, when they needed extra *chizzuk* to get through another night.

After several months in Reichenbach our prayers were answered, bringing us one step closer to liberation, as we were transferred out of Reichenbach, to a new working camp in Germany, called Porta.

In Porta they put me in the kitchen. The kitchen is the best job you can get in the camps because you were able to nosh and get extra food. My sister-in-law, Zisu was still with me, and she was becoming very frail from hunger. I feared that she was becoming so weak, she would not survive. I was much stronger than her at this time, (after liberation, the doctors commented that I was one of the few survivors they'd ever seen who did not go down to skin and bones), so I gave her my kitchen job and volunteered to clean the house of the chief S.S. lady- Schneider.

Now, on the surface, this story may appear as if it was put in place just so that my sister-in-law would survive. But Hashem had an even bigger plan, and it turned out, placing me into this cleaning job allowed me to help save even more Jewish lives. I will explain.

To this day, anyone who knows me knows that I insist on keeping a clean house. This desire has always been with me, and it surely saved my life as a prisoner in the Holocaust. My boss, the S.S. lady, was pleased with my work, and she kept asking me what I did in my home and what my parents did, and we had many conversations. She noticed that I

didn't have any experience in scrubbing floors (growing up, we always had maids for this purpose), and so I was very grateful when she found someone else to do this job.

I have one very sweet memory of my time spent working for this S.S. woman. One day, she tells me that she wants to visit another town on bicycle and she asks me if I will ride the bicycle for her. My goodness, I did not even know how to ride a bicycle but what was I to do, say no? As we rode, we passed a big apple tree with apples falling all over the ground. We stopped and walked by the tree, and I said to this woman, 'I have a very interesting story for you. Do you want to hear it?' She said, 'Yes.' I told her, my parents had apple trees in the garden but we children never ate the fruit from those trees because my father only wanted to give the fruit to the poor. This impressed her very much. She asked me if I wanted to pick up any apples from the ground and I eagerly accepted. I picked three apples. Perhaps I could have picked more, but I didn't dare.

When I look back on my Holocaust journey, of course my mind fills with much grief and occurrences I wish to forget. I must say though, that there are also incidents which I feel very good about, and because of which my life has had greater meaning. For example, the friendship I formed with Miriam, or the moments when I made decisions to uphold my *tznius*. I never completely lost myself, and the essence of Esther Bella Schonkopf – this, the Nazis could not take away from me! I found courage I never knew I had, like when I ran away from the ghetto,

or when I insisted that Mengele select me for work. From where did this courage come? From *HaKadosh Boruch Hu*, and my intense desire to see my son, Asher, again. What follows is a story of one of those moments that fills me with joy when I think about it. Even in the darkest of times, if we look for it, we can find, and create, light.

One morning the S.S. woman who was my boss ordered us to line up. When we were called for a selection, it was always frightening because we never knew what it meant. With me were six sisters from Chust, the Gruenzweig girls. They were extremely close to each other, and it was miraculous that they had all survived and were still together. In the line up, the S.S. woman separated them. They were screaming and crying. I got the guts to ask the S.S. lady not to separate them. She screamed at me, 'how do you dare ask me to do this?' I said, 'they are my cousins and I knew you would do it for me, as you are so pleased with my cleaning for you and because I keep your toilets so clean!' *Can you believe I said such a thing to her?* In the end, she did me this favor. These sisters were not separated, and they all survived the war. After the war, in Prague, their brother, Dovid Gruenzweig, who also survived, expressed his sincerest thanks for risking my life for his sisters. [5]

5 These sisters now live in New York (besides Pearl who died in New York after a serious illness.) Dovid is the right hand man of the Bobover Rebbe in Boro Park. He visits the White House often regarding Jewish matters. One sister, "Freidy" is married to a rabbi in Brooklyn, one sister is now named "Raizy Rubin, (not mishpacha), and Eta Flem, a third sister still alive is a close friend whom I see when I live in Miami.

After a few more months, we were transported to Bendorf, Germany by train. I was still with my friend, Miriam, and also Yitzchok's sister, Zisu, and they remained with me until liberation.[6] My friend, Miriam, saved my life, and my *hakoros hatov* knows no bounds when I think of what she did for me. This is a real friend.

In Bendorf, I was assigned an impossible job, digging into the hard soil with a shovel. In my run down condition, with no more food a day but a slice of bread with a bit of jam, and a cup of coffee, I did not know how I would survive the demands on my worn-out body. Many of the remaining prisoners died, so close to liberation, because their bodies were not strong enough for this work. Miriam had a golden watch that she had somehow managed to hide all throughout our concentration camp imprisonment. Ah, I cry sweet tears whenever I think of what she did for me. When she saw how much I was suffering with the work, she bribed the S.S. man in charge with the watch, offering it to him if he would reassign me to easier work. He took the watch, and indeed, he changed my job. *That was the last possession Miriam owned in her life, and she gave it away for me.* I have pictures of us dancing at a wedding together, and we constantly twinkled our eyes at each other, as if to say, 'look what we did, look what we survived to see!'

I felt that we were getting closer and closer to liberation,

6 Zisu married after the war and lives in Toronto and has three married children, and grandchildren and great grandchildren.

although we had no real knowledge of this. From Bendorf, we were transferred again by train to Hamburg. At this time, I lost contact with Miriam and Zisu, so I was all by myself. In Hamburg we did not work. We were worried at first that this was a very bad sign, because in the war, those who didn't work, were murdered. If we were not useful to the Germans, then we feared they would just dispose of us because to the Nazis, our life meant nothing unless we could make their lives better through our work. I refused to give the Satan a chance to get a hold of me, so even in these conditions, I never stopped talking about good things. Fellow prisoners surrounded me and listened to me all day long, wanting to believe my words of encouragement. In the morning, we ate our one piece of bread and a drop of jam that meant so much, and drank some black coffee. At least it was real coffee, and not dirty leaves cooked in water and called "coffee". Then we fasted the rest of the day. We prayed, and hoped, and grieved our losses; we all just tried to survive one more day.

Around August of 1944, after only a few weeks in Hamburg, they packed us again on the trains. We didn't know where we were going, and this time, we couldn't get off the train for a few days. I don't know how we survived. They stopped the train on the way a few times so that we could get off the train to urinate, but we were so dehydrated, this wasn't even necessary. Many of us were too ill to even have the strength to get off of the train when we were given the opportunity. On one

stop, we saw that a more lenient group of soldiers, the Vermacht, were now mixing with the S.S. soldiers, and I felt instinctively, that better times were ahead, although none of us really knew if this was just another incident of being *shlepped* from one place to another. Then I saw Red Cross trains passing us and I was even more hopeful.

By this time, most of us were down to skin and bones, and seriously sick, on the verge of death. We were humiliated and depressed. They had stripped us of everything we cared about and enjoyed, and our bodies couldn't take it anymore. Few of us escaped the black depression that led to no hope, and total apathy. I occupied myself all day long with thoughts about my child waiting for me at home.

I remember a beautiful woman from Holland, Maria, who stood up for me on the train when I was being harassed about my legs being too long and getting in someone's way. After all we'd been through, there were actually people harassing me about my legs. When I think of this, I cry, it is so sad what the Germans turned our people into, but I also must be forgiving as well, because the people who were upset with me had been through something so horrible, and who knows what they lost. They were perhaps entitled to their outburst, although at the time it hurt me very much. I finally managed to squeeze my legs in somewhere and then I didn't move for most of the trip.

Finally, after something like two or three days travel,

the train rolled to a stop. We had no idea where we were. The *Vermacht* came in and the Danish people rushed on to the train, congratulating us and saying, 'You are lucky, you survived, you are free!'

Just as we did not believe that all that the Nazis did to us and our families was possible, at this moment as well, we did not feel that freedom from death was possible. This day occurred shortly before the official liberation – I do not remember the actual date – and we were all in a daze. When they opened up the train, perhaps they were hoping we would all jump up and down in excitement and gratitude for being rescued, but most of the passengers on the train were close to death.

I remember very clearly the first thing that got me truly excited. I will tell you about it in the next chapter. I have recalled all that I wish to tell, for now, of my concentration camp ordeal. Now we move on to happier stories, although always, even in the joyous moments of reuniting with Asher and Yitzchok, never far from me was the intense grief from all we had lost – most of my family, all of our possessions, our livelihood, our city, and our genuine faith in human beings as being essentially good. We survived to see the official end of the war, but it has taken me all of my life to recover from the damage I have just shared with you.

Truth be told, I have not ever, and will never, fully recover from what was done to my family and to me. I have had the privilege though of living a long, fruitful life, and the satisfaction of the sweetest revenge of all – living

old enough to see my great-grandchildren born. Esther Bella Schonkopf, the young girl born to her beloved holy parents in Uzhorod, did die to some extent. The blessed life she was supposed to live with her family was stolen from her by evil, murderous, human beings.

But reborn from the holocaust is a Esther Bella who appreciates every day of the life *HaKodesh Boruch Hu* has granted her. She got off that train in Denmark, starving, exhausted, humiliated, grief-stricken, and alone. But she did not, and would not, remain stuck in bitterness and anger. She moved on to build a beautiful life with her beloved husband and son, as you will soon learn. That new Esther Bella Rubin Schonkopf carries all of her family with her every day, still cries over her loss, and lives every day for those in her family who were not given the same opportunity.

Allow me now to share with you the beautiful life that this broken, but determined Esther created with her beloved Yitzchok and Asher in her new start on life.

Just as it was important to me that you, my family, know of the terrible losses I endured, I want you also to know of the life I rebuilt from the ashes of the crematorium. It is not of my own doing, but the family's spirit that lived through me, and inspired me, to reach once again for beauty, prosperity, a *Torahdik* life, and above all else, close family. Asher deserved this, and I am very grateful to say, he received it.

Baruch Hashem.

Chapter Seven

I promised that I would tell you what got me truly excited when we arrived in Denmark. Perhaps you were expecting something like the taste of real food, or a warm bath, or the most important thing of all – finding my husband and son. These wishes and appreciations would all come later. The sweetest memory I have of this moment still makes me smile when I think about it.

Some Danish ladies with the Vehrmacht opened the doors and came in to the train. They announced to us: 'You are in Denmark; Count Bernadotte (the main general from Denmark) sponsored all of you.' We were all lying in the train, squished together like sardines, unable to move, so dehydrated and ill, we couldn't even speak, let along jump up and dance a celebration. These were very well intentioned women but they really didn't have a clue what we'd been through, and I'm sure they were horrified at what they saw.

Soon these women left and then came back with sandwiches packed in beautiful white parchment paper.

This is what I remember so vividly: I was not so excited about eating the sandwiches. I was too sick to even care

about food. But the parchment paper? This lifted my spirits more than any food could have.

I thought to myself, 'Oh, we are human again.' I remember being happier seeing the way the sandwiches were packed than any thought of eating them. For so long, the Germans had treated us worse than dogs. Pets were treated much better than we were. We were treated like zoo animals, vermin, the lowest of the low, no better than a rat. You don't feed such an animal a sandwich wrapped in parchment. If rats are lucky enough to find food, they rummage through other people's strewn garbage and they eat what human beings throw away.

This was the first time in so many months that I felt that someone other than fellow Jews saw me as a human being, and treated me with kindness. It was a joyous experience amidst such pain. I still feel something special when I see white parchment, even after all these years.

The Danes took us into quarantine in a huge building and had a doctor examine each one of us. We were told not to eat much as our stomachs had shrunk and we would easily become ill from not being able to digest the food. I was admitted to the hospital, (I don't remember the name of the hospital) due to my run down condition. I remember the doctor saying, 'make sure you don't let yourself go, as we have many deaths here of people who collapsed after they got freed.'

This doctor – I wish I remembered his name, but I don't – told me, 'be strong, keep your eyes closed and

rest your nerves.' I cannot imagine what it was like for this doctor to see so many survivors in such deplorable condition. There were so many who had no idea of the torture we were enduring, and it must have come as such a shock to see our skeletal, sick bodies, and for so many of us, thankfully not me, our devastated spirits as well.

B'ezras Hashem, I also remember the doctors commenting on how much better my body was than so many other prisoners who were nothing but bones. Although I needed medical attention, I was not in life-threatening condition, and for this I am eternally grateful to the *Ribono shel Olam*. The doctors fed me intravenously with fluids and vitamins, and very slowly reintroduced my body to eating food. Tragically, so many Jews died right in the hospital from the mere attempt to eat food when their bodies were not ready to handle it. For so many of my fellow survivors, it was such an enormous tragedy, to survive the tortuous conditions of the camps, and then to die soon after liberation from nothing more than trying to replenish their strength. I feel such pain when I think of it, and such gratitude that I was spared.

My sister-in-law, Zisu was with me and many other survivors in this hospital. The mood was both happy and somber to feel that we survived and we had a chance to go on with life, but we were also all very concerned about whether we would find the rest of our family, and many of us were so sick, so close to dying. I never thought I was going to die. I am a big believer now that Hashem will help me and then, as well, I believed I would fully

recuperate and see my husband and son again. I was full of hope, but also anxiety and grief.

With substantial medical help and much loving kindness from the nurses and doctors, I recuperated enough in about two weeks to leave the hospital. Zisu recovered as well, and she and I were then transferred to Sweden-Heilsingbourg, a large city where we were put into quarantine (see photo of people in the streets staring at the Jews by the window in quarantine), in a huge building. We were not allowed to leave that building because of the quarantine. We were there at least four weeks, and then we were transferred to Karactreen. All this time, I was growing in physical strength, and increasingly anxious to find out where my husband and son were, and to see them again.

In Karactreen, we were still in quarantine and told that we couldn't mix with the people, so that we wouldn't spread any sicknesses. By this time, I looked good and my weight was much better than most, and I was really not that sick.

As we regained our physical health, it became increasingly urgent to all of us survivors to find our loved ones. The Red Cross was very helpful, and they kept announcing the names of the survivors on the radio, from 7-10 P.M. Zisu and I stayed by the radio, night after night and listened to the names. I waited to hear a Rubin or Schonkopf, but in vain.

I say these words, and I think, those of you reading

this, can never imagine what it was like to have your ear to a radio listening with hope and fervent prayer for the miraculous news that a loved one had survived. Or the pain that was in my heart each night when I would not hear the names I longed to hear. It was a devastating and frightening time, with nothing I can compare it to in modern life. These days, we make a big fuss if we have to wait for the repairman to arrive. Oh, the waiting and waiting we did, for any sign, whatsoever, of good news.

Some days later I *finally* heard them announce "Schonkopf." I called out loud, 'I heard Ignatz Schonkopf.' But all around me the other survivors said, 'it is only your imagination.' Then finally, someone else heard it too and I knew it was true.

It was a tremendous joy to me to hear my husband's name. I wanted to see him immediately, right then, not wait another minute. But I knew we both needed time to recuperate. Yitzchok was probably listening for my name on the radio as well and before too long, I got the first of several cables (telegrams) with even further proof that I would soon be reunited with my beloved husband. (You will find photographs of these cables at the back of this book).

The first cable arrived in Sweden from my sister, Perl Friedman, who lived in Sibiu, Romania, telling me that 'Yitzchok is alive and he is well.' They also sent him a cable, telling him that Esther and Zisu survived and are well.

Take a moment to imagine these cables, which you can see in the back of the book. Look at how little information they contain. We didn't have email, the Internet, use of phones, even the ability to send a letter full of detail. We waited all these months hoping and praying that our loved ones had survived, and then in one moment, in only a few words of a telegram, we see the words we've prayed for: 'Yitzchok is alive.' We want to know so much more, but we can't, because all we have is the simple words on that very basic telegram. It was at once a joyous moment and also extremely agitating, because the process of reunion was agonizingly, torturously slow. Yitzchok and I had to go through the weeks of regaining our health and quarantine before we could be reunited. It was like fasting for days on end, seeing a cake in the window that we are told we can have eventually, and needing to wait just awhile longer till we could eat it.

Our efforts to reconnect were also thwarted by the serious obstacle that the public transportation system had largely been destroyed by the war. It wasn't like it is now, where you can basically pick any place in the entire world that you want to visit, and find a way to get there. First my husband and I had to become healthy enough to travel, and then we had to find a place to meet that we could both find transportation to, and meanwhile, we had to figure all of this out without being able to pick up a phone and talk to one another! Believe me, nothing was simple.

Eventually, I also received the most important cable of all, telling me that my child, Asher was with my sister

and Mr. Deutsch, and he was well. I cannot describe to you now how impatient I was to hold him once again in my arms. From the moment I received these cables, I took all these very intense feelings and I channeled these emotions very early in the morning into my prayer. The feeling I had when I prayed was very special. I felt Hashem's closeness to me, and I could hear Him saying, 'do you see what I did for you?' I cried throughout the whole *davening*, every morning. (And sometimes I still do!) Truthfully, it was with mixed feelings, happiness and grief that I prayed. I was about to see my son and husband again - what joy. And close to my heart was also, my intense, impossible to accept or comprehend, loss. I never heard the name Rubin on the nightly radio broadcast, and I was coming to terms with the knowledge that I had lost my beloved parents and siblings, nieces and nephews. It was too much to bear. I turned to Hashem to help me navigate through these very emotional waters, and I gave Him my tears. I have been giving Him my tears all these years.

There was one more detour in my tumultuous journey from the concentration camps to seeing my family. Many Swedish families sponsored a couple of survivors to help them recuperate. They gave us each a coat, dress and pair of shoes. (You see from the photos that I wore a beautiful white coat in Sweden). My sister-in-law, Zisu and I became guests of a family in Heilsingbourg, Sweden; "Bredaryd" was their last name.

At first they didn't believe me, that I was a prisoner from a concentration camp, because they had seen these

terrible photos in the newspaper and I was not all skin and bones like those photos, and also, because they believed from the cartoons they had seen that all Jews have long noses, and mine was a normal nose! But when I told them my story, then they believed me. They lived on the Oresund Ocean, and were a well-to-do-family. They took us swimming in the morning, and were very kind to us. Even after all these years, I still think of them often. The family consisted of a husband and wife, the wife's sister, and young children, 5 - 8 years old. Being around these young children made me yearn for my son all the more.

We had no choice in the concentration camps but to eat whatever we needed to in order to survive, but after liberation, and after regaining my health in the hospital, I immediately committed to keeping kosher. Many survivors, sadly, gave up their faith and their religious practices because of their ordeal. This idea never occurred to me for a second. We were a deeply religious family, and I knew that I must carry on the practices of my family, now, more than ever, because my family was no longer alive to do these mitzvahs. It rested with me and my sisters to live as religious Jews, not only for us, but also, for my holy family members who no longer had this privilege. [7]

7 When I arrived in America, I cried joyously every time I lit my Shabbos candles. I thanked Hashem that I was able to regain my religion, and *bitachon* like I had before. I always prayed that I would once again light my candles, and it was very emotional to me when I did. I felt that Hashem had answered "Amen" to my prayers, and had restored me to my former level of *bitachon*, and that of my parents. Ever since then, I have had a very strong feeling of Hashem guiding me always.

The problem I had was that the Swedish family we were staying with was not Jewish, and they were unable to get kosher food. We didn't want to insult them, but Zisu and I told them that while we stayed by them, we would only eat potatoes (potatoes again!), and vegetables, and cold dairy. Under no circumstances would we eat non-kosher meat, even though we were supposed to be regaining our strength and I'm sure the iron would have helped. Still, this was not a compromise we were willing to make after liberation. This very kind family was so cooperative; they did not have meat for the entire time that we were with them. When they wanted meat, they went to a restaurant!

