we fight *to Survive*



by

Esther Stermer

When the war began, Esther and Shabsy Stermer had six children and two grandchildren: Henia, married to Fishel Dodyk with whom she had two young daughters, Sonia (Shunkale) and Sima(Pepkale); Nissen; Chana, married at the start of the war to Joseph Richter; Shulim; Yetta; and Shlomo.

In her memoir, Esther describes the family's trials and tribulations during the Nazi occupation and bears witness to the tragic fate of the Jews of Galicia. Desperate to save her family, Esther urged them to defy the decrees of the Nazis and not to go to the Ghetto. She said that if they tell you to do one thing, you do the opposite. But where could they hide? As she says in her memoir, "Clearly, there was no place on the earth for us."

But the family did miraculously find two caves in which to hide until the liberation. Defying all the odds, they escaped capture by the Gestapo in the first cave and, along with several other Jewish families, 38 people in all, overcame the incredible challenges of living underground for 344 days in the second cave which was under a spot known locally as Popova Yame (Pope's sinkhole), a feat apparently unparalleled in recent human history. (The cave was later to be named Priest's Grotto).

This is the extraordinary story of this Jewish family's struggle to survive the Nazi genocide.

We Fight to Survive



Mrs. Esther Stermer
Montreal, Canada 1973

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by

ESTHER STERMER

preface by

PROF. EMIL FACKENHEIM

Montreal

Jewish Institute of Higher Research

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The author, with her grandchildren, at Val Morin, P.Q. while writing her memoirs of wartime days.

The holocaust through which the Jewish people passed during the decade ending 1945 is of universal and timeless significance. Only now, thirty years after these murderers were disarmed, is the world beginning to assimilate the horror and to recognize that the atrocities then revealed are suicidal for all mankind.

Antisemitism is the tip of the iceberg that might readily sink the fragile ship on which the human race is floating precariously. Every reader of any newspaper today can easily apply the lesson of that history to himself, to his society and to his values.

The recollections of Esther Stermer are so relevant and valuable just because they are not unique. They tell what happened, as it was witnessed by the heroes of the epic.

These happened to survive. They are also the testimony of the absent.

They deserve the most scrupulous attention, just because they have not been translated into literature or polemic. They are the original version of the real.

It is because of this character of the document that Prof. Emil L. Fackenheim of the University of Toronto has consented to draw attention to Mrs. Stermer's memoir. His own studies and considerations of the holocaust have placed him among the intense and influential thinkers of our time. His comments will therefore help the reader evaluate the document.

A similar appreciation of Mrs. Stermer's testimony has impelled Mr. David Rome of Concordia University, historian and librarian, to prepare the text for this publication.

The Jewish Institute for Higher Research is grateful to these gentlemen and to the family of Mrs. Stermer for the opportunity to present the volume to the public.

Dr. Eli Gottesman,
Editor.

PREFACE

Emil L. Fackenheim

The author of this chronicle is not a professional writer but rather an ordinary Jewish woman who has found herself compelled to give an account of what happened to her and her family in Eastern Europe in the time of the Nazi occupation. Her account is simple and straightforward. What is more, she would have refused to make it into "literature" even if she were the most gifted of professionals. In her own words, "the truth of our horror must be told, in no sense purged."

The reader should be warned not to start this book unless he has the will to persist. This is not the "ordinary" case of a Jewish family caught, stamped, processed, and murdered by the Nazi machine. It is the extraordinary story of one family that hid and survived.

Nevertheless, while having a beginning and an end—the one, the onslaught of Nazism, the other, liberation—the story itself has every appearance of monotony. The monotony of the Nazi universe of organized hatred and brutality. The monotony of systematic sadism and murder. The monotony of the suffering of the Jewish victims. The monotony of the petty greed of the by-standers—peasants, Poles, Ukrainians—all victims themselves, and yet robbing and cheating their erstwhile Jewish neighbours, almost without exception, whenever they had the chance, Thus the reader who lacks persistence may well give up.

In giving up, however, he would, in a very special way, give in.