So, here we were, liberated from the camps, and I was in the kitchen cooking potatoes in a pot for dinner! Now, I think this is quite funny. I'm sure at the time I was quite tired of potatoes, but then again, I was still so grateful for the smallest of pleasures and privileges – being able to cook my own meal, in a pot, mixed with spices, and to then serve it on a plate with a napkin and a fork! Such luxury!

In Sweden, we were not able to keep the Sabbath, but we were grateful for the packages of used clothing sent to us, and I always made sure I was modestly covered. I remember in Stockholm, there was a wonderful family who heard about us, and they sent us packages of old clothing, and I'm laughing as I remember this now because I give away so much better when I give away used clothes. But at that time, after wearing a single dirty dress for so many months in concentration camps, it was

a much-appreciated luxury to have more than one dress to choose from.

I remember one Shabbat we tried to keep in Sweden. We were invited to the home of very prominent Jewish people and Zisu and I enjoyed a wonderful Friday night seudah, the first one in such a long time. The next morning, after breakfast at 8 A.M., the father took a bunch of keys and excused himself and said he was going to open the store. He apologized, saying, 'We have to do this, but we keep Shabbos in the house!'

We were with the Bredaryd family for quite awhile, and then finally I received a cable from Yitzchok telling me that he was in Prague, Czech Republic, at a hotel, waiting for me, and that I should come there as soon as possible.

Can you imagine such a thing? Truly unbelievable.

At the end of 1945, in December, I was finally able to make arrangements to travel by train, with Zisu, my husband's sister, from Sweden to Prague. And so, I prepared to meet my husband once again, and his sister prepared to meet her surviving brother, after we were all separated for a year and a half.

Of course, it goes without even saying, that I couldn't wait to see him. If I just think about it even today, it brings me a chill. I also laugh at myself when I think about what I did. I felt that when I met my husband for the first time in so very long, I must bring him a gift, a very special gift. Goodness, my being alive was

the only gift that he needed, but at the time, it was very important to me to bring something special for him. So I bought him a beautiful box of Swiss chocolates in a cigarette box. And believe me, it wasn't so easy to purchase these chocolates. I remember I had to trade my coupons in for them! I was thinking to myself, 'Oh, he'll be so happy to receive these chocolates!' Of course now that I look back on this, I laugh at my peculiar idea, but at the time, it felt very important to me. It was also a wondrous feeling to be doing something so normal – purchasing chocolates for my husband – a simple act of love that we completely took for granted until the Nazis took all of that away from us.

I don't remember the dress I wore, but I know that I chose it with great care, and over it, I wore the beautiful white coat given to me in Sweden. It was in my nature to always look as neat as possible. My Papa, Z"l lived by sayings in the Gemara; one in particular comes to mind: "When coming into a new place where people don't know you, one must dress his best to give a good impression." My mother and father's regal nature was imbedded in me, and whenever I went into the public, I tried to dress to their standards. Now, I was going to meet my husband, even more so! My hair was covered in a nice kerchief because of course there was no such thing as a *sheitle* for me then, and covering my hair was essential!

Yitzchok was at the railroad when I arrived in Prague. Remember there were no cell phones back then so it wasn't like I could call him from the train and let him

know that I'd be there in a few minutes! I can only imagine what was on his mind as he stood there, with his friend, for who knows how long, waiting for his wife to arrive on the train. *Such a simple thing. So many, many Jews who were never given this bracha.*

I stepped off the train and when I saw Yitzchok, I knew immediately it was him. He had recuperated in a hospital in Romania and although he had been down to 90 pounds, only bones, since liberation, he had put on some weight and he wasn't as skinny anymore. As soon as I saw him, I cried from happiness. This was a very historical moment for us. His friend (a builder, still alive in Monsey) was with him to witness this moment.

What do you think my first question was for Yitzchok? Perhaps this helps you understand even more how deeply committed I was to our religion. My first question for Yitzchok was, 'are you still religious after all this?' He said, 'Yes, of course, what kind of question is that?'

His response was a big comfort to me. Although I was, of course, so relieved that he had survived the war, I had seen so many religious Jews give up their halachic observance after the camps, I didn't know what I would do if my husband had reacted similarly. Still to this day, I hear so clearly my Papa pouring over his *tehilim* early every morning, singing a tune that still rings in my ears. *Dayenu*, we were reunited, both of us fairly healthy considering the ordeal. *Dayenu* that soon, as I will tell in the next chapter, we would find our son Asher again. And triple *Dayenu*

that neither of us waivered in our commitment to Torah, not even one iota, after all we had each been through. We were tested, and tested, and tested over and over again, and we passed with, as they say now, 'flying colors.'

Although my personal losses still haunted me, for that moment I was deliriously happy, and Hashem was very near to me.



After liberation in Sweden. The Refugees were put in quarantine.



In Sweden, Esther seen in window wearing her first new coat.



In Sweden, Esther with Blanka Kibovitz, a friend, who gave her money. See the telegram sent from Sibiu, instructing Esther to seek Blanka for this purpose.



In Sweden, Esther is in back row 2nd from left. Her sister-in-law (Zicu) is 3rd to Esther's right.



Esther and Zisu with their gentile hosts in Sweden (two sister-in-laws themselves). For many years, Esther sent them gifts to show appreciation for their kindness. They lived by them for about six months.



In Sweden with other Jewish survivors.



In Sweden, Esther is in the middle row wearing white, left of the soldier. Zicu is on to row, 4th from right, wearing white.



The daughters of Rabbi Grunzwieg, that Esther saved from separation by intervening with the S.S. lady on their behalf.



Asher - in Prague wearing clothing his mother brought from Sweden.



Esther and Yitzchok reunited in Prague.



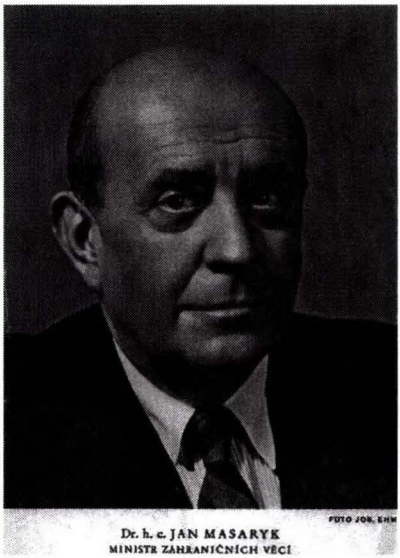
Asher about 2.5 years old in Prague right after war.

Esther and Yitzchok and unnamed man to the left in Prague.





Yitzchok in Prague with unnamed man.



Jan Masaryk, a Czech political figure found dead 14 meters below his second-story bathroom window at Cernin Palace - the Czech Foreign Ministry, two weeks after the Communists seized power. As described in the book, this causes the Jews to feel unsecured in Prague and pushed Esther and her family to immigrate to America.



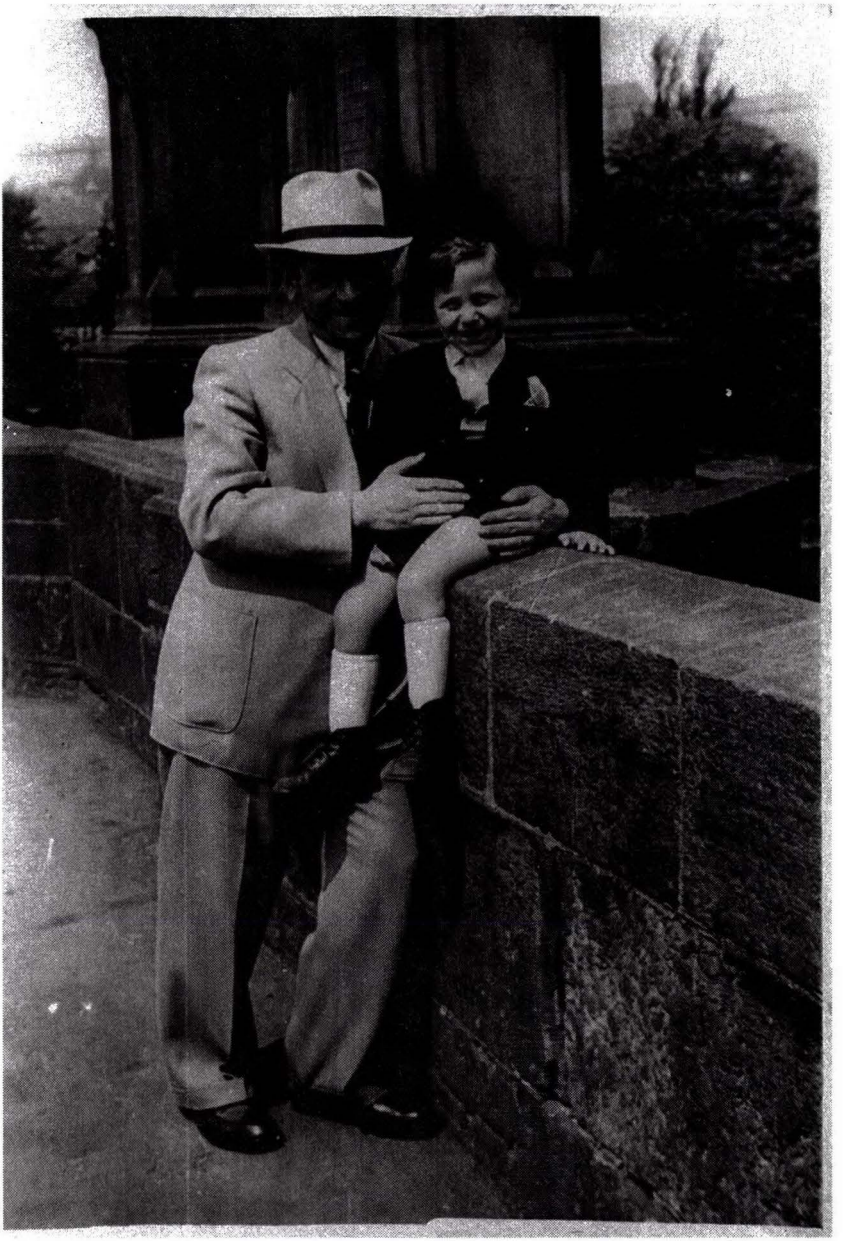
Yitzchok, Esther, Zicu and Asher in Prague.



Father and son in Prague.

Prague on Karls Bridge.





A joyous father and son in Prague.



In Prague, Esther, Asher,
and Chani Deutsch, Zisu (Bergita).



Shmilku Friedman, Husband of Esther's sister Piri (Perl Basha).

Piri and Shmilku in Prague.





Left to right, Yitzchok, Esther, Bashi (Goldbaum), Piri.



Yitzchok and Asher with Zicu in Prague on Karls bridge.



Esther and Zicu in Prague.



In Karlsbad, man on the left is Mr. Shtranger from Lugano.



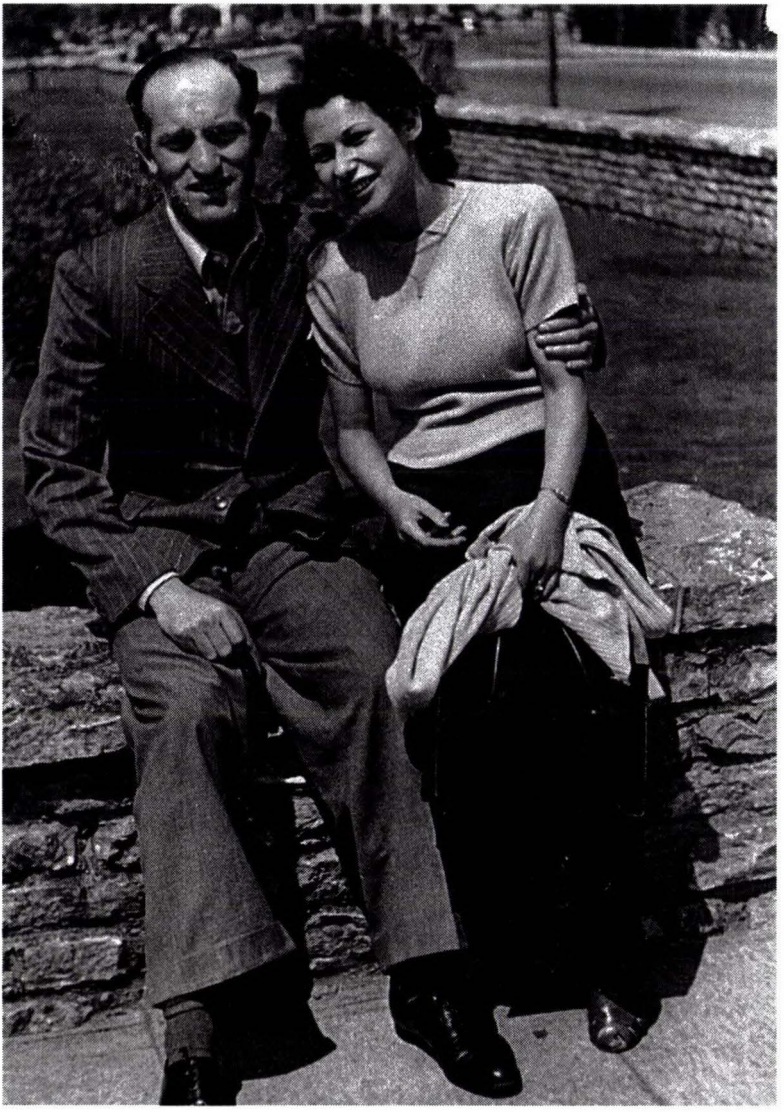
In Karlsbad drinking their famous mineral water.



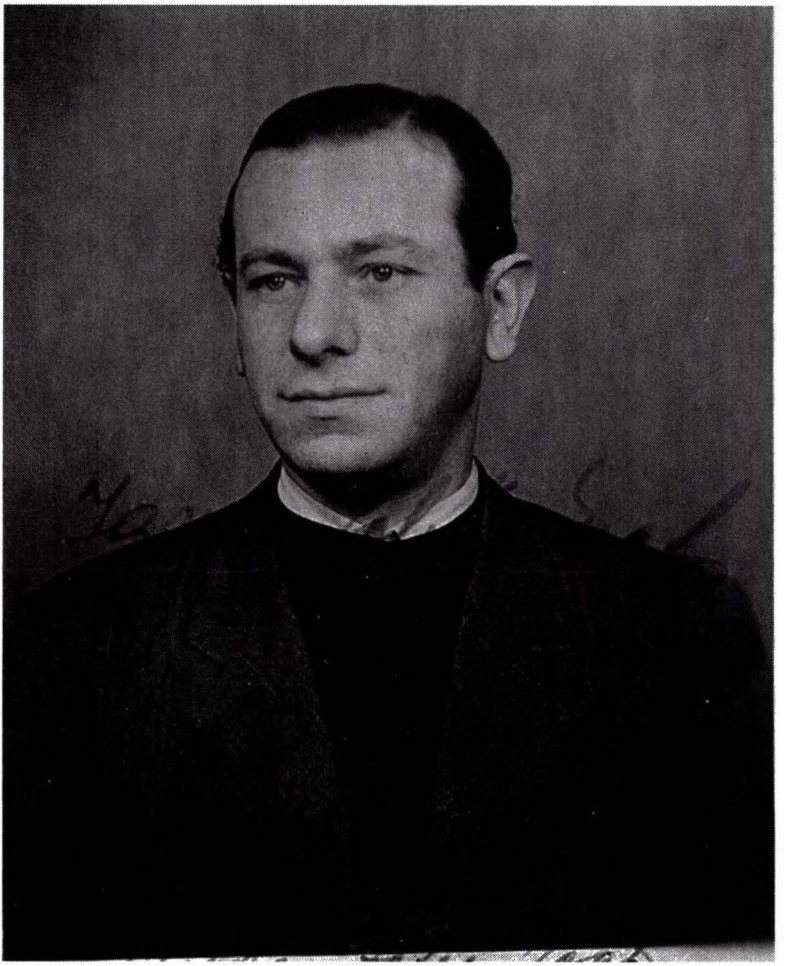
Asher in Karlsbad.



Right to left, Yitzchok, Ferry Joseph (son of Pessel Joseph, a sister of Yankel Rubin), Asher.



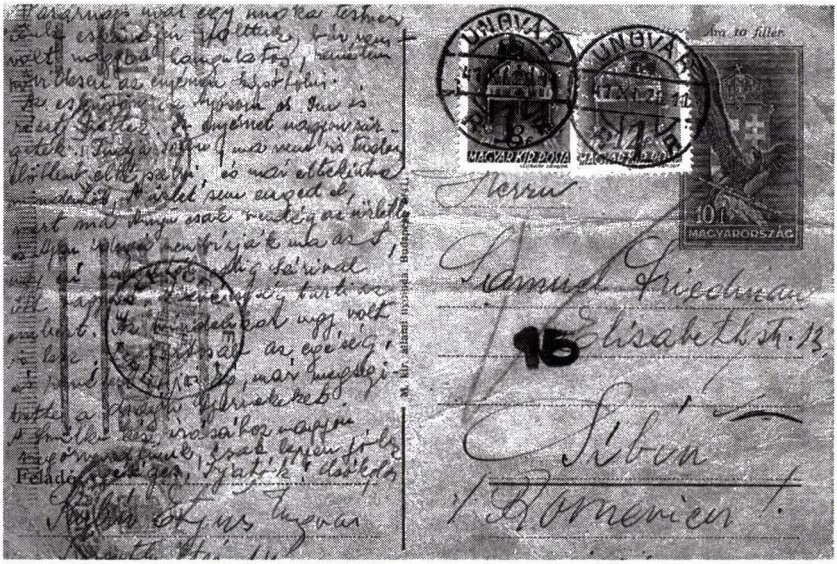
Jack and Tony Stern from London, son of Leibish Stern.



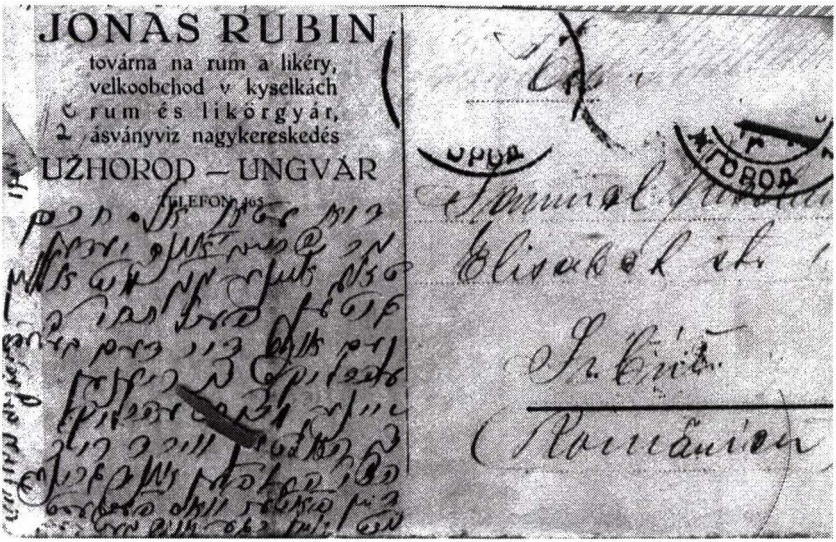
Yitzchok posing for a visa picture looking like a 'Rabbi'.



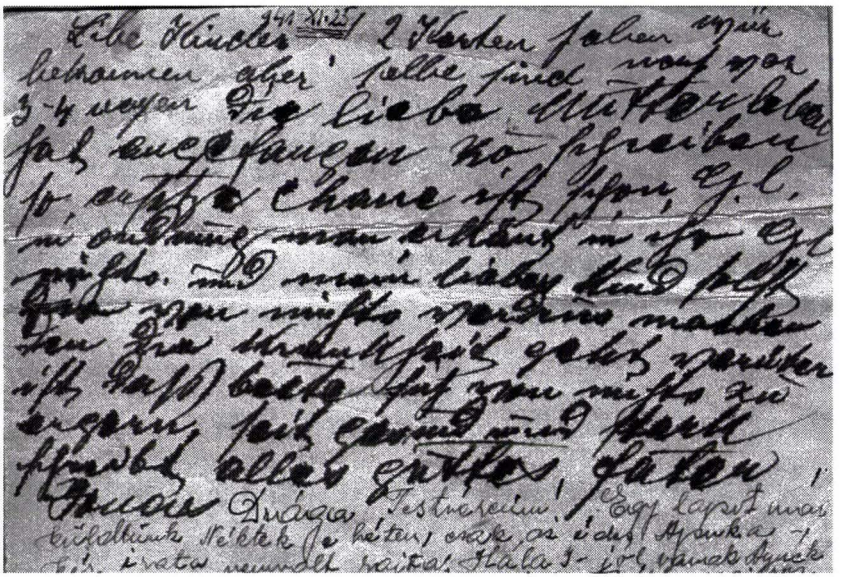
Yitzchok's government ID photo.



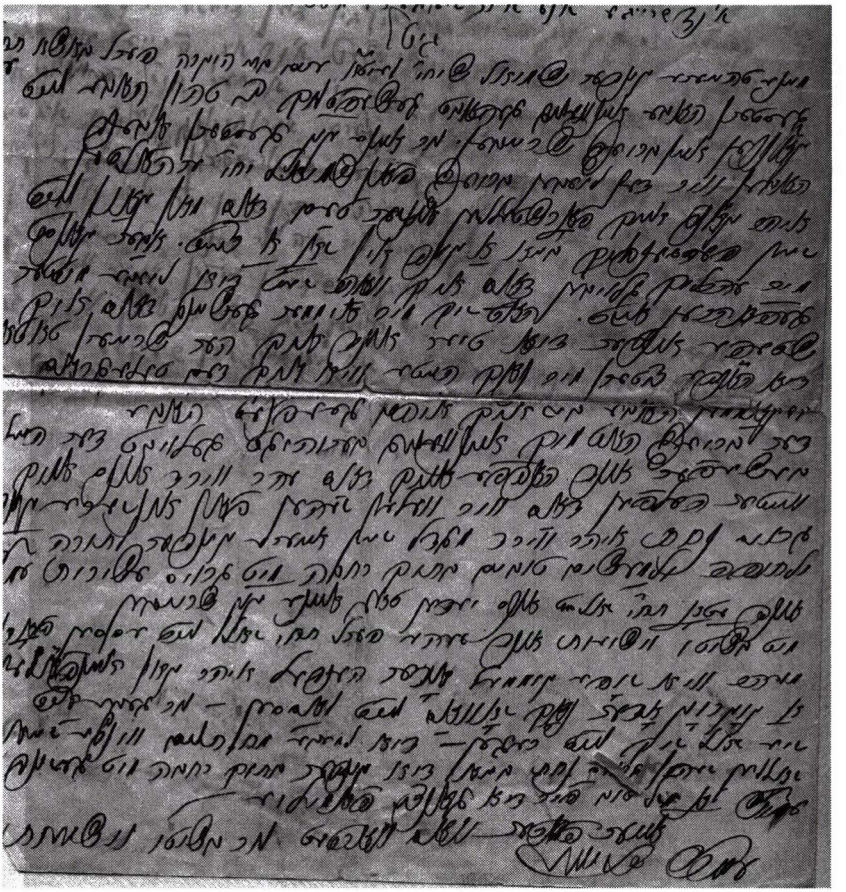
Postcard sent to Sibiu by Esther's father, Yankel Rubin. Piri (Esther's sister) had a baby and Esther went to help her while her mother stayed behind to help another sister who also had a baby.



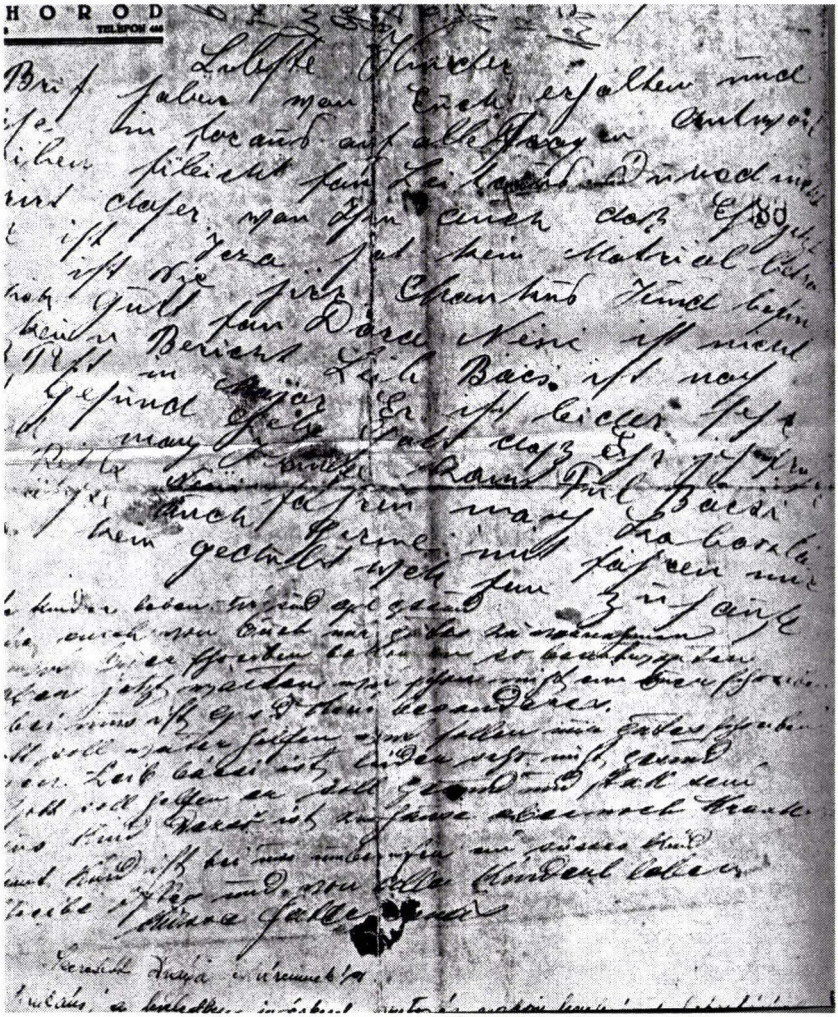
Postcard from Papa to Sibiu.



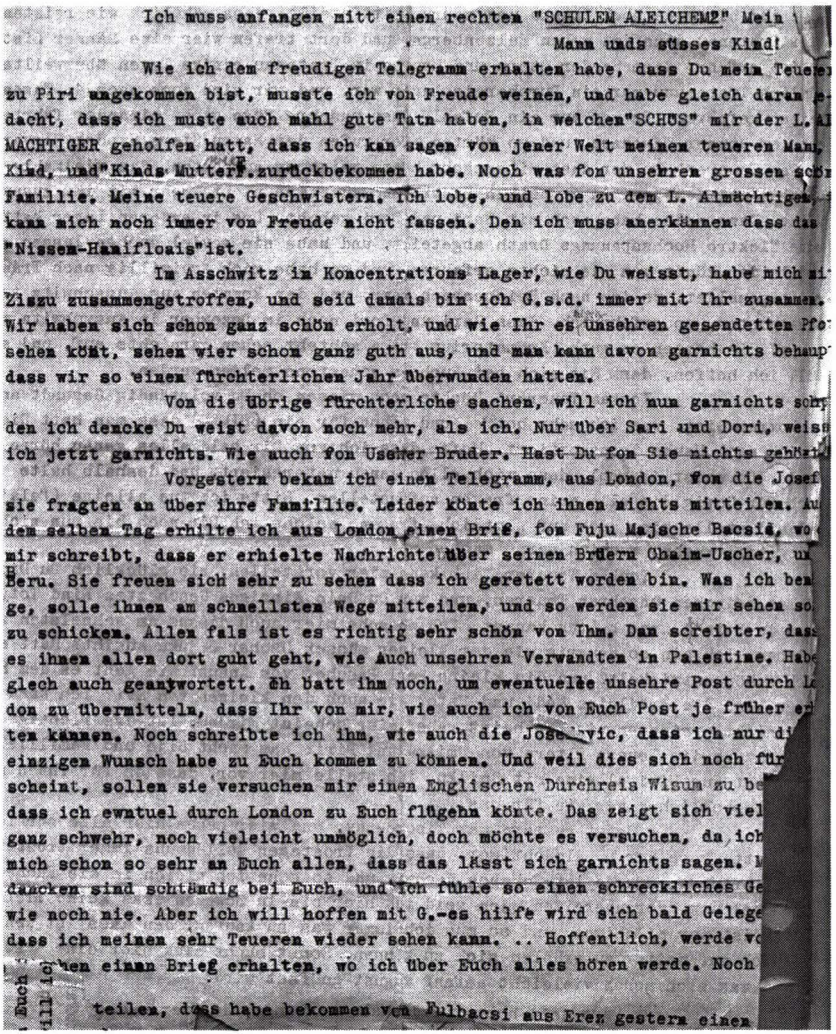
Letter from parents to Sibiu.



Yiddish letter from Papa to Sibiu.

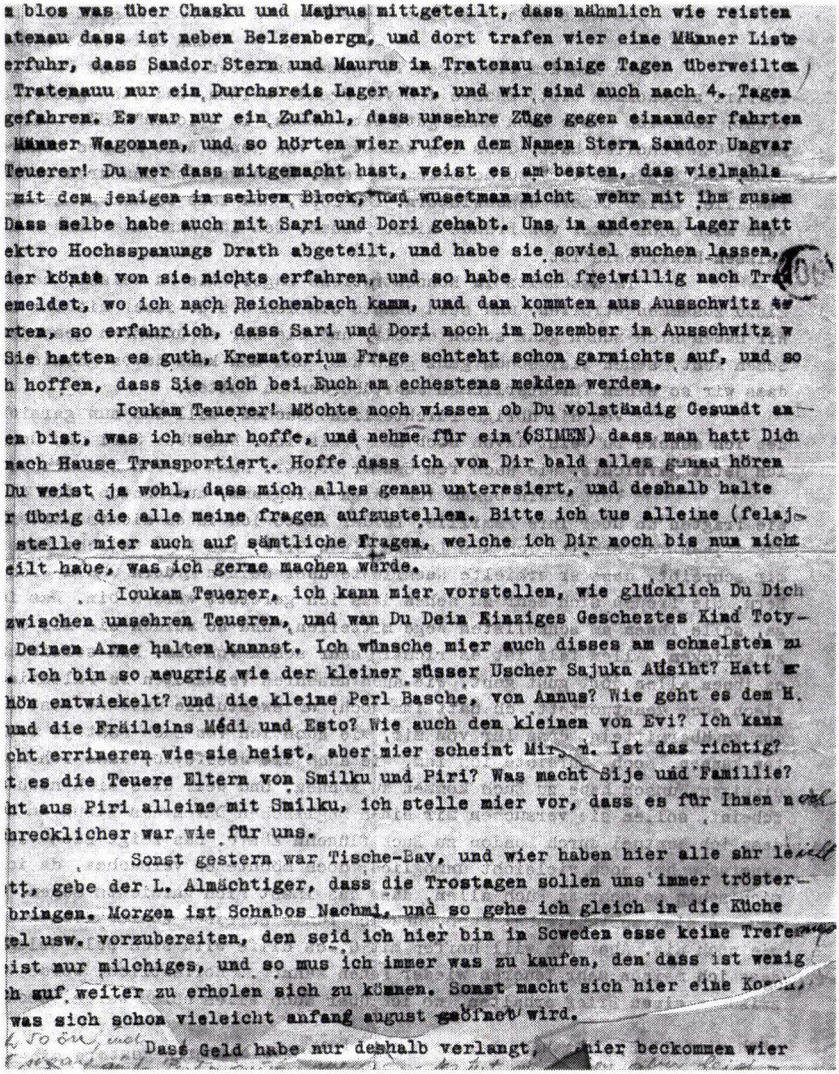


Mama's handwriting on top, papa's handwriting on bottom.



Ich muss anfangen mitt einen rechten "SCHULEM ALEICHEM2" Mein
Mann unds süsses Kind!
Wie ich dem freudigen Telegramm erhalten habe, dass Du mein Teuere
zu Piri ungekommen bist, musste ich von Freude weinen, und habe gleich daran
dacht, dass ich muste auch mahl gute Tatn haben, in welchen"SCHUS" mir der L. A
MÄCHTIGER geholfen hatt, dass ich kan sagen von jener Welt meinem teueren Mann,
Kind, und"Kinds Mutterf.zurückbekommen habe. Nooh was fon unsehren grossen sch
Famillie. Meine teuere Geschwistern. Ich lobe, und lobe zu dem L. Almächtigen,
kann mich noch immer von Freude nicht fassen. Den ich muss anerkännen dass das
"Nissen-Hanifloais"ist.
Im Asschwitz im Koncentrations Lager, wie Du weisst, habe mich mi
Ziszu zusammengetroffen, und seid damals bin ich G.s.d. immer mit Ihr zusammen.
Wir haben sich schon ganz schön erholt, und wie Ihr es unsehren gesendetten Pf
sehen könt, sehen wier schon ganz guth aus, und man kann davon garnichts behaup
dass wir so einen fürchterlichen Jahr überwunden hatten.
Von die übrige fürchterliche sachen, will ich nun garnichts sch
den ich demcke Du weist davon noch mehr, als ich. Nur über Sari und Dori, weis
ich jetzt garnichts. Wie auch fon Ussher Bruder. Hast Du fon Sie nichts gehör
Vorgestern bekam ich einen Telegramm, aus London, fon die Josef
sie fragten an über ihre Famillie. Leider könte ich ihnen nichts mitteilen. Au
dem selben Tag erhilte ich aus London einen Brief, fon Fuju Majsche Bacsia, wo
mir schreibt, dass er erhielte Nachrichte über seinen Brüern Chaim-Uscher, u
Beru. Sie freuen sich sehr zu sehen dass ich geretett worden bin. Was ich ben
ge, solle ihnen am schnellsten Wege mitteilen, und so werden sie mir sehen so
zu schicken. Allen fals ist es richtig sehr schön von Ihm. Dan screibter, dass
es ihnen allen dort guht geht, wie Auch unsehren Verwandten in Palestime. Habe
glech auch geantwortett. Ich batt ihm noch, um ewentuelle unsehre Post durch L
don zu übermittels, dass Ihr von mir, wie auch ich von Euch Post je früher e
ten kännen. Noch schreibte ich ihm, wie auch die Jos[illegible]vic, dass ich nur di
einzigen Wunsch habe zu Euch kommen zu können. Und weil dies sich noch für
scheint, sollen sie versuchen mir einen Englischen Durchreis Wisun zu be
dass ich ewatuel durch London zu Euch flügehn könte. Das zeigt sich viel
ganz schwehr, noch vieleicht unmöglich, doch möchte es versuchen, da ich
mich schom so sehr an Euch allen, dass das lässt sich garnichts sagen. M
danckem sind schtändig bei Euch, und Ich fühle so einen schreckliches Ge
wie noch nie. Aber ich will hoffen mit G.-es hilfe wird sich bald Gelege
dass ich meinen sehr Teuerem wieder sehen kann. .. Hoffentlich, werde vo
[illegible]en einan Brieg erhalten, wo ich über Euch alles hören werde. Noch
Euch
teilen, dass habe bekommen von Fulbacsi aus Erez gestern einen

Letter in German written by Esther to Piri after war.



n blos was über Chasku und Majrus mittgeteilt, dass nähmlich wie reisten
atenau dass ist neben Belzenbergn, und dort trafen wier eine Männer Liste
erfuhr, dass Sandor Stern und Maurus in Tratenau einige Tagen überweilten
Tratenauu nur ein Durchsreis Lager war, und wir sind auch nach 4. Tagen
gefahrem. Es war nur ein Zufahl, dass unsehre Züge gegen einander fahrten
Männer Wagonnen, und so hörten wier rufen dem Namen Stern Sandor Ungvar
Teuerer! Du wer dass mitgemacht hast, weist es am besten, das vielmahls
mit dem jenigen im selbem Block, und wusetman nicht wehr mit ihm zusam
Dass selbe habe auch mit Sari und Dori gehabt. Uns in anderen Lager hatt
ektro Hochsspanungs Drath abgeteilt, und habe sie soviel suchen lassen,
der könnt von sie nichts erfahren, und so habe mich freiwillig nach Tr
emeldet, wo ich nach Reichenbach kamm, und dan kommten aus Ausschwitz 4
rten, so erfahr ich, dass Sari und Dori noch im Dezember in Ausschwitz w
Sie hatten es guth, Krematorium Frage schteht schon garnichts auf, und so
h hoffen, dass Sie sich bei Euch am echestens melden werden.

Icukam Teuerer! Möchte noch wissen ob Du volständig Gesundt an
en bist, was ich sehr hoffe, und nehme für ein (SIMEN) dass man hatt Dich
nach Hause Transportiert. Hoffe dass ich von Dir bald alles genau hören
Du weist ja wohl, dass mich alles genau unteresiert, und deshalb halte
r übrig die alle meine fragen aufzustellem. Bitte ich tus alleine (felaj
stelle mier auch auf sämtliche Fragen, welche ich Dir noch bis nun nicht
eilt habe, was ich germe machen werde.

Icukam Teuerer, ich kann mier vorstellen, wie glücklich Du Dich
zwischen unsehren Teueren, und wan Du Dein Einziges Gescheztes Kind Toty
Deinen Arme halten kannst. Ich wünsche mier auch disses am schnelsten zu
. Ich bin so neugrig wie der kleiner süsser Uscher Sajuka Aüsiht? Hatt er
hön entwiekelt? und die kleime Perl Basche, von Annus? Wie geht es dem H.
und die Fräuleins Médi und Esto? Wie auch den kleinen von Evi? Ich kann
cht errineren wie sie heist, aber mier scheint Mir, d. Ist das richtig?
t es die Teuere Eltern von Smilku und Piri? Was macht Sije und Famillie?
ht aus Piri alleine mit Smilku, ich stelle mier vor, dass es für Ihnen n
hrecklicher war wie für uns.