For should it in fact be the case that this book is monotonous, it could only be because Nazism and all its works were themselves monotonous. There is, in fact, a limit to the possibilities of depravity and evil, so that (as the distinguished Christian theologian Roy Eckardt has put it) sooner or later the devil becomes a bore.

Moreover, it was a calculated Nazi policy to foster the infinite repetition of exactly the same horrors, with the goal in mind that these horrors should become the law of the universe for all those involved. A three-sided law: from the side of the perpetrators, unfeeling criminality; from the side of the by-standers, unfeeling selfishness and greed; from the side of the singled-out victims. unfeeling despair.

For these reasons, the reader who is bored by the monotony of it all does indeed give in, in a very special way. He has unconsciously accepted the Nazi law. He has been unwittingly co-opted.

For the fundamental truth—a truth which has yet to be understood by the vast majority of statemen and opinion makers, clergymen and historians, all of whom think they have long since heard everything, when in fact they have as yet understood nothing—is that the most diabolical system of criminality ever imposed upon a section of the human race cannot possibly be monotonous; it calls for an ever-new surprise, an ever-new anguish, an ever-new rage. And the way to tell the story is the way it was. The truth of "the horror must be told fully, in no sense purged."

Once this fundamental fact is grasped, every appearance of monotony surrounding this book vanishes, and it becomes engrossing. It becomes a living document.

Anyone who studies the Nazi Holocaust comes upon two types of sources which fail him in opposite ways: the first—accurate statistics, accounts of regulations and the like—leave the human element to the helpless imagination; the second manages to achieve humanity only by embellishing fact with rumour and legend. The present book is starkly authentic in every detail. It also breathes a living, if near-desperate, humanity.

Thus it comes to pass that the false appearance of monotony is dissolved by the report of one Jewish family that, day by day, week after week, month after month, defied unfeeling despair and struggled to live.

One who writes or speaks of Jewish responses to the Holocaust is often asked: you speak of the saints! you write about the fighters! what about the countless ordinary men and women?

The question is fair, indeed, inescapable. It is also virtually unanswerable, and anyone making the attempt to answer it does well to ponder long and hard how many things it must have meant to be an ordinary Jew caught by the Nazi machines.

In this book the question finds one answer. What shines through its every page are extraordinary qualities shown by ordinary people under intolerable circumstances.

Hounded by foes and "friends" alike, the Jews of this book might understandably hate the human race. Yet they show lasting gratitude to the few that showed no more than normal decency, often with little risk to themselves. What is more, they even manage to show understanding and forgiveness for the weaknesses of all the little cowards and the greed of all the petty scoundrels.

As for their hatred of the Nazi enemy, it is clear.

More remarkable still is this family's will to live. Every normal person wills to live. Within the Nazi system, however, the survival of the will to live on the part of Jews, hour after hour, day after day, week after week, and for months stretching into years, is beyond our comprehension. One seems to comprehend it a little when one perceives how in this particular family each member is loyal to the whole, and how thus the morale of all is sustained.

But then one loses comprehension again when one asks why, under circumstances such as these, it was, instead of "each for all, and all for each," not rather "each for himself." Doubtless this will to live and this family loyalty were inspired by a still vital Jewish tradition.

This is a fact which ought to give pause to all those who, in circumstances of ease, think nothing of casting that tradition aside.

But this only gives rise to the further question of why, during the most horrendous persecution in all the millennia of Jewish history, Jewish tradition did not suffer total collapse.

In the end the reader remains without adequate comprehension. Yet he finds, astonishingly, a deep inspiration coming from a world of utter darkness.

Most inspiring of all, perhaps, is that this book was written at all.

One might have expected that, in the atmosphere of friendly Canada, the author, a woman no longer young, would endeavour to leave behind as far as possible the horror of the past.

Yet somehow she had to write this document. And somehow she found the strength to write it. May the reader be worthy of the writer and her story.