Sonst gestern war Tische-Bav, und wier haben hier alle shr l
tt, gebe der L. Almächtiger, dass die Trostagen sollen uns immer tröster
bringen. Morgen ist Schabos Nachmi, und so gehe ich gleich in die Küche
el usw. vorzubereiten, den seid ich hier bin in Scweden esse keine Trefe
ist nur milchiges, und so mus ich immer was zu kaufen, den dass ist wenig
h auf weiter zu erholen sich zu können. Sonst macht sich hier eine K
was sich schon vieleicht anfang august geöfnet wird.

Dass Geld habe nur deshalb verlangt, hier beckommen wier

German letter continued.

Translation of a letter Esther wrote to her husband right after liberation.

Below is a translation of a letter that Esther sent after the war to her family in Sibiu. It is addressed to her husband and son, both of whom miraculously survived as outlined in this memoir. This letter is unique for it gives us a glimpse into the raw emotions of survival that Esther experienced right after liberation. We feel her joy for having found her husband and son and her pain for losing so many other family members.

Throughout, one can almost tangibly feel her staunch faith in the Ribono Shel Olam and her utter dependence on Him to guide her as He did during the war years. It is the greatest lesson for her family that a matriarch can give. Others who never experienced the Holocaust ask: "Where was G-d in the Holocaust?" Here we have an example of someone who just experienced first hand its horrors and she still proclaims to the world: "Hashem is king, Hashem was king and Hashem will be king for all of eternity".

It was a challenge translating this document because it was written in German and some of the edges were cut off. We succeeded in finding a German translator, but were forced to guess a little to complete some of the sentences. When adding words to add meaning, we put into parentheses, otherwise we left it as is and just added three dots.

Yossie Schonkopf, Editor

I must begin with an appropriate "SHALOM ALEICHEM!" (to) My (dear) husband and sweet child!

As I received the cheery telegram, that you my dear (referring to Yitzchok) arrived at Piri (Esther's sister), I had to weep with joy, and I thought right then that I must have done something good, in which "form" (merit) the Lord Almighty helped me, that I can say from what world (destruction) I have gotten back my dear husband, child, and child's mother. (In addition) Something else (is) [left] from our big fine family- my dear siblings. I praise and praise the Lord Almighty, and I still cannot contain myself for joy. So I must acknowledge that it is the "Nissem-Hanifloais (miracles and wonders)."

In Auschwitz in the concentration camp, as you know, I met with Ziszu (Zicu), and since then I have been, Baruch Hashem always with her. We have already recovered well, and as you can see from the photo we sent, we already look quite good, and one can not at all tell that we had gone through such a horrible year.

Of the other horrible things, I will not …(say) anything at all, because I think you already know more about it than I do. Only about Sari and Dori (Esther's two adorable Kallah-age sisters that perished al kiddush Hashem), I now know nothing

at all. As also about our brother (Asher Yishaya). Have you heard nothing from him? (Editor - He too did not survive)

The day before yesterday I got a telegram from London from the Josef (a cousin) that you asked about your family. Unfortunately I could not tell them [or, you] anything. On the same day I got a letter from London from Fuju Majsche Bacsis, wherein he wrote me that he got information about his brothers Chaim Uscher, and Beru (editor - sons on Moshe Stern, both survived the war). They are very happy to see that I was saved. What I …, I will report to you in the fastest way, and then they [or you, pl.] will see me to send … In any event, it is right (very) nice of him. Then he writes that everything is going well for them there, as also our relatives in Palestine. I have also answered the same. I also asked him to forward any of our mail through London, that I also could get mail from you earlier (maybe this means - faster). I also wrote to him how also the Josefovic, that it is my only wish to be able to come to you. And since this still seems (impossible)…, they should try to get for me an English transit visa so that I can fly through London to you. It still seems very difficult, even perhaps impossible, yet it should be tried, since I …(miss) so much to all of you that it leaves nothing at all to be said. My thoughts are constantly with you, and I feel such a terrible (homesickness)… more than ever. But I will hope with God's help that an opportunity will soon [arise] that I can again see my very dear ones. Hopefully, I will get a letter from you, wherein I can hear everything about you. Still …

… report that I got from Fulbacsi from Erez yesterday a …

… merely what he reported about Chasku and Maurus (editor-Yechezkel and Moshe Stern - Children of Refuel Stern. See telegram), that namely how they traveled … Tratenau that is near Belsen-Bergen, and there we found a list of people … that Sandor Stern and Maurus were in Tratenau for a few days … Tratenau was only a stopover camp, and we (meaning herself) also traveled after four days. It was only by chance that our trains ran toward each other … passenger cars, and so we heard called out the names Stern Sandor (from the city of) Ungvar… dear ones! You were familiar of it; you know it best, that many times …(inmates were) with the same (people) in the same cell, and one does not know who [was] together with him. … I had the same thing happen with Sari and Dori. They had separated us into different camps … high tension electric wire, and I have searched for them so much, … I have not been able to learn anything about them, and so I voluntarily reported to Tra… , where I came to Reichenbach, and then they

(meaning other prisoners) came from Auschwitz …, so I learn (from the newcomers), that Sari and Dori were still in Auschwitz in December (unknowingly to Esther) … They had it good, [the] crematorium question does not arise at all, and so … hope that they will report to you as directly as possible (Editor - it seems that she didn't hear that the died and she still had hopes that they survived).

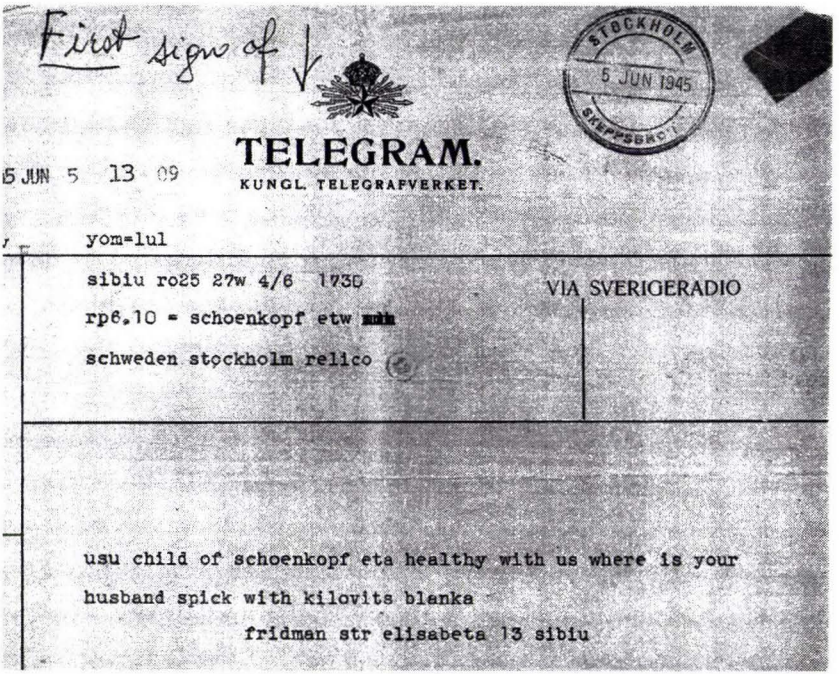
Icukam (Yitzchok) dear ! Could I know yet whether you are in complete health, which I very much hope, and I take for a *simen* (sign) that they have transported you home. I hope that I soon hear everything precisely from you … You know of course that I am interested in everything precise, and therefore I hold … else which all my questions pose. I ask only (perhaps[?]) … ask me also about all questions which I have not yet told you, which I will gladly answer.

Icukam (Yitzchok) dear, I can imagine how fortunately you … between our dear ones, and when you … your only treasured child Toty… can hold in your arms. I wish also for myself this too … as soon as possible. I am so curious how the sweet little Uscher Sajuka looks? Has he turned out fine? And the little Pearl Basche, from Annus? How is it going with Mr. … and the Misses Medi and Esto? As well as the little ones of Evi? I cannot remember what her name was, but it seems to me it was Miryam. Is that right? … the dear parents of Smilku and Piri? What are Sije and family doing? … Piri alone with Smilku, I suppose that for them it was more terrible than it was for us.

Just yesterday was Tische - Bav, and we have here all very …, may the Lord Almighty grant that the days of consolation might always bring us consolation. Tomorrow is Shabbos Nachmo, and so I am going straight to the kitchen to prepare bagels and so on, because since I have been here in Sweden I have not eaten any (meat)… only dairy, and so I always have to buy something (to supplement my diet), because that is little … to be able to get anything else. Otherwise there is here a Kosch [kosher store?] … which perhaps will open at the beginning of August.

The money I have only therefore required, we get here …

Esther Schonkopf


First sign of

TELEGRAM.

KUNGL. TELEGRAFVERKET.

STOCKHOLM 5 JUN 1945

5 JUN 5 13 09

yom=lul

sibiu ro25 27w 4/6 1730

VIA SVERIGERADIO

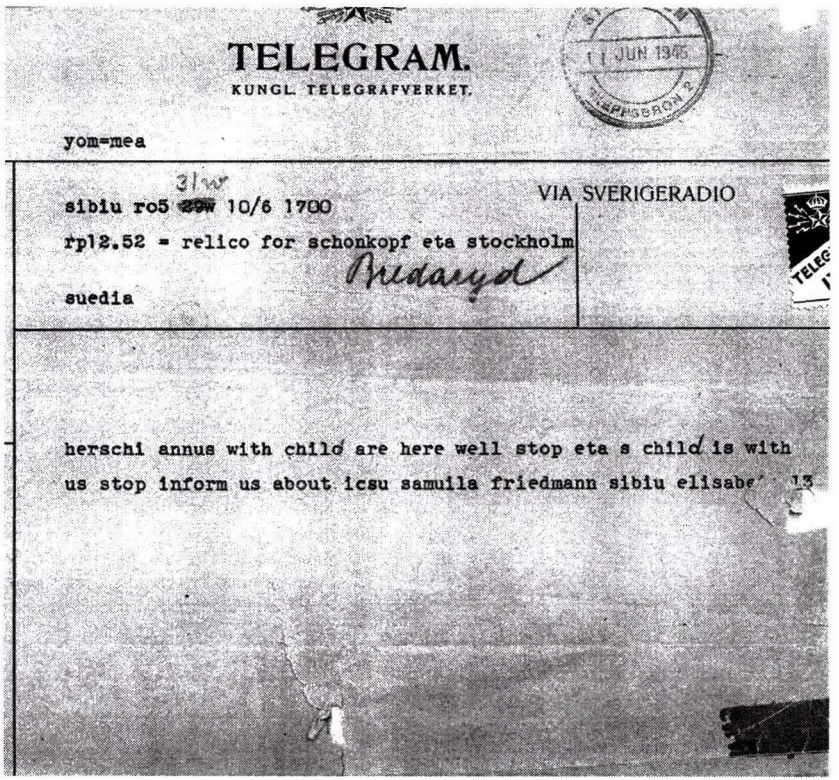
rp6,10 = schoenkopf etw

schweden stockholm relico

usu child of schoenkopf eta healthy with us where is your husband spick with kilovits blanka

fridman str elisabeta 13 sibiu

June 5, 1945 – Telegram sent to Sweden from Piri and Sibiu telling Esther that her child is well, and asking her if she heard from her husband, and instructing her to seek Blanka Kibovitz who can help her with money.



TELEGRAM.

KUNGL. TELEGRAFVERKET.

11 JUN 1945

yom=mea

3/w

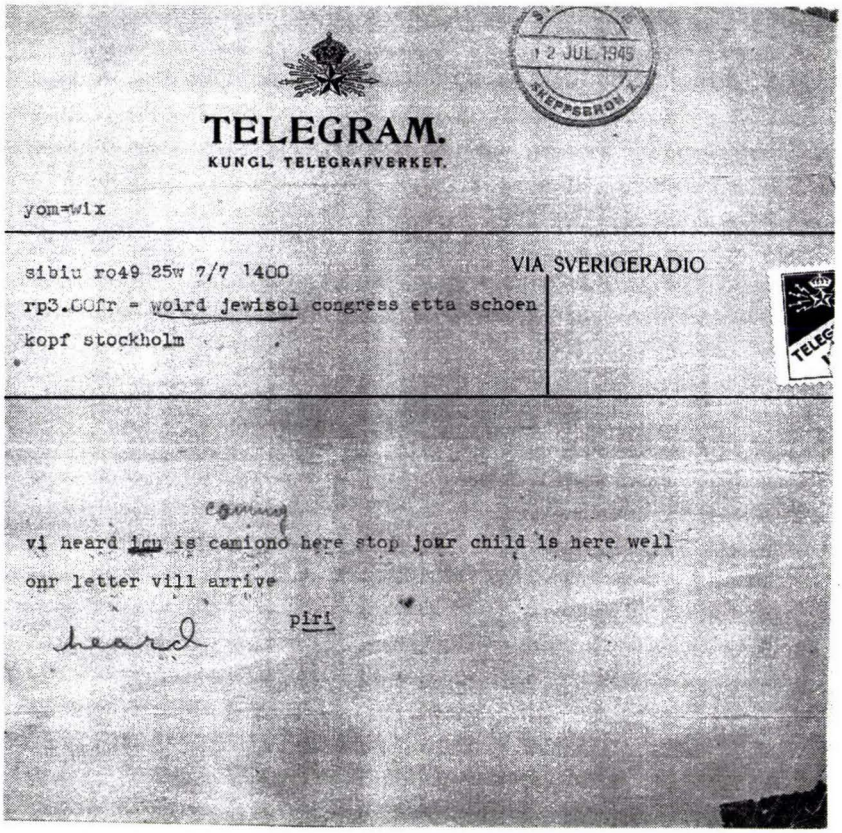
sibiu ro5 ~~29w~~ 10/6 1700 VIA SVERIGERADIO

rpl2.52 = relico for schonkopf eta stockholm

suedia

herschi annus with child are here well stop eta s child is with us stop inform us about icsu samuila friedmann sibiu elisabe 13

Postmarked June 11, 1945 – Informing Esther and Zisu in Sweden that Hershi and Chanie and their child, Bashi, are well, as is Asher, and asking them if they heard from Yitzchok. (Icsu)



TELEGRAM.

KUNGL. TELEGRAFVERKET.

12 JUL 1945

yom=wix

sibiu ro49 25w 7/7 1400

VIA SVERIGERADIO

rp3.60fr = wolrd jewisol congress etta schoen

kopf stockholm

egaming

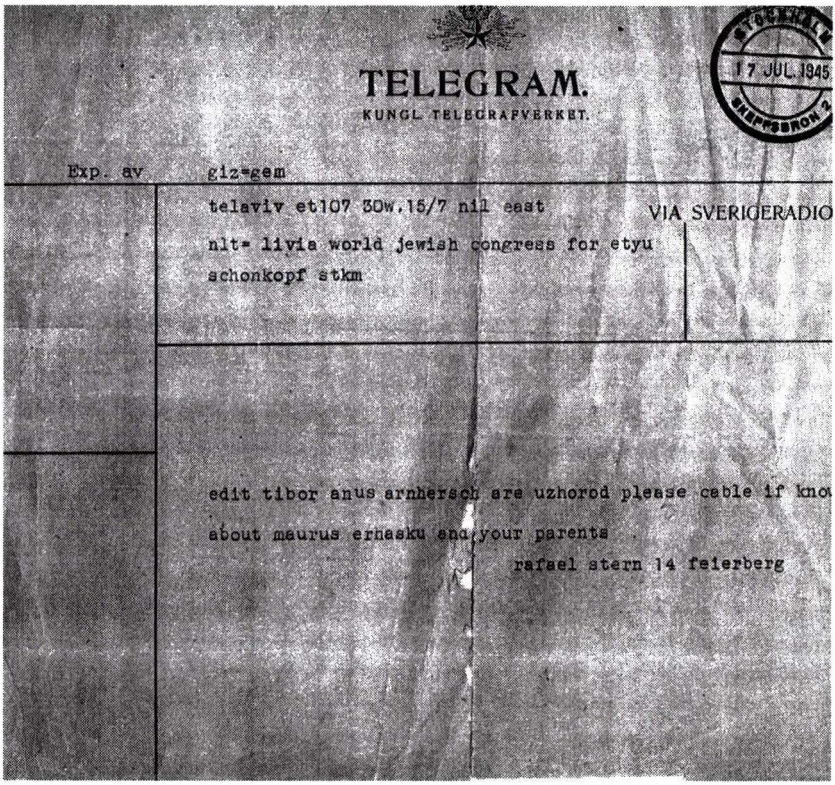
vi heard icu is camiono here stop jour child is here well

onr letter vill arrive

heard

piri

July 12, 1945-more good news, informing them in Sweden that Yitzchok is coming as well!



TELEGRAM.

KUNGL. TELEGRAFVERKET.

17 JUL. 1945

Exp. av giz=gem

telaviv et107 30w,15/7 nil east VIA SVERIGERADIO

nlt= livia world jewish congress for etyu

schonkopf stkm

edit tibor anus arnhersch are uzhorod please cable if kno

about maurus ernasku end your parents

rafael stern 14 feierberg

July 17, 1945. Telegram sent from Israel by Esther's uncle, Rafuel Stern, asking them if they know where their sons Moshe and Yechezkel are. Esther saw them in wagons being shipped to the camps.



TELEGRAM.

KUNGL. TELEGRAFVERKET.

STOCKHOLM 2 8 JUL. 1945 SKEPPSBRON

av aia-yom

sibiu ro93 22w 27/7 1100 VIA SVERIGERADIO

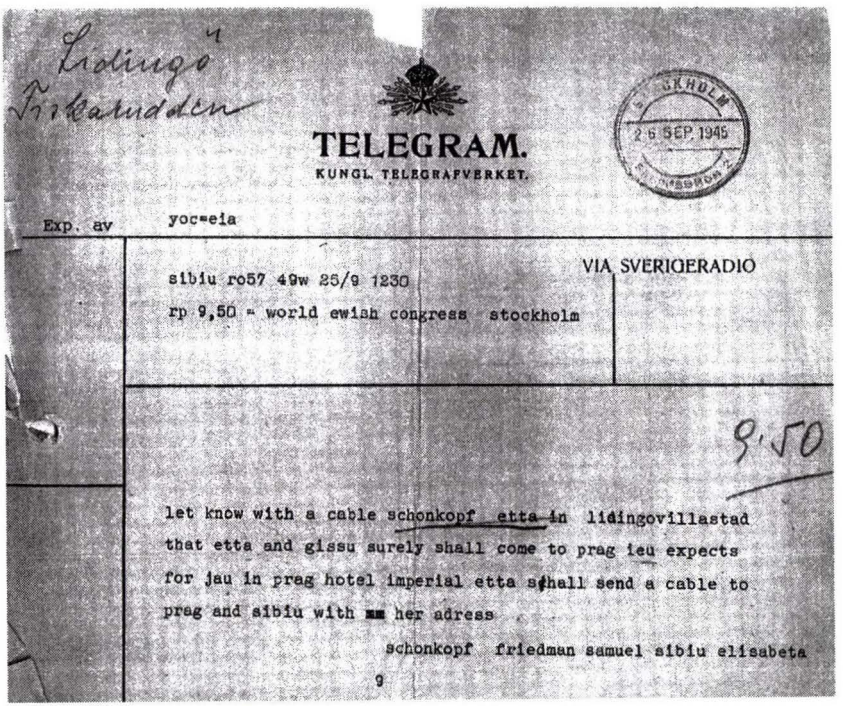
warold jeursch congress atta zissu schonkopf

stokholm

how da you thinke to return ? we expect jou

izu freidman str elisabeta 13

July 28, 1945. Telegram sent from Sibiu, asking Esther and Zisu how they plan to return.



Lidingö 4
Fiskarudden

TELEGRAM.
KUNGL. TELEGRAFVERKET.

STOCKHOLM
26 SEP 1945

Exp. av yoc=eia

VIA SVERIGERADIO

sibiu ro57 49w 25/9 1230
rp 9,50 = world ewish congress stockholm

9.50

let know with a cable schonkopf etta in lidingovillastad
that etta and gissu surely shall come to prag ieu expects
for jau in prag hotel imperial etta shall send a cable to
preg and sibiu with her adress

schonkopf friedman samuel sibiu elisabeta
9

September 26, 1945, telling them in Sweden to come to the Imperial Hotel in Prague.



TELEGRAM.

KUNGL. TELEGRAFVERKET.

Sibiu ro 303 28 ord kl 19.00 29/9 1945
via Sverige radio

rp 9.20 Eta Schönkopf
no 105
Suédia Lidingövillastad

Come immediately together with ziszu to praha stop
i await on hotel imperial stop cabel to sibiu and
praha

Otzu Schönkopf

September 29, 1945. Yitzchok making final arrangements to meet Esther and Zisu in Prague.

יד ושם
Yad Vashem
Яд Вашем

The Central Database of Shoah Victims' Names

KL.:

12e358 Unk. Jude

Häftlings-Personal-Karte

Fam.-Name: Schönkopf
Vorname: Ignac
Geb. am: 3.8.13 in: Munkacs
Stand: verh. Kinder: 1
Wohnort: Munkacs
Strasse: Lehrergasse 13
Religion: mos. Staatsang.: Unk.
Wohnort d. Angehörigen: Sch. Betti w.o.

Eingewiesen am: 25.1.45
durch:
in KL.: Mauthausen
Grund: Unk.Jude
Verstrafen:

Überstellt
am: an KL.
am: an KL.
am: an KL.
am: an KL.
am: an KL.
am: an KL.

Entlassung:
am: durch KL.:
mit Verfügung v.:

Strafen im Lager:

Grund:	Art:	Bemerkung:

Personen-Beschreibung:
Grösse: cm
Gestalt:
Gesicht:
Augen:
Nase:
Mund:
Ohren:
Zähne:
Haare:
Sprache:
Bes. Kennzeichen:
Charakt.-Eigenschaften:
Sicherheit b. Einsatz:
Körperliche Verfassung:

Bl.-Nr. 44-000000

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A copy of Yitzchok's concentration camp card as found on Yad Vashem's web site. Number seen on top right was the one tattooed on Yitzchok's arm. Note reason for imprisonment (Grund) - Jude.

Chapter Eight

From the train station, Yitzchok and I went to live with my sister, Chana Liebe (Chanie) and Hershi and their little girl, Perel Bashi, (Bashi) in a very nice house in Prague. This whole experience was very surreal for me. Suddenly, after all these months of suffering, and being apart from my dear husband, we were together again. I had to pinch myself over and over again to be sure it was not a dream, and that it was real. I even remember the address we went to: "Saska Ulice, number 3."

The joyousness we felt upon reuniting could not be complete until I saw Asher, and we brought him back home with us. We were so close, but there was a journey still we had to go through to complete the process. When I arrived in Prague, I learned that my baby was in Romania with my sister, Perl. This is what happened, before I even arrived in Prague.

When the Russians freed Uzhorod, Chanie and Hershi Deutsch knew where my child was because they had been living as goyim with false papers, and keeping their eyes on him. As soon as liberation occurred, they went to claim the child because at that time, there was no report as to my survival. The woman, "Samara Antalne", a Chezk was taking care of Asher because she had no children. To my knowledge, she was not doing so for payment, although

Hershi rewarded her very well financially with money and with some of our family's valuables. For reasons that every mother can understand, she had gotten so used to being a mother to Asher, she loved him and did not want to part from him. I am forever grateful to her, as she took such good care of Asher; he still had a wonderful life as a small child, with no impact from the war around him. Asher was also attached to the woman, understandably so.

Mr. Deutsch argued with her that Asher is a Jewish boy, and his Jewish parents must raise him. She replied that she was only obligated to return Asher if the parents were alive, and she would not budge.

To try to convince her, Yitzchok came with Mr. Deutsch, once he was out of the hospital and recovering. It was the first time he saw Asher, and he cried with relief and indescribable joy. She still would not budge. She said, 'Oh, I see that his father survived, but unless I see the mother alive, I will not return him!'

We will give her the benefit of the doubt ~ she was concerned for Asher's welfare and had grown attached to him as her son. How could she give up a baby she loved, when also, she did not believe there would be a mother to care for him? Meanwhile, we would stop at nothing until Asher was returned to our care. Finally, Mr. Deutsch got very clever.

My sister and brother-in-law had "protectzia" with a Russian colonel in exchange for an apartment in my parents' new house on 12 Mazarick Street. My parents had built that house in approximately 1932. It was a four

family dwelling with six or seven rooms each, with the newest, most modern and luxurious appointments. After the Germans moved out and the Russians took over, Hershi gave one of these apartments to the colonel, in exchange for the colonel using his influence to force the woman to give Asher back to us. We don't know what words were exchanged, or how the colonel accomplished this "persuasion", but the results were, the baby was finally returned to us.

You know, I must tell you before we continue, you can see that Mr. Deutsch, my brother-in-law was so close to our family, he would do anything for any one of us, anything at all. Remember how he rescued me from the garage where I was hiding by the priest and put me into hiding? He was somehow always on the scene and involved in my survival. It was a tremendous comfort for me that he watched over Asher all the time I was absent from Asher's life. Yes, for certain, we have tremendous *hakoros hatov* to Hashem for saving our lives, and bringing us back together. My heart is also filled with such *hakoros hatov* for the lengths that Hershi went to, to make sure that I survived, and that Asher was returned to us safely. There are really no words.

The story continues – it's quite complicated, really.

My sister Chanie Deutsch, her husband and her little girl, (now known as Bashi Goldbaum), got in touch with my sister Perl and her husband, Smilku Friedman, in Hermannstadt. This is how Perl first learned of the tragedy. I know that seems impossible. How could they have not known? But you must understand that they were

living in Sibiu or Hermannstadt (as it had been always called in Romania.) The Germans did not occupy that area. They didn't even know what was going on in Europe as everything was done so secretly. When the Russians occupied Uzhorod, there were no transportation or communication possibilities. So my sister, Perl, was cut off from all communication with us, and therefore, she had no knowledge of the tragic murder of our family members, or of the concentration camps.

So as I was telling you, the woman had no choice but to give the child back to Chanie and Hershi, but Asher was frightened and insisted that she come with him wherever he went. So Chanie and Hershi agreed that the woman should come and live with them until Asher got used to his new home. She did not stay long by them, once Asher was able to understand that he was going to soon meet his real mother. Asher never seemed to be a child. He was thinking and speaking like an adult from the youngest age. Somehow, he understood this idea that the woman who had been raising him since 11 months of age was not his real mother, and that I existed, and would soon come to find him. He was very eager to see me.

There were only two Jewish children left in Uzhorod, my sister's baby, Bashi and mine. Those people who returned or survived were almost all singles. The few married people who returned lived only with the hope that their children and parents and siblings would return. They heard from people who worked in the gas chambers that there was no chance that the children could have survived. (Remember, automatically, all of the children

were sent to the gas chambers.)

I feel I must say these words again. Those reading this memoir cannot just gloss over these sentences as if they are just another small piece of the story.

There were only two Jewish children left in Uzhorod and perhaps the entire Eastern region after the war, Asher and Bashi, and they were both from our family.

Only two. Out of how many hundreds of thousands? Only two. Two Jewish, healthy, happy, normal, well-adjusted, beautiful children, alive and well. So many Jewish children murdered. So many Jewish children separated from their parents and raised as goyim. *Nebach.* Bashi survived in hiding as a goy. Asher was cared for, and then given back to us, reunited with both parents, Auswitch survivors. Only 300 survived Auswitch in total, out of so many thousands of Jews murdered there. As I read these words myself, I am so moved. What are the chances, really? It is such a miracle, all from Hashem.

Many people wonder if I am bitter and angry with G-d because of the terrible tragedies that befell my family.

Surely I have cried many tears. But read this sentence again.

There were only two Jewish children left in Uzhorod, my sister's baby, Bashi and mine.

This kindness from Hashem is so monumental; I have no vocabulary adequate to express my *hakoros hatov.*

I am convinced that this good fortune is in the merit of the holiness of my Papa and Mama and all the chesed they did all of their lives. But then, so many righteous Jews were murdered, cremated, whole families destroyed, with *neshamas* as holy as my beloved parents, so I cannot say that it is only this merit that saved Yitzchok, Asher and me. Was it something I once did, a small action that put me into G-d's favor? I wonder about this many times; what was it I did that gave me such merit?

All I know is that Hashem is very close to me, and for some reason, the *Ribono shel Olam* took mercy on our family, and He had a plan that *Baruch Hashem*, allowed us to continue our lives as a family. *Baruch Hashem*, a thousand million times over.

As Chanie and Hershi survived on Goyish false papers, they were the first people after liberation to visit my parents' second house. The house was very large, with a long garden and several apartments. All the survivors who returned to Uzhorod made their way to this house. You may think this must have been so many, many people, but regrettably, few of us survived. We all slept and ate there and my brother-in-law helped several become active in some business. My sister acted very well as a matchmaker: a man. . . a lady. . . and shortly there was a *chuppah* at my parents' house. One day there were three weddings on the same day![8] At the time, survivors were at once, devastated by the loss of their families, parnussa,

8 A few of these couples live here in the US and are very happy and successful business people. A very good friend of mine who lives now in Five Towns, Ica Salts, was one of the first to return.

health, and home, and at the same time, anxious to begin a new life and to put the war behind them.

Now Hershi and Chanie had another problem that is a very good problem to have! The problem was how to raise two little children, when the mother (me) was not there yet, and there were, tragically, no other Jewish children in the entire city for them to play with. My child was already 16 months old and my sister's baby was about 6 months old. Yitzchok had to focus on earning a parnussa. They decided that it would be best if the two children went to live with Perl, in Sibiu, Romania, where she could offer them more of a normal life for a child.

Mr. Deutsch travelled with the children to Romania. Perl decided that while Chanie and Hershi would return to Uzhorod to settle matters, they should put the two little children in a special children's home. This was of course only a temporary arrangement. Bashi was easy to please in this new Kindergarten. She accepted the change. But Asher didn't want any part of it! He went on strike, refusing to eat and crying all day long; he was very unhappy. The school notified my sister that they could not take responsibility for the little boy, and she must pick him up and bring him home.

Perl got a very nice Sabatistian[9] lady called Yulishka to care for him in their house. She was very devoted, a woman who served at their home for over 30 years. (I was told she raised Perl's husband Shmilku!)

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9 Seventh Day Adventist

With Yulishka looking after him, Asher was very happy and well adjusted there. People from Sibiu and surrounding areas came to see the two Jewish children who were saved. Mr. Deutsch recounts how many people especially came from Budapest and said, 'we had to come and see the Jewish children who were saved!'

In the meantime, while Asher was adjusting to his new home in Romania, I was still stuck in Sweden, anxious to see my husband and child again. We survivors belonged to a Czech group that met with the statesman of the country. I was known as the mother of the child home in Uzhorod who had been saved from deportation. One day, I was greeted by a special Czech representative who asked how he could help me. I replied, naturally, that I wanted to be able to return home as soon as I can. I should be able to hold my child, hug and kiss him! I told this man that there was no day that I didn't cry, and no minute that I wouldn't think of my baby. My biggest wish was for them to help me return as soon as possible.

With their help, I was given a passport and visa to return to my country. But not to Uzhorod. Only to Prague. In the meantime, while all this paperwork was being constructed, my husband arrived in Prague and my sister Chanie, her husband Hershi and Bashi were also there.

This gives you some of the back story to the moment when I stepped off the train in Prague, eager to see my husband and son, only to find out that I would need to make a trip to Sibiu, Romania to see my little boy. After a couple of weeks in Prague, I had the necessary permission to travel about eight hours by train to Sibiu to see my

little boy. Yitzchok stayed behind in Prague to figure out how to earn a parnussa. I believe that I traveled with my sister and Mr. Deutsch, but I don't quite remember.

When we arrived, Asher was about 2½ years old. You can see from the photos, taken mostly by Perl, that he was a happy, adorable, healthy, normal toddler. He was taught a poem by Perl which he delivered very nicely to me. I will try to quote what I remember in translation:

'Oh G-d, how happy I am, that I have already a mother and father. . .'

What can I say about the first moment when I lay my eyes on my boy? I had prayed so earnestly for this moment, every day, all day long. I am sure that I cried when I first saw his beautiful blond hair and soft little face. I am also confident that I made some effort not to cry so that my little boy would not be frightened. I was introduced to him as his mother, and this made him very happy. He wanted to have a real mother like all the other boys in Kindergarten!

We sat down to lunch (I don't remember, but I can't imagine that I was in the mood to eat anything – all I wanted to do was hold my baby!) and after lunch, Yulishka, who disciplined him very carefully, handed him his pajamas. She told him to go rest. I was told he obeyed this daily request very naturally. They used to cover him with a blanket.

That first day, as we finished lunch together, the maid came over to take him to rest. Very seriously, Asher remarked like a young adult, not the toddler that he was: 'Now that I also have a father and mother, you're not

going to cover me up with that rough blanket anymore! My mother is going to cover me up!'

Oh, such sweet words for me to hear.

In the evening we went to sleep. Asher wanted to sleep with me. As he woke up in the night I asked him if he had to use the bathroom. He said no, he was just waking up happy because he had a mother!

I can say the words, 'Asher was always a very good boy,' but you can't imagine the extent to which I mean this. He was really an exceptional child.

Asher was 2½ when we were reunited. We were apart for a year and a half. I missed so much – my only child learning how to walk, to talk, all of the wondrous transitions from infancy to toddlerhood. The Nazis took that once in a lifetime experience away from me, and for this injustice, I was still angry. But I was also delirious with joy to be one of the only lucky Jews from the war to still have my baby. I knew that there were millions of Jewish women who had not been so lucky. How could I be bitter?

I was crying *until* I found him, and then I was crying *when* I found him. But this time, the tears were tears of gratitude.

Chapter Nine

Asher remained with me for a few months in Sibiu while Yitzchok returned to Prague to figure out our *parnassa*. These were very unusual times. First we were separated by the war, and in fear for our very lives. Now, we were together again, but soon after, apart once more, because after all, we had survived, but like all people, we now had to figure out how to put bread on the table. We were no longer prisoners, and we had the right to purchase our own bread once again. It was time to figure out how to earn the money to make this purchase!

Cigarettes were a very big asset at that time; people smoked all over the world. It was illegal to buy cigarettes and Yitzchok made some money selling cigarettes on the black market. Mr. Deutsch had long ago exhausted the money hidden with the mayor/priest.

My parents had hidden money in a pot buried in the floor of our Uzhorod house, which Mr. Deutsch retrieved for us. It wasn't much, but it gave us a little start, which is much better than what many survivors had.

After a few months of separation, Yitzchok, Asher and I moved into the house of Chanie, Hershi and Bashi in Prague, where, believe it or not, my job was to be a full-

time mommy to my baby, Asher. Such a privilege, you cannot imagine. Perhaps there are women who complain now about how this work is boring, or they need a career to be fulfilled. I tell you, I was so happy to be a wife to Yitzchok, and a mother to Asher, I needed little else to be satisfied.

Hershi opened up a grocery store in Prague and Yitzchok joined him in the business. This was not just a kosher store; they sold to the gentiles as well. As you can imagine, at that time, there were not enough survivors in the area to make a kosher-only business profitable. This business lasted about a year, but then, once again, we were feeling worried and unsettled. We take so much for granted in America – we don't appreciate the simple luxury of living as Jews without worry of persecution. It was never like that for us in Europe after the war. The talk in Prague was that the Russians would soon occupy the country and this could be terrible for the Jews, with no escape. We couldn't bear the thought of living through anything close to what we had just miraculously survived. America seemed at the time like a shining light, a haven for us to run to, a place where finally, we might be safe.

We were talking a great deal about going to America, as were many other Jews, when the situation suddenly became more imperative. President, Jan Masaryk "fell" out a window and he died. Everyone knew that this was bluff and that he been thrown out of the window. We took this as a sign that conditions would soon worsen for the survivors and we had to make every effort to leave Prague.

Under President Masaryk, who was kind to the Jews and democratic, we felt reassured, but we had no idea how we would be treated under a new government. It was time once again to flee. This turned out to be very difficult for Yitzchok and me, until once again, Hashem intervened on our behalf and granted us another miracle.

Chanie, Hershi and Bashi left by plane to America in October, 1946. Hershi already had a brother in New York who sponsored them with an affidavit. We aimed to follow after them, but we didn't have anybody in America who could sponsor us, and back then, you were not allowed to enter the country without a sponsor who would assure that your living expenses were cared for. Hershi and Chanie tried everything possible to help us, but all in vain. This was a very frightening and frustrating time for us. With so many family members lost to us, and having spent all our days after liberation with Chanie, Hershi and Bashi, we were as close as any family, and being separated by the ocean, and not knowing how we would cross it, if ever, was very traumatic.

My sister would not give up the dream of us being reunited, and one day, she dreamed up a fantastic idea that logically, had absolutely no chance of working – but thankfully, the *Ribono shel Olam* doesn't work by logic!

My sister's English was poor although she attended school immediately after her arrival, and still, she did not let this obstacle stop her. Chanie wrote a letter to Washington, D.C., addressed to Mrs. Truman, the President's wife.

Can you imagine? She apologized for having to write to her. She wrote, 'Only G-d and you can help me'. She explained how our large family had been mostly lost in the Holocaust. She explained the story of how I had been reunited with Yitzchok and Asher, because of the heroism of the pediatrician. She then explained in her letter that Yitzchok is an experienced businessman and a Rabbi, so in no way would he be a financial burden to the country. She also enclosed a picture of us so they have an idea of who we people are. She was aware that Mrs. Truman's daughter was of marriageable age, and not yet married. She assured Mrs. Truman that G-d would help her daughter find her true *zevug*, in the merit of helping to bring our family back together. My sister said, 'I need the help of G-d, and I know you are also religious. I am sure you will get your daughter married because G-d will help you, since you are helping us.'

We did not know of Chanie's letter to the White House, and even if we did know about it, I'm not sure we would have been so reassured. How many letters are answered from these kinds of pleas? But Hashem heard our prayers, and shortly after she sent the letter, The American Consulate in Prague asked Rabbi Forhand, the Chief Rabbi of Prague, to let us know that visas were granted for all three of us! We couldn't believe it. It was a *naeis*!

As you well know from looking at the photographs and documents in the back of this book, I saved everything associated with our early life in Europe, but to my great regret, I do not have possession of this letter. I do believe

that Mr. Deutsch held on to it, but my sister and I do not know its whereabouts now. I know I date myself when I say that I will always have a soft spot in my heart for Mrs. Truman, and now you can understand why!