To ask that this book should be read in the spirit in which it was written would be to ask the impossible. The gulf is too deep and too wide. Yet this and future Jewish generations must strain every nerve to bridge the gulf so far as is possible. They owe this effort to a uniquely tragic Jewish generation of saints, fighters, and ordinary people with extraordinary qualities. They also owe it to themselves.

This past ninth of May was the 15th anniversary of the destruction of Hitler, the blood-soaked murderer and the most savage enemy of the Jews, may his name be erased from the annals of mankind.

As one who had survived those atrocities, I wish to record to the best of my recollection some of what we experienced during the years of the Second World War.

It is impossible to describe all the happenings of those years. As the poet had phrased it, if all the forests of the world were made into paper and all the waters became ink, they would not suffice to describe our terror, our suffering and the tribulations of those horror years.

I do not pretend to be a writer and I readily excuse myself for errors that may be found in this writing.

I nevertheless attempt to put this to paper in the hope that my grandchildren and great-grandchildren will take note of my record of that dark epoch.

Val Morin, P.Q., 1960.

Esther Stermer

from Mrs. Esther Steiner

Montreal July 1960

First page of the original manuscript

ON THE EVE OF DESTRUCTION

We were living in the town of Korolowka, not far from Borszczow, my husband Shabsy, may he rest in peace, our children and I.

My husband was a businessman. We owned fields and lived in a big house with a fine garden where there had been a woodyard long ago. We had barns for the cows and the horses, and silos to store the crops from the fields. It was all fenced in with tall boards. The house faced the market place.

There were about 500 Jewish families in Korolowka; they were in business or were craftsmen. Most of them lived in the centre of the town, near the market.

Ukrainians and Poles lived on the bordering streets and in the surrounding villages. The Jews traded with them, would buy their crops, their cows and their agricultural products, and the peasants would procure their needs from the Jewish-owned stores.

It has gone on like this for many years until 1938 and 1939.

At about this time a great change came about in the attitude of these people. They had come under Hitler's influence and began to persecute Jews, especially in the villages. They would beat them, attack them, rob them and throw rocks through their windows.

There was little protection from the police who were in no sense better. They, too, were permeated with anti-Semitic venom.

Hitler began his aggressions. He marched into Czechoslovakia and carried through the anschluss of Austria to the third Reich. He had already carried out his criminal violence against Jews in Germany.

All Jews who had migrated into Germany long ago from Poland were ordered back to their homeland. But since Poland refused them entry, they remained on no man's land in Zbonzhin.

Thousands of these uprooted Jews were driven together there. Winter was coming with its fierce cold, and these exiles cried out to their Jewish brethren in Poland.

We sought to respond to the call of these poor people immediately. We contributed monies and material and sent them to Zbonzhin. We suffered their agonies with them; people are pulled out of their homes and no one in all the world lets them in!

We remembered the Yiddish proverb, "when sheep are shorn, then the lambs tremble". We were certain that we, too, will not be spared

the tragedy, and that black clouds were blowing our way.

One day we read in the papers that a Jewish society was formed in Canada to help Jewish farmers immigrate there. Our hopes were greatly raised by this report and we immediately wrote to the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society of Canada to inquire. Within several days we received word from them to the effect that families with four members capable of working, who have the necessary funds for the voyage and an additional thousand dollars to prepay towards a farm in Canada, might be admitted. We replied the same day that we qualified and we began to assemble the required documents.

We hurried, but they did not.

It was not until February 22nd, 1939 that a Canadian inspector came to Chortkow and called on us in order to ascertain whether we met the requirements. We were questioned and we passed medical examinations. Everything was in order.

We began to prepare for our journey as did one other Jewish family in our city, but the officials delayed issuing the permits until it became too late.

We were supposed to be in Warsaw on September 8th. We had even reserved space on board ship.

But on the first of September the Polish-German War broke out. Hitler attacked Poland that day and immediately cut deeply into its territory. We were not then aware of the treaty between the villainous Hitler and Stalin, according to which the German army was to stop only at the San River. There was general flight from the areas which the Hitler army was approaching.

Those were days of great fear.