Rabbi Forhand advised us to go to the Chief Consulate to pick up the visas. On a Monday morning at the first opportunity, all three of us arrived at the consulate. We were frightened and didn't believe that this was really happening. We noticed very strange looks from the clerks. We were finally seated. After all the papers were examined, we walked out with the visas! The personnel there remarked, 'the sooner you can leave the country, the better off you are.' We wasted no time; that night we packed up as much as we were able to carry with us, and the very next day, we left Prague for London by train.

This time, we were not forced out of our homes in just a few seconds, so we could be thoughtful about what to take, or not take, but still, we had to leave behind many items that wouldn't be carried on to a train. We only took what we considered the most necessary things. We brought out a few items with enormous sentimental value to me (all who know me see that sentimental items from my family are of great meaning to me, and I surround myself with them). Mr. Deutsch went back to the house to retrieve these items. They included a set of crystal glasses in a wooden box, a tablecloth[10] that my parents

10 Rabbi Moshe Tendler is my machatunim. I showed him the tablecloth and told him I wanted to donate it to the right place, because it was so valuable to me. Rabbi Tendler took it from me and placed it on the amud in his synagogue.

used for decorating in the dining room, and my father's silver *becher* that he used for *kiddush*, which is my most important glass, and I carry it always wherever I am.

In London we boarded a ship and after a few days we arrived in New York. It was a big ship with a few hundred people, not all Jews. We all were very seasick. We were throwing up the entire journey. Asher was not even 4 years old, and he is the only one who didn't suffer. Hashem spared him so he could be our errand boy! The whole journey, we asked him to fetch the water or anything else we needed because we were so sick to our stomachs we couldn't move.

Finally, the big moment arrived. Seeing the Statue of Liberty for the first time was like a dream. For us, it symbolized the freedom of the United States. We cried tears of joy, and we also felt sadness, as we recognized that we had left our home country and would probably never return to the place of our birth, and the place where so many of our loved ones had died. It was a bittersweet moment, a time of new beginnings, and also, endings. We cried tears of gratitude for all that we had survived to reach this moment.

We arrived on Shabbos so we had to leave all our luggage behind in the freight of the boat and return for it a day or two later. I'm thinking now about this simple idea. First, we were forced to give up everything we owned when the Nazis threw us out of our house. *So many precious and beloved family heirlooms, and all of our physical*

comforts, torn away in a matter of minutes. Then we were imprisoned in the camps with no personal possessions at all. When we left Europe for America, all we could take with us were the items we could fit into a couple of suitcases (and we shipped a few fragile valuables, like my crystal separately), and then, so ironically, when we get to America, the land of freedom and possibilities, once again, we were separated immediately from our possessions, as few as they were in the world. But you see, at that moment, this was not an issue at all, because we were alive and well to observe the Sabbath, and we wouldn't dream of desecrating it by carrying our luggage to our new home.

I realize now, that from the first moment our feet touched American soil, we made a statement. Our religion, and our allegiance to Hashem was primary to any loyalty we would later have to this country. I don't think we even thought about it much at that time, but now that I reflect on this, I feel very good about this decision. Many Jews, when they arrived in America, gave up the Sabbath in exchange for *parnassa.* Even though it meant starting out our stay in America with, literally, only the clothes on our back (no simple thing after a long journey by boat!), we blessed Hashem with our commitment to His laws and He has blessed us back every since.

There is a second reason why the rather meager collection of material possessions we brought with us was not a big deal. Standing at the dock, waiting for us, was a most glorious sight. Hershi was waving to us. We

were with family once again. We had no reason to be frightened any more. You cannot imagine what comfort and joy it gave Yitzchok and me to be on the same land once again as my dear sister and brother in law. We had been through so much together, and we looked forward to spending the rest of our lives together.

Because it was the Sabbath, Hershi had walked a long way to meet us. As we came off the boat, we were wobbly, (sea-legs is what they call it) but we were happy. The next part of our journey was about to begin, our American life.

I still remember the address of the first apartment we stayed in ~ 178 Forsythe Street, lower east side, where Chanie, Hershi and Bashi lived. It was very difficult to find apartments, and we lived with them for a few months before we were able to afford to live in our very own apartment. Although Bashi and Asher were both only children, they grew up together like siblings!

Our first apartment of our own was also on the lower east side, 340 east 4th street. Rent was unusually low, 19 dollars/month! It had no elevator, and we had to walk four flights up to the apartment. Imagine the journey I'd taken, from such an elegant home in Uzhorod, to now this. There were no drapes or carpets, and the apartment was so primitive, you can't imagine. In fact, I remember that the bathtub was in the kitchen! What can I say, I was at once, so happy to be alive, but also, so tired of living as a pauper with such indescribable physical conditions.

Those who know me know that this runs against my nature. Yet, how could I complain when I was one of so few who escaped Germany with my husband and my baby? I did not allow myself to dwell on what I did not have, when I was so grateful to Hashem for what He gave me. Whenever I mourned my losses, it was the loss of my dear parents and siblings, not the material losses I had suffered.

One day, after living there for a few months, I was so sick, I couldn't get up out of bed. I had a first cousin, Willy Joseph, (his mother and my father were brother and sister) who lived in London, and he drives up in his Red Cadillac of all things to visit me, while I am sick in bed. He notices the terrible conditions we are living in and says to me, 'What are you doing here? This isn't the place for you!' He was staying in an elegant hotel in Manhattan. He insisted that I get out of bed, as sick as I was. He says, 'Get dressed, we're going to the city!' He was so insistent, what could I do but listen to him? I put on an elegant outfit I had brought from Prague, and made myself as beautiful as possible in my sick condition. I'm sure I wore a hat, as I always wore a hat in public.

My cousin took Yitzchok and Asher and me to his Fifth Avenue hotel. He would not let us return to our little apartment! He insisted on helping us find an apartment and furniture that was more in keeping with the kind of people we really were. Remember, before the war, we were considered upper class in Uzhorod. It was very difficult for my cousin to see Yitzchok and I living like peasants.

In 1951, shortly after joining him at the hotel, he helped us secure our first normal apartment as a married couple, (by paying 600 dollars to a Polish person) on 805 St. Marks Ave in Crown Heights. Isn't it funny how everything is relative. This small apartment was not even comparable to that which we left behind in Uzhorod, but in comparison to the concentration camps, or that first apartment, this was a palace! We had a nice-sized bedroom for Yitzchok and myself, a kitchen, and even, decent furniture with carpeting and curtains. Asher still slept in the living room, and he very much approved of our own little place. We *davened* by the Spinka Rebbe (and later on, starting in 1954, in the big Bobover Shul when it opened) and we were free to worship there without fear. This was *Gan Eden.*

While still living in the east side, Asher started attending RJJ which was located on Henry Street. This is how he began at RJJ: It was 1948 and we were walking down the street, dressed in elegant European clothing, when a very presentable Jew with a beard stopped us. He observed from our clothing and our manner that we must be from Europe. He said to us, he is Rabbi Weiss from Vienna, and he feels that Asher belongs to his yeshiva! So Rabbi Weiss brought him to RJJ. He was supposed to be age six to enter, but he was only five and a half. Still, they tested him, and he knew a few words of English such as 'I beg your pardon', which they thought made him sound like a real noble gentleman, so they let him in!

Asher went to RJJ through the third grade, and then

we moved to Crown Heights (1951). Imagine this – it tells you how exceptional Asher really was. To travel from Crown Heights to RJJ you had to travel with two subways and one bus, each way, and even though Asher was only in the fourth grade, he traveled alone all the way to RJJ and back – not arriving in the Fulton Street neighborhood (which was not a nice neighborhood) until 7 P.M., when often Yitzchok would then pick him up. This was a very difficult thing for Asher, so in fifth grade (1953) he transferred to the Crown Heights Yeshiva for one year, but it wasn't for him, and the following year he returned to RJJ and began the long journey back and forth to yeshiva once again. This gives you some sense about how committed we all were to Asher receiving the best yeshiva education for him.

In the meantime, Hershi became the owner of a grocery store. He proposed that Yitzchok work with him as a partner. Yitzchok appreciated this opportunity. They worked well together, running a grocery store on the lower east side, on Avenue C and East 4th street. The grocery partnership dissolved after about two years when a new opportunity presented itself.

Yitzchok and Hershi opened up a candy factory in the Bronx called, "Tip Top Candy Manufacturers." They produced sugar-coated peanuts and chocolate covered candies. They borrowed money from another cousin, Nathan Trietel, who was president of Bobover shul, a real personality. They employed a few people and sold the candies to sweet shops in the area. It was hard to make a

real profit in this business so they paid back their loans and closed the business after just two years. It was at this time that Yitzchok and Hershi went their separate ways for parnussa, although it was a very friendly decision.

Hershi bought a self-service grocery with another partner, but Yitzchok wanted out of the grocery business. In 1954, Yitzchok and I decided to go into the insurance business.

It was Yitzchok's idea, because we had a lot of acquaintances, and we were highly regarded by many people. We both decided to get our licenses. *Funny how certain memories stick in your heads.* I was so accustomed to wearing a hat wherever I went in public, I remember, when I went for my license, I finished the exam and said goodbye to the one in charge. Then I returned, saying to him, 'I left my hat here.' He laughed at me and said, 'You have the hat on your head!' *Isn't that funny? I didn't even know it was there!*

On the way back home, I went by subway, and I saw a fellow I knew. I told him I had just finished taking my insurance exam. He said, 'Oh no, you'll never make a living.' 'Well,' I smiled, 'we're going try it.' It was with great pleasure some time later, after we were doing very well in insurance, that I was able to tell him so!

I was the second female life insurance agent in "NY Life", which I joined in 1955. Yitzchok and I intentionally worked for different companies. If I had a hard time placing some policies, because an individual was overweight, or

had high blood pressure, Yitzchok wrote the policy with his company, "State Mutual", one of the great insurance companies. Yitzchok also worked in investments, selling mutual funds.

We were very highly respected in the business. When we attended business lunches or dinners, in the beginning, they served us kosher airplane food, but towards the end of our careers, the companies were catering the entire dinner kosher for all who attended; that's how much respect we had! Yitzchok and I both earned awards for our success, and we loved the business. I recall a funny episode at one of the dinners we attended. The president of the company asked me to have a dance with him. My husband looked at me, and I said, 'sorry, I don't know how to dance.' The president's wife told me that I insulted the president when I refused to dance with him. I told her that I don't know to dance. That isn't the truth. I love to dance! But I am a *tznius*, married woman and there was no way I was dancing with another man!

I loved many aspects of the life insurance business. It suited Yitzchok and me very well. I had to be dressed elegantly whenever we went to visit with the clients, which I very much enjoyed. Yitzchok and I had a routine. We went together in one car to visit two different clients who lived within the vicinity of one another. Yitzchok's clients were mostly Jewish. I was very good at selling to non-Jewish, or Russian, German, or Hungarian professionals, and especially for some reason, lawyers. It was amazing how little lawyers knew about life insurance at that

time. They trusted me, and I very much enjoyed earning their trust. I was a very friendly person and not afraid to be very assertive if I felt that I could help someone with their insurance needs. I'll tell you one story that comes to mind.

My husband had to deliver a policy on a Sunday morning, but he didn't feel well. I didn't drive but I said I'd do it for him. I took the subway to the Lower East Side to deliver the policy. On the way back, I got a big cramp in my stomach. I thought maybe it was just from excitement, but it was hurting me a great deal, so I went to a drug store and asked them where I could see the doctor. They sent me around the corner, where I walked up four flights, and there were no elevators at that time. By the time I reached the doctor, my stomach was hurting very badly. He examined me and told me that I had appendicitis and needed immediate surgery. I protested – I was not prepared for this idea! So then he agreed, that I could wait awhile, and I promised him that I would go to the hospital if the cramps got much worse. I called a taxi and went home to my husband, and luckily, the incident passed with no surgery necessary.

One week later, I went back to visit the doctor again, but this time, I was not coming as a patient, but rather, as a life insurance agent. He liked me very much and he bought a life insurance and an income replacement policy from me. Our business was built up through referrals, so when we were finished, I said to him, 'I would appreciate it if you would give me a few leads.' He went to his safe and pulled out his files and gave me 15-20 leads. *Can I tell you, I*

wrote a policy on every single one of those referrals, because they all felt, if the doctor trusted me, they could. This is how Yitzchok and I were able to build such a successful business.

During the early years of our life insurance business, when Asher was a teenager, we lived at 712 Crown Street in Crown Heights. Right above us lived an absent-minded woman who always forgot to turn off the water. One day, after she had flooded our apartment for the fourth time, the Super, an Irish man who respected us, said, 'Mrs. Schonkopf, you pay 139 dollars a month, (that was a lot of money at that time); you have to tolerate this four times?'

We started looking for a new place to live. We saw an advertisement in the newspaper for a house in Boro Park, and it sounded so good after talking to the broker, we almost bought it over the phone. As soon as Yitzchok saw it, his architect mind was working full-time and he could imagine how beautiful this house, which needed a lot of work, could become. We bought it for approximately 50,000 dollars, in 1976. I remember that the price quoted in the newspaper was 20,000 less than the actual price. They tricked us into looking at the house with a ridiculous price, and then added twenty thousand more to the sales price if we wanted to buy it. Yitzchok was hesitant, but we really wanted this house, and so we bought it anyway. Many years later we sold it to the Bobov yeshiva at a discount and thru that we developed a special relationship with the Rebbe and Rebbetzin.

During all of these years, we always made Asher's religious education a priority. He went to many yeshivas, and after his bar mitzvah, he boarded at yeshivas, first in Telz in Cleveland, and then later at the Yeshiva of Philadelphia. Although we missed him very much during his absences from home, we would never consider any other option than providing him with the best religious and secular education we were capable of providing him. Asher was a brilliant, motivated student, and he always gave Yitzchok and me much *nachas*.

When Asher became 18, he was very capable, and he took the general life insurance examination, passed it well, and then worked for four years with us in the business. He did very well, but all of the years we were raising him he saw that we worked so hard, late into the night, and he decided to make his *parnassa* in another way.

Asher married Tova Goldfinger in 1967 and they lived for one year in New York, and then returned to live in Israel. They blessed Yitzchok and me with our special grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. These are the names of my precious family from Asher:

Racheli, Asher's oldest daughter, married Ely Tendler and their children are: Yossi, Ari, Sima, Leora, and Yitzy. Racheli and Ely live in Lawrence, NY.

Chanie, Asher's daughter, married Moshe Herskovitz and their children are: Yossi and Racheli. Chanie lost her husband, Moshe in 2003, and she and her children live in Lawrence, NY.

Yossie, Asher's only son, married Gitty Rosenberg and their children are: Shira, Shmuel, Devorah, Penina, and Elisheva. Yossie and Gitty live in Lawrence, NY.

Asher's next daughter, Rivi, married Binyamin Ganz, and their children are Yitzchak, Yaakov and Yehuda. Rivi and Binyamin live in Far Rockaway, NY.

Miri, the youngest, lives at home with Asher and Tova.

Asher and Tova moved to Lawrence, NY in 2001.

When I lost my beloved husband on 17 Teves, 1996, I continued living for five more years in Boro Park, and then a good opportunity came for me to sell the house. It was too big for me to handle as a widow, and I wanted to be closer to my family, but Asher didn't want me to sell anything until I had a place of my own. So on the same day, we bought an apartment for me in Lawrence, close to my family, and sold the Boro Park house! Such a noble act, the way Asher made sure that everything was settled for me on one day. The mitzvah of *Kibud av v'aym* is very dear to him, and he lives this mitzvah every day. No mother could be treated better than I am by Asher; it is not possible.

I moved into my apartment in Lawrence in 2001, and now half the year I enjoy being close to my family in Lawrence, and the other half of the year I appreciate the warm weather and my apartment in Miami. We purchased two apartments in the same building in Miami so that

there would be a place to stay available to my children and grandchildren when they visit. *Baruch Hashem*, they take advantage of this opportunity often. My Miami apartment is a replica of my Lawrence one, with family memorabilia and photographs and sentimental items all around me. My sister, Chanie. spends part of the winter in Miami as well, and I have good friends there.

My sister, Piri immigrated from Romania to France, and then to Prague after we had already left. Then eventually, they immigrated to Boston, because Piri's husband, Shmilku got a job in a textile factory there. She adjusted very well. We would get together every so often when Piri was able to visit us in NY. Piri passed away in 1992 and my brother in law passed away shortly before that.

Zisu, my sister-in-law, married in Prague, another survivor from Chezkslovakia, Frank Bergida, who had lost his wife and children in the war. They moved to Montreal, and we tried to see them quite often because it was a car-ride, and sometimes, Yitzchok would come home from shul in the morning on Friday, and he would say, 'Do you want to take a ride to Montreal?' We didn't want to be a burden, so we would bring our own food. Zisu had three children. She lost her husband a year ago, in his early nineties, and she is still alive at the time of this writing, living in Toronto, *Baruch* Hashem.

I still feel the loneliness of being a widow; there isn't a day that I don't grieve the loss of my dear husband. But

I also consider myself very fortunate that I am truly never alone. Hashem is very near to me, and always has been, and all I have to do is close my eyes and I can feel the presence of my mother and father, Z'l, as well. Every morning, in my prayer, I bring them close to me. I hear my father saying his *tehillim*. I feel my mother's hug and I see her beautiful face. I hear the voices of my siblings, and I feel surrounded by their souls. My family was ripped from me in the physical, but I want you to know, I am still very much connected to them in the spiritual and in my heart.

I would suppose that one ends a memoir with thoughts about what I would want Asher and Tova, my grandchildren and great grandchildren to know, my message to them, so to speak.

What can I say? Truthfully, this part of the book is not really necessary. That is, because I have always been so close to my family, they know this already. They know that all that really matters is to be close to one's family and to do chesed as often as possible, and to be a *kiddush* Hashem in the world.

They know that I have always thought it was vital to be elegant and refined and presentable in public, and to dress and behave like the royalty that Hashem has bestowed upon us.

They know that a loving marriage with a partner who is Torah observant, with fine midos, is the bedrock of any home.

My family has seen me pray every day, and they know

that *tehillim* is near to my lips and that of my father's. There is no problem that can be solved alone, only through Hashem's help, and they have seen me pray to Hashem for help with all things, big and small.

They know that Hashem has blessed our family with one miracle after another, and therefore, they have a responsibility, and an opportunity, to make the most of the *brachos* we have received, and to carry on the Torah we have inherited from their ancestors. My family's honor lives through them, and my parents' lessons are still alive in the fourth, and fifth and sixth generation and beyond.

Above all else, this is what I want my family to understand about me, and about my life:

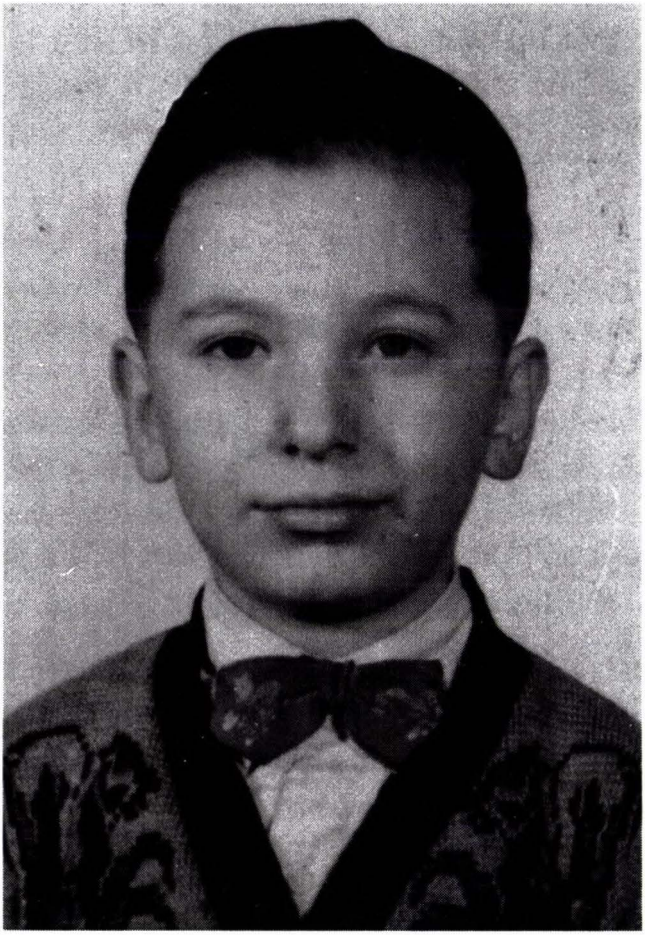
I have never taken one minute of my life for granted. I have never stopped thanking Hashem for His blessings in our life, especially the privilege to raise Asher with my husband, Yitzchok. I have never stopped crying over the loss of my family, and I never will. But I hope I have not allowed my grief to stop myself from living my life to the fullest. Quite the opposite. I have tried to make the most of every minute, of every breath I take, to make a difference, to continue my parents' good works, to give my family and friends *chizzuk*, to be a *kiddush* Hashem. I have, *B'ezras* Hashem, made over 40 *shidduchim* in my lifetime, including my very own beloved niece, Bashi, who has, with her husband, Dov (Burt) Goldbaum, brought 11 beautiful children into the world. May all of

these couples I have brought together, *B'ezras* Hashem, build lives centered around Torah and love of G-d and one another.

I love every member of my family unconditionally. I know that they love me. And, I know that Hashem loves my family and me as well. This is not a belief. This is a knowing, as much as I know that my name is Esther Bella Schonkopf.

May Hashem be with you always and may you stay in good health and follow in the footsteps of our family. I hope you all live in love, affection with one another, without jealousy, and have success, peace, and shalom. Never question G-d's ways, or doubt the existence of Hashem. Hashem has a plan, and *Hashgacha pratis* works in unforeseen ways. Our family story is all the proof you will ever need that Hashem is the guiding force in our lives.

In the telling of my story, there are no words adequate to tell it all. But hopefully these words are sufficient to give you our family's legacy, so that you may carry it forward for generations to come.



Asher age 8 in America.



Asher and Yitzchok.



Asher age 8 in America.



At Asher's Bar Mitzva with Zicu and Ferri Bergida and their son Volvi.



Esther with her sister Chanie at the Bar Mitzvah of Yanky Deutsch. Also seen are the four sisters.



Asher graduating high school in Philadelphia Yeshiva.



Asher graduating Brooklyn College, with Esther.

Receiving honor in high school graduation. Asher was Valedictorian.





Asher and Tova at their wedding.



Asher and Tova at their wedding, to the right of Tova is her mother, Tzipporah, left of Asher is Esther and Zisu.



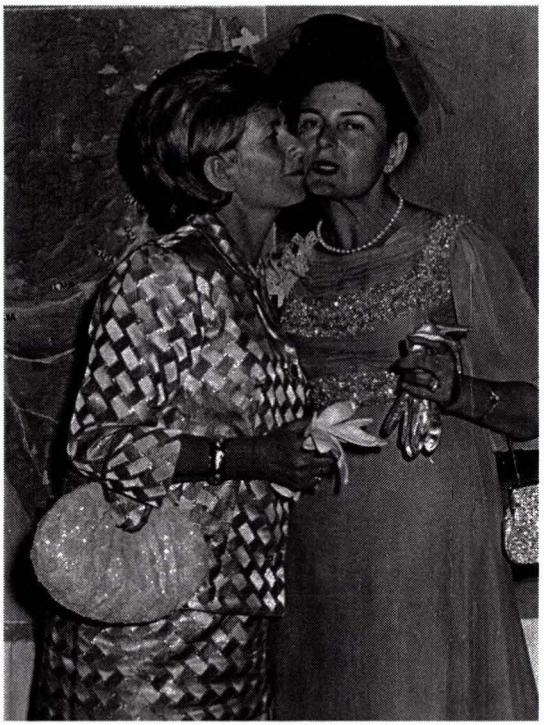
Asher and Tova with Tova's parents at their wedding.



Asher with his father-in-law, Yosef Goldfinger, dancing at his wedding.



At the wedding of Asher and Tova. Moshe Stern (son of Rafuel), 4th from right, Sara Hoffman (daughter of Libu Berkowitz) second lady from left.



With sister Chanie at Asher and Tova's wedding, 1967.



With Zicu by Asher and Tova's wedding.



Rabbi Sheinberg at the wedding. Asher learned in his Yeshiva in Brooklyn.



Asher and Tova with Yitzchok, Esther and Yosef Goldfinger.



Esther with mechutanim, Yosef and Tzipora Goldfinger.



Tova with her in-laws at the Kosel.



Yitzchok and Esther at the head, with Hershi and Chanie Deutsch.



Piri, Esther's sister, is sitting.
Standing next to Esther is a cousin from London - Joseph.



Esther with sister Chanie and Rebbetzin Shifra Tendler, a close friend and machetenste, at Racheli and Ely's Sheva Brachos.



At Racheli and Ely's Sheva Brachos 1989.



Yitzchok dancing with Ely Tendler who married his oldest granddaughter, Racheli, 1989.



Yossie Schonkopf's Bar Mitzvah, 1989.



Esther and Yitzchok at their granddaughter's wedding, Chani- June 1993.



Yitzchok and Esther with Moshe and Chanie Herskovitz at their engagement (1993).



Yitzchok and Esther with (right to left) Yossi Tendler, Yossi Herskovitz and Ari Tendler, at their home in Miami.



Grandson Moshe with Yitzchok and Esther.



At a family simcha.



Esther with her family at Yossie Herskovitz Bar Mitzvah, 2007.



Hershie and Chanie Deutsch and family at a Dividowitz wedding.



Chanie and Hershie.



Zicu and Ferri Bergida at a Seidenfeld wedding. Also seen are their children – Volvi, Gracy and Ruthy with their families.



Asher with Rebbetzin Feinstein and Shifra Tendler.



Bella and her sister, Chanie.



Esther's great grandchildren.

From
the Grandchildren

From: Eli Tendler

בס"ד

מקימי מעפר דל, מאשפות ירים אביון.
להושיבי עם נדיבים, עם נדיבי עמו.

He raises up the poor from the dust,
from the trash heaps He lifts up the needy.
To seat them with nobles, with the nobles of His people.

These words are familiar to all of us - they typically are the first words chanted by the *Chazan* at the opening of *Hallel.* Indeed, they capture the essence of *Hallel* – our motivation, no – our obligation, to praise and give thanks to *Hakodosh Boruch Hu* for delivering us time and time again from the clutches of destruction. Debuted initially on the shores of the *Yam Suf*, we are told that

אותו על כל פרק ופרק ועל כל צרה וצרה שלא תבא
נביאים שביניהם תיקנו להם לישראל שיהו אומרים
עליהם לישראל ולכשנגאלין אומרים אותו על גאולתן.

On a national level, we surely appreciate how the *Yad Hashem* has taken us from the extremes of מעפר דל to נדיבים – our history is replete with subjugation and "golden eras." But on a personal level, it is a far rarer occurrence. To experience first hand both *totei ara* and *rama tigra* evidences a level of *Hashgacha Pratis* that demands a unique form of שבח והודאה to *Hashem.*

Of the very few from among the countless salvations experienced by our nation that חז"ל saw fit to commemorate during our national calendar, it is only Purim that highlights מנשאים את היהודים. As part of *Hashem* delivering us from the grasp of one of the original "final" solutions, we were entitled as individuals to experience a return to an apex and

not just climb out of a trough. Yet, on Purim, we don't recite the traditional *Hallel*. Rather, we read the story of Purim as recorded in *Megilas Esther*, because, קרייתא זו הלילא - recounting the story is the ultimate form of singing *Hallel*.

None of us are in a position to fathom the depths of *Churban* that Ma - our Queen Esther - experienced, עפר דל, אשפות, אביון. - these seem like sugar coated code words compared to what we know happened during those terrible years. But if there ever was a story that was foretold by the words

מקימי מעפר דל, מאשפות ירים אביון.
להושיבי עם נדיבים, עם נדיבי עמו.

it is Ma's story on the pages that follow.

To have lived the horrors of a lost generation and raise new generations built on the same values of *Torah* and *Chesed*;

To mourn the loss of family and celebrate its wondrous rebirth;

To have lost everything there is to lose and to find everything worth having;

To go from being "a number" to not just be surrounded by נדיבים, but to define the meaning of nobility for everyone fortunate to know her;

To constantly feel the intensity of the love of parents and siblings absent so many years and to shower that same love on children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren that cherish seeing or talking to her every single day - these incomprehensible contrasts both wondrously define Ma and are the type of unique *Chasodim* referred to by those words of *Hallel*.

But nothing defines Ma more than her name - Ma.

Although blessed with an only child, she gave life to him three times - twice physically, at childbirth and at the

far more painful "separation," and spiritually, through pain and sacrifice that insured that an *Ilan* worthy of his ancestry would take strong root in the spiritual wasteland of post-War America. And as a result, two more generations לפאר ולתפארת are indescribably fortunate to have her as our Ma – to be mothered, spoiled, educated, and loved as only Ma can.

How fortunate are we that Ma, together with Deddy ז"ל, who we all miss so very much, took care of us, whether during the long summers in Brooklyn or when they would move in to our home in Israel to give our parents a much needed break?

How excited are we when we get one of her "letters" on special occasions (or for no reason at all), always containing heartfelt and moving wishes - as well as some form of legal tender?

How motivated to succeed are we by the shining example Ma has set for all of us, turning every challenge into a triumph, every *Nissayon* into an opportunity to draw closer to *Hashem*?

And who among us doesn't feel her constant love and concern – not only for her progeny, but for her extended family, friends and even strangers? Her love for her sisters and their families is the epitome of what a sibling relationship can and should be. Her desire to help anyone in need makes us feel so inadequate – she probably made more *shiduchim* than most successful professional *shadchanim!* Yet, Ma's sole motivation is to do a *chesed* and give everyone the opportunity to experience the type of warmth and love that she so elegantly represents.

מושיבי עקרת הבית אם הבנים שמחה הללוי–ה

It is not just Ma, but each of us, who must sing out in *Hallel* to *Hashem.*

קרייתא זו הלילא

Eli and Racheli Tendler, Yossi,
Ari, Sima, Leora and Yitzy

From: Chanie

Expressions of Love and Regard
from the Herskowitz Family

Ma – you are our Queen and the matriarch of our family, always standing tall with strength and regalness. We have always called you "Ma", and Yitzchok, "Deddi", because we are so close to you.

When I was growing up I remember you always talking about your family and the *churban* you went through and Deddi, A'H, a noble man, used to get up from the table quietly and return when the conversation is over. I couldn't understand why he always left, but my parents told me that he doesn't want to talk about what he went through, however, he understood that you had to talk about it, and you had such respect for one another, he made it okay with himself.

It wasn't till years later, when we were in Florida for Pesach, when you rose in the middle of the seder and told us that we must publicize the *nissim* that happened to our family and write it down so the future generations will know and remember, that you started to write your short memoir and distributed it to the family. Years then went by before we found an author to write your more complete memoir, and all these years, we knew that your strongest wish was that your full story would be told. All our life you have done an amazing job bringing to life our great grandparents and great aunts and uncle so well,

we feel like we know them. Now, with this book, you will ensure that future generations will have your book to treasure, and your stories to bring your family to life for all time. Ma, you are the bridge between generations.

Ma, I have a favorite memory, among many, which I would like to share with you; it makes so clear the incredible connection you have with *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. About two years ago we were in the country for Shabbos and it was pouring on Friday afternoon. When I went to get you for the *seudah* you told me, 'I was *davening* to Hashem that the rain should stop and men should walk to *shul* without *tzaar*, and I see that it stopped raining, so since Hashem is listening to me, I went on with my list and kept *davening*!' This is you, Ma, always *davening*. This past Shabbos 2-year-old Yaakov saw you *davening*, so he took a *siddur* and sat next to you to *daven* because he wanted to emulate you! We all want to emulate you and *daven* with the same *kavana* and *bitachon* you always show us.

When Deddi was sick my dear husband, Moshe A"H, gave you a *sefer tehilim* and you use this *sefer* all the time. Moshe inscribed to you that you're your *tefillot* should be as if Dovid Hamelech prayed them himself. After Moshe was *niftar*, I asked you to tell me how you managed to have such *emunah* and *bitachon* after all that you saw and experienced. You answered with a smile and said that when you and Deddi were released from Auschwitz, and you saw Deddi the first time at your reunion, the first question you asked him was, "Are you still frum?', and when he answered, 'Yes, of course I am!', you said "Good!'

If you didn't have questions then, how can I?

The Kloizenburg rebbe told a chassid in search of a *bracha* that he should go to shul and look at any person that has a number on his arm and puts tefillin ask him for a *bracha*. Your *brachas*, and Deddi's, for our family, that come every day, for every occasion, worry, or concern, have given me, and all of our family such chizzuk. You are always reminding us that Hashem has a plan, and even if we don't know what it is, we *daven* to Him all the time.

Ma, although we all know and treasure your serious side – the way you are always praying every spare moment you have, we also love your fun-loving side – the way you feed us, and send us "love letters", and never miss a simcha, and the way the family dances around you and Aunt Anush, and the way you always say to me, 'pinch me and tell me this is real, is this is a dream? Who would believe we would survive to see this!'

Yes, this is all real, Ma. You and your sisters, the Rubin girls, rebuilt beautiful families *ken ayin hara*, and you are enjoying the *nachas*. We, your children and grandchildren and great grandchildren have the tremendous zechus to learn so much from you!

Here is a special message from one of your dear great-grandchildren, Yossi, who wanted to share with you his feelings for this book: (If we had room and time, all the other great grandchildren would have written something as well!)

Ma, who would ever think that two people who survived the war would bring out such an illustrious family? But I can

see this answer in this question when I walk with you on most shabbosim and motzai Shabbos. I see that you gained a sense of discipline and respect you learned you're your parents and you've passed it on to your children and grandchildren.

After my father A"H's petirah, I was constantly told to take his example and bring it into my future, just like I see that you and Deddi have done. The photos all over your walls remind us of what you've gone through to raise our family, and set an example for us today. Your bracha is so meaningful and irreplaceable. All these years, it has always been a pleasure being around you. Your love for all of us is incomprehensible. Thank you Ma, and I hope to be with you ad meha viesrim shanah, amen!

Love, Yossi Herskovitz.

Ma, my *bracha* to you is that we should continue to have the *zechus* of sharing every Shabbos together in *gezunt* and lots of *nachas* from all of us 'till 120!!!

With lots of love and admiration,

Chani, Yossi and Racheli Herskovitz

P.S: I would like to take this opportunity to thank my brother Yossi for spending countless hours on this project and ensuring its success.

Last but not least, thank you, Azriela, our newest honorary family member. Your talent, wisdom, caring and patience made this book happen. I'm proud to be the shadchan who brought you together with Ma!

From: Yossie

ROYAL LEGACY

It was a few months after "Ma" moved from Brooklyn to Lawrence, and I was privileged to accompany her back to Boro-Park to attend to some business. It was before a *Yom Tov*, the streets were hectic and we went into a hardware store to fetch some items she needed. You can imagine the rushed atmosphere in this overcrowded store. The owner was in three places at once, checking people out, answering questions and ordering his staff. Ma needed some help from the storeowner and tried catching his attention. First he was hurried, but as soon as he started dealing with her, his demeanor changed. It is as if he suddenly felt he was dealing with someone special – with a *Bas Melech*. For some reason it hit me then that my Ma is really an unusual person. Her persona is one of aristocracy and dignity and when one deals with her one can feel an intangible feeling of standing in the presence of greatness and respectability.

True beauty is a science in contrasts. Be it in a blending of different notes in music, or varying pigments in a painting. In humans, true beauty is defined by blending of the greatest contrast that exists – the one of the spiritual mind and the physical body. It is that sense of beauty that people sense in Ma. This is what is meant when Rashi says that *Sarah Imeinu* was called *Yisca*, because people were enamored by her beauty and saw through her body

and into her spirit. When looking at and interacting with *Sarah Imeinu*, they felt the presence of something higher and more refined.

This, to me, was illustrated when my wife and I hosted Ma twice on *Yom Kippur* and I remember my wife being amazed (besides for Ma knowing more people in *Shul* than we do) how taken people were by her personality. It drove home that when one represents a connection to a past more dignified, and then sacrifices to continue that legacy, people notice and gain respect for what he or she represents.

To impart this sense of loftiness to my kids, I often tell them another story I had with Ma. One summer, I went with camp to Dorney Park and there I won a prize playing one of the amusement park games. The prize was a framed picture of a famous basketball player (that years later was found to have conduct that was "un-becoming"). When I came home from camp, I placed the picture proudly on a dresser in my room, which was adjacent to Ma's and Dedi's room (we spent summers visiting from Israel and living in their house). When she came in to the room and saw the picture, the look in her eyes was all I needed to know this is not something we do. We are the "people of the book", a people that respect wisdom and spiritual pursuit, and idolizing a professional ball player is beneath our dignity.

Yes indeed, when one stands in front of great spiritual greatness, one can automatically sense that certain things just don't belong. This to me is what Ma and Deddi A"H are all about.

In the publication of this book, I was a liaison between the family, the writers and the various personalities that critiqued and advised on the book. Through this honor, I came to experience, and witness in others, a strong love and willingness to do anything to help Ma make this dream – her memoirs - come true. We are all so grateful to be a part of this very important work.

Yossie and Gitty Schonkopf

From: Benjamin Ganz

REFLECTIONS

Our grandmother has written a memoir about a period of time in her life, and in the life of the Jewish people, that people of our generation can only understand enough about to realize that we really don't understand at all. It would, therefore, be entirely unjustified for us to write anything about that period in our history. But in reality, this book is not about that exceptionally terrible time in our long and arduous journey through the Diaspora. This book is not a book about the Holocaust, anti-Semitism or about tragedy in general. It isn't even a book about the ability of man to triumph over tragedy. No, this book is about a romance. It is about the love between a woman and her Creator as depicted by King Solomon in the Song of Songs and characterized by the statement that, "I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine."

When one meets "Ma" he or she immediately recognizes in her the traits that are so characteristic of the pure souls who managed to come out of Holocaust battered but far from broken. These were the heroes who promised G-d and themselves that their families' deaths would not be in vain. They would not allow Hitler to follow them across the Atlantic. They would recreate, to the best of their abilities, the way of life taught to them by their parents, in a world lost but not forgotten.

Ma is to her Beloved. It can be seen in the way she *davens* slowly and with concentration. She is the first to shul,

and if she has spare time she spends it reading inspiring stories and *divrei* Torah, or by saying Tehillim. We can't remember ever seeing Ma reading a novel. She doesn't have time for unimportant trivialities. She has made dozens of *shidduchim* and is singularly focused on what she can do for others. Ma and her husband, Yitzchok saw to it that the most important goal of their lives would be to send their one and only son to the best yeshivas that America had to offer. She carries with her every day a basic trust in G-d that everything He has done and will do is for her ultimate benefit.

Her Beloved is to her. G-d chose to save mother and father and child from a world where entire cities disappeared in fiery smoke and mile-wide graves. He placed them in New York with her sisters and their families whom He also hand-picked for survival. He helped them manage in a strange land, and held their hands as they raised their only son in a brave new world to live according to the millennia-old Torah that many hoped had perished along with its adherents. He rewarded her with grandchildren and then great-grandchildren whom she sees continuing in her path. Most of all, He continuously gives her the satisfaction of knowing that He loves her as much as she loves Him.

It is our distinct honor to have a grandmother of Ma's stature. She continues every day to be a role model for us, as well as for our children. It is our hope that this book will not only shed light on the world that was and on the cruelty that befell it, but that it will also illuminate the tremendous goodness that G-d bestows on those who truly love Him.

Rivi and Benjamin Ganz

From: Miri

SENTIMENTS

What can I say about Ma that you won't already know from reading her memoirs, or the letters written by other family members?

Maybe this. . .

All holocaust survivors have their story to share. Some people want to share the horrors with the younger generation either because it's therapeutic to get it off their chests or because they want to impart to their children and grandchildren that despite the hurt and suffering they endured, they were able to rebuild their lives, and their faith in Hashem never wavered.

Ma may have had all of those reasons and more for writing this memoir, but she is unique in that she always focused on the positive, on the *nissim* that Hashem granted her during the war, and, as you will read in her memoir, Ma singularly focuses on the beautiful life she had prior to the war, and the one she has built after it.

Ma is always talking about how much Hashem has done for her. I don't know if she realizes how much she has done, in turn, for each of us.

After all she suffered, the legacy she leaves us is not one of bitterness and anger, but one of love for Hashem and an appreciation for every moment of her life. She is entitled to be angry after all she has gone through, but she

won't waste her life with this kind of bitterness. Instead, Ma always looks forward and is grateful for everything she has, without dwelling on her pain or the past.

I have yet to meet anyone with as much *bitachon* as Ma; the way she *davens* and says tehillim fervently and with intense *kavanah* is something to be envied. Ma always says, 'I spoke to Hashem and he will answer me.' That's how strong her connection with Hashem is. Whether she is feeding anyone who comes to her apartment, so that she can hear another *bracha*, or she is patiently playing Rummikub for hours with her youngest grandchildren, what pours out of Ma is love, constant love.

Ma never forgets any special occasions in the family. Without fail we all receive a "letter" in the mail on all Birthdays, Anniversaries, Graduations and sometimes for no specific reason at all. In camp, I would receive a letter almost every day from Ma with a warm note and a dollar for "a cold drink." Perhaps this level of attention might be expected from a grandmother, but Ma always goes beyond the norm. We grandchildren always joke with her, 'Ma, who is the favorite?' We are all absolutely sure that we are it.

In her special way, Ma has brought her parents, "Papa" and "Mama," so alive to us that we all feel, even the youngest great-grandchildren, like we know them. We even ask her – who am I more like? Papa or Mama? In addition, the beautiful deep and respectful marriage of Ma and Deddy A"H, was something we all wish to emulate. Together they built and then rebuilt their lives

and never faltered in their faith in Hashem and mankind, and their love for one another.

Ma named this book, "There are no words." I believe she meant that there are no words to really describe the ordeal she suffered, or the loss to her of her family being murdered by the Nazis. I wish to borrow that phrase if I may for this writing.

Ma - there are no words meaningful enough to really express how I feel about you. I am incredibly proud to be your granddaughter.

With love and admiration, Miri

(Ma's favorite grandchild, if you know what I mean...)

Sisterly Love

From: Esther Bella

About my sister, Chanie, and Mr. Deutsch
Love, Esther

Yitzchok and I were always so close to my sister, Chanie, (Mrs. Deutsch), and her husband, Mr. Deutsch. I want to make a special comment on this closeness, so that you will fully understand from where I believe it comes.

Chanie and I talk every day, often two or three times a day; our lives intertwined like the strings in a licorice candy. It's not just my sister and I who are close. We were always a very, very close-knit family, and it all started with my beloved parents, Z'L, and it continues into the next generation, with my children as close to me and to Chanie, as I was once to my own mother and father.

I must tell you, I don't feel a separation between Chanie's children from my own. They are all my children and grandchildren. When Asher was a small baby, living temporarily with Mr. Deutsch and my sister, and awaiting my return from the war, my sister treated him with the same attention as her Bashi. Sometimes, if both of them were crying, she would run to him first, because her heart felt pain for him, this small baby without his mother and father. When, later in life, Hashem blessed Chanie with five children, and one of them had a spelling bee and she couldn't be there, I was there, a substitute mom, almost as close as she was.

It would be easy to presume that Chanie and I are

so close because we were the sole survivors of the Nazi atrocities (along with our beloved sister, Piri, who was living in Romania and thus escaped from the holocaust). Although certainly this experience is something we lived through together, and yes of course, it brought us even closer, this is not the whole story, or even, the most important part of our story.

Our closeness really came from the way our parents raised all of us. Why is it that some family members can't be close to one another? Our parents gave Chanie and me the tools to manage the worst stress in life, without losing our minds. We have always known what is really important. We understand that what really matters in life, is what is inside a person, not the superficial. Family is first. Family is everything.

They say, 'You can see from the children the home from where they come.' If my sister and I have merited having a beautiful relationship with each other, and with our husbands and our children, it is a reflection of the home from where we came. I see that our children are raising our grandchildren in the same way. They love seeing one another at simchas, and Chanie and I are so happy to see how much they love one another. They were raised in America, but we know that they will never be 100 percent American. Every day, when we see our beautiful family growing and flourishing, we see our beloved mother and father, smiling from the heavens, with tremendous *nachas*.

Bella Esther Schonkopf

From: Chanie Deutsch

I knew Yitzchok Schonkopf ע"ה, my sister Esther's husband, well.

We became acquainted when I got married. He was my husband Hershi's cousin. He was the nicest, best person. So I wanted him as my brother-in-law, and he and Esther were married. We were a very close family and we loved him dearly.

Life was beautiful until the Holocaust.

I'm sorry to say that we lost most of our family in the Holocaust. These included our dear parents ע"ה, my brother Asher, his wife Helen and their three children, my sister Leah, her husband Dovid and their six children, and my sisters Shifra and Dvora.

We resumed a "normal" family life after liberation by the Russian army. We reclaimed Asher from his gentile caretakers and initially made our home in Uzhorod. We were able to welcome the survivors returning from the concentration camps. Among them was Yitzchok Schonkopf. Unfortunately, there was little remaining to which they could return.

After a short time, we moved to Prague. During our sojourn there, we discovered through the offices of the Red Cross that Esther had been released by the Nazis to Sweden. We were all reunited in Prague.

In October, 1946, Hershi, Bashi and I immigrated to the U.S.A.

Yitzchok, Esther and Asher followed some months later.

My sister Piri, her husband and their family eventually arrived in America. She and her husband passed away some

years ago. They left children and descendants living in Chicago and the New York area.

We were בע"ה able to rebuild our lives and our families after The War.

With much hard work and Mazel, we attained financial security and succeeded in raising generations of family following the traditions of our ancestors בדרך התורה והיראה.

ב"ה,we each derive lots of Nachas from our beautiful families.

Yitzchok Schonkopf ע"ה,passed away in January, 1996. My husband Hershi ע"ה, passed away in February, 2007.

We and our families maintain a close relationship. Esther, I and our families live with the pleasant memories of the past, looking towards the future.

Chanie Deutsch

More Family

From: Bashi

Love from the Goldbaum Family

To My Dearest Aunt Esther,

Mazel tov! Mazel Tov on the completion of this book – an account of your incredible life story. As a fellow survivor mentioned in the book, I feel privileged to add some of my own thoughts and updates.

As my father ע"ה related on numerous occasions, the רבש"ע was watching over both our families throughout the war, kept protecting us all with השגחה פרטית and continuous נסים which enabled us all to survive the inferno as young intact families. The Deutsch and Schonkopf young families, though only in their twenties, took on the responsibilities of the lost older generation, helping many other lone survivors rebuild their shattered lives, feeding them, helping them, marrying them off and rebuilding families and כלל ישראל.

After coming to America, you all continued building your own lives and families while always helping others too in every way you could. And the רבש"ע sent his סיעתא דשמיא, obviously approving of the way his hand-picked messengers were doing their תפקיד with kindness, grace, compassion, generosity, responsibility and success.

As much as you did for all the people, you were always there especially for your own extended family. You felt an obligation to continue the traditions with which you were raised and to impart to the younger generations an appreciation of where we come from, what your parents and grandparents taught

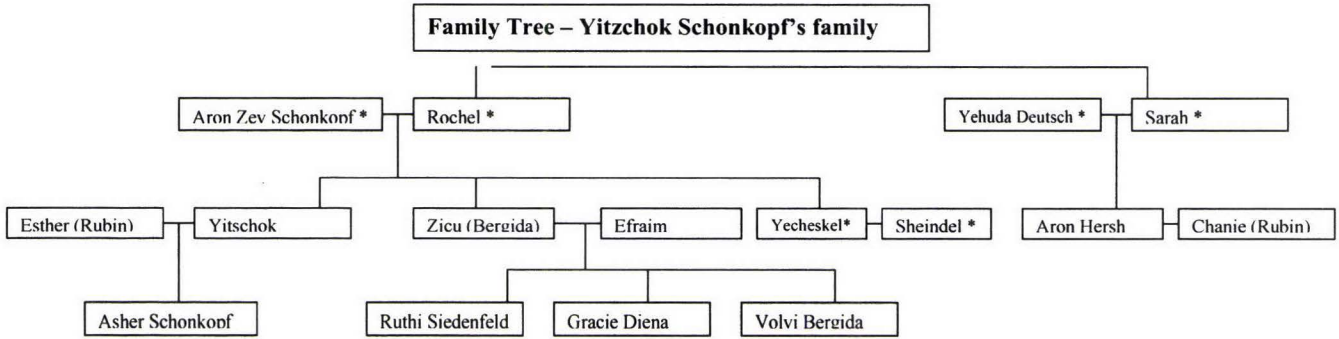
you, how they raised you and how we all have to continue to lead our lives with those same values.

You and my parents were always helping each other, acting as surrogate grandparents to each other's children. My siblings and I benefited greatly from all your kindness, wisdom, compassion and generosity. You helped us even before we knew we needed it. You took us shopping, invited us for שבת and gave us one on one attention. You made my *shidduch* with my dear husband, Dov Goldbaum. You really are responsible for the beautiful family, children and grandchildren קע"ה that were זוכה to have. You used your contacts to help us get established in the travel business which now בס"ד also involves some of our grown children. So you are really responsible for our Parnassah too. How can we ever thank you enough! And I know you helped many other Jews, made many other *shiduchim*, provided financial and emotional support to so many other people and institutions in your quiet way, without publicizing your *chesed* or seeking acknowledgement.

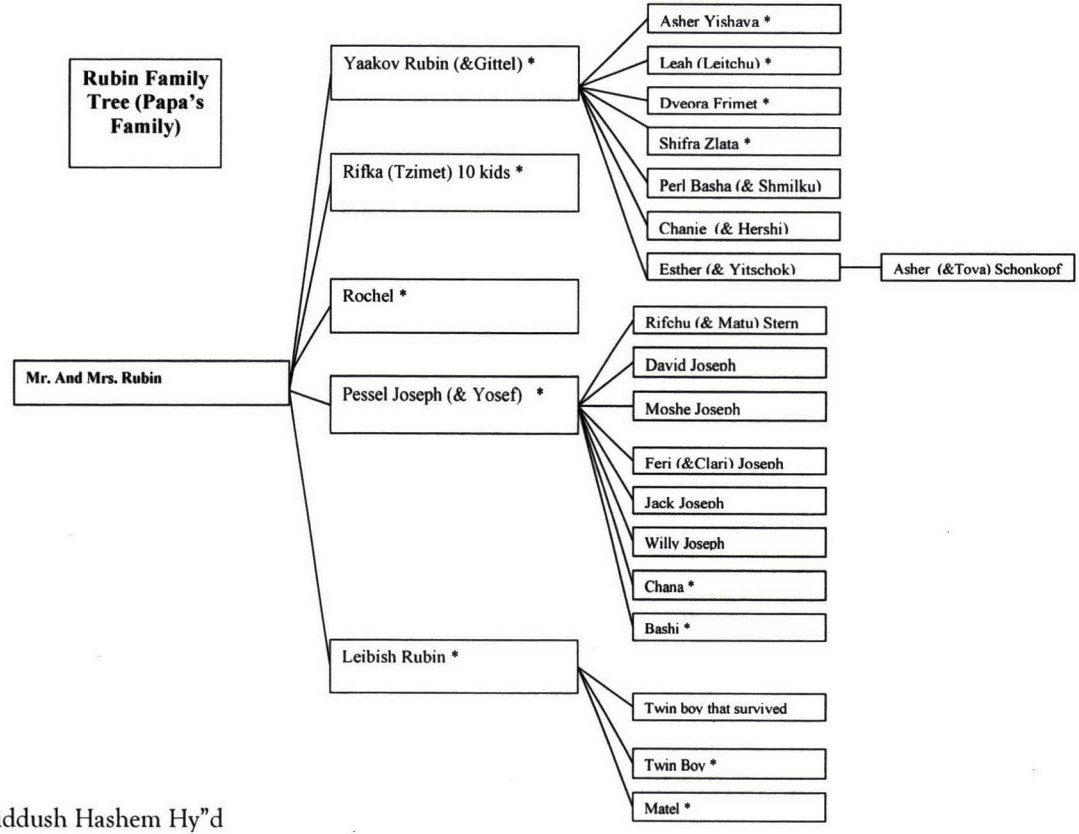
I know I'm speaking on behalf of the entire extended Deutsch family, all the Goldbaums, Deutsches, Liebermans, Davidowitzes and Solomons. We wish you many, many more happy, healthy, years together with the whole family with שמחות, אידישע נחת, ברכה והצלחה וכל טוב always. We feel honored and privileged to be part of your family! We love you! You're one of a kind!

Love, Dov and Bashi Goldbaum & family

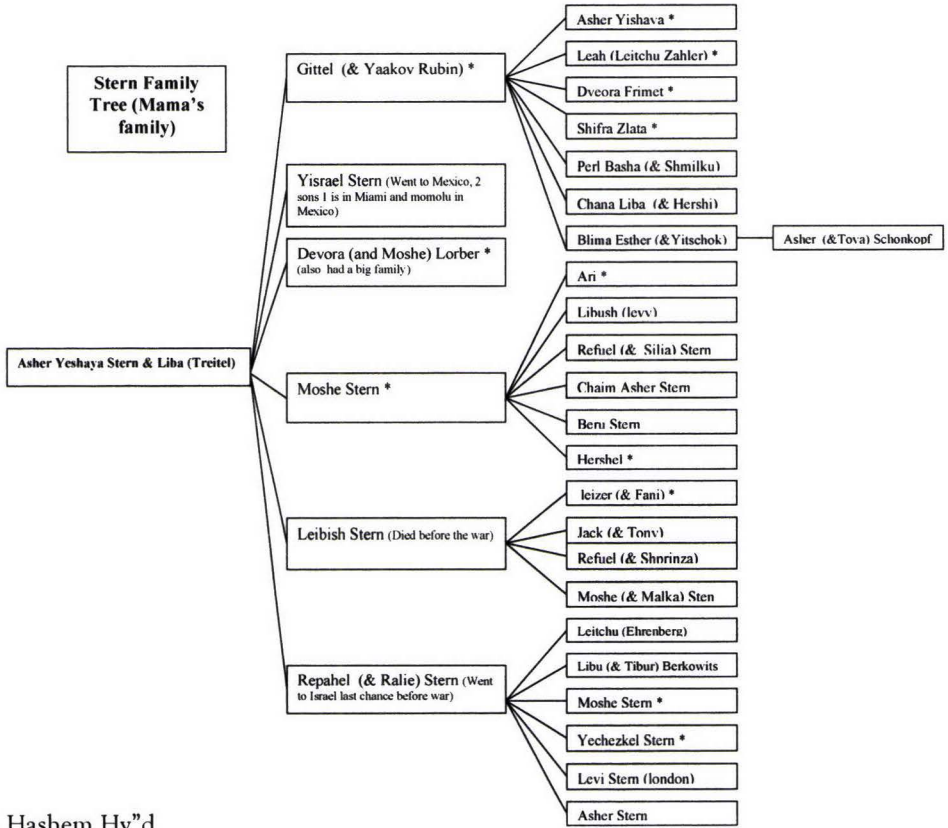
Family Trees



* died Al Kiddush Hashem Hy"d



* died Al Kiddush Hashem Hy"d



* died Al Kiddush Hashem Hy"d

Every holocaust survivor's story is a miracle. Esther Bella Schonkopf's incredible life-story is no exception. But what becomes eminently clear from her moving story is that it isn't any one miracle that saved her family's life. It was one miracle after another, and another, and another – too many to count. So many moments to be grateful for, there truly are "No Words" that can adequately express Mrs. Schonkopf's gratitude for her life, and that of her surviving family. One cannot read her story without seeing the hand of Hashem guiding her every step. And, one cannot meet Esther's esteemed and holy parents, (through her story) and not mourn over the devastating loss to Esther, of her beloved family members who died *al Kiddush* Hashem at the hands of the Nazis. There surely are "No Words."

The life of one Jew is of infinite value, tantamount to all of humanity.

Esther Schonkopf שתחי' has written a personal memoir of the years when a depraved world allowed animal/man to become dominant, and destroyed more than 6 million of the finest of humanity. This is a cry of anguish for the beauty and sanctity of her family and community destroyed by Nazi Germany while the world stood silent. It is also an ode to the courage and intelligence that made possible the survival of a small remnant of her family, including her only son. The cry from the depths of her soul gives voice to the millions who were silenced.

Rabbi Moshe Dovid Tendler, Professor of Talmud, Biology and Medical Ethics, Yeshiva University.
Moreh D'Asra of Community Synagogue of Monsey.

I have read this special memoir of Mrs. Esther B. Schonkopf, "There Are No Words". This book brings back wonderful memories for a beloved city of Ungvar, which is now part of the Ukraine. The author's family were of the most prominent people; their house was always open to all who were in need, be it finances or any other help. Their door was always open. People who entered the door broken-hearted, left with a smile and deep satisfaction. This book will show the reader the legacy of a prominent, noble Jewish family and a very beautiful city, which sadly, is no longer what it was.

Dr. Moshe Katz, Worldwide lecturer, Holocaust historian and author of Holocaust memoir, "Nine Out Of Ten"



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