The Polish government began to mobilize. My son Nissen was an army veteran; he had served for two years in one of the best cavalry regiments of Poland.

We expected him to be called any day and I had prepared a pack of food and clothing for him. But it soon appeared that the Polish army had been completely demoralized at the very outbreak of the war and was unable even to call up its reserves.

We were all confused, frightened and depressed. At first we did not know what was happening in the regions which the Nazis had occupied, but soon we heard the details from those who fled from there.

They told us horrible and terrifying things.

The situation became more hopeless every day.

The Polish military began to flee towards Bucovina in Roumania. The German-Polish War lasted but three weeks. Then Poland ceased to exist as a sovereign state.

UNDER SOVIET RULE

Seventeen days after the Germans attacked Poland the Soviets marched into our town, the day after Rosh Hashanah.

Their coming was unexpected. I saw people running in the streets like wild men. I asked them what had happened, but no one bothered to answer me. One young man stopped for a moment and told me to go out on the main street; I would then know what was happening.

I ran and saw that the hill above the town was black with tanks and military trucks. It became quickly known that these are the "barefoot ones" (That is how we called the Red Army who had come to us in 1920, in most cases with bare feet).

We remembered them from the days after the revolution and the civil war. But now they looked altogether different; they were certainly not barefoot.

The Russian soldiers were at first impressed by the private stores in our town. They were very much surprised indeed because it had been so long since they had seen privately owned stores and storekeepers at work.

At the beginning the poorer people in our town rejoiced with the coming of the Soviets. They thought that their lot might improve now.

But they soon learned better. The officers took all the best things from the stores for themselves. The rest they sold. Officially, these stores were "nationalized", that is, they became the property of the government. They were all closed.

Only one shop remained open. The people were ordered to stand in line and to wait for the opening of this store. We were not used to such procedures, but we had no choice and soon learned that people would stand in line days and nights before being admitted inside only to find that everything had already been sold out and that the store was empty.

The Soviets began to establish their own type of order in the villages and on the farms around our town.

There were a number of Polish landowners in our region who owned large estates. There were also several Jewish landowners. The Polish landowners were dealt with first. They were arrested and deported and were never heard of again. Who knows what revenge was

inflicted upon them!

The well-to-do were driven from their homes and were not permitted to take any of their belongings with them.

The banks and the factories, too, were nationalized, as were the farms. Their owners were driven away. Henceforth everyone became an employee of the Soviets at very minimal pay.

Former businessmen were the special object of persecution. When it reached the Soviets that someone had been in business, he was arrested and deported for slave labor deep in Russia.

It was so that someone informed on my son-in-law, the late Fishel Dodek, telling them that he had been a businessman. They came looking for him every day. He could only flee.

For a time he hid out in Borszczow at Meir Latkowcer's. Then he ran off to Stanislawow. He had an appendix attack there and was operated on.

My daughter Henia was with him continuously in his wanderings; they never passed a night where they had spent the day. Everyone was afraid to harbour such people in their homes.

At the time we believed that these were the greatest troubles that could befall human beings until—Hitler came to us.

The Soviets were in our town twenty-two months. During this period they mobilized our young men into the Red Army. On May 18, 1941, a year after his marriage my son-in-law, Joseph Richter, was called up, together with other young Jewish men. They were all sent somewhere deep into Russia. Later we heard that at the moment when Hitler attacked Russia this group of soldiers was somewhere on the road. Their unit was heavily shelled and there were many casualties among them.

My son Nissen was also mobilized a little later and was stationed in the barracks in Borszczow. On Sundays we were given permission to visit him.

On June 22, 1941 Nazi Germany attacked Russia.

We were overwhelmed by the report. There was a general flight of refugees deeper into Russia. There were even many Roumanian Jews who were fleeing into Russia through our town in order to escape the Nazis. But when they reached the former Polish-Soviet border they were stopped because the Germans had already reached Kiev. There was great confusion among them as they were turned back in their flight.

No one knew where to hide out from the great catastrophe that loomed closely ahead. Many soldiers would come at night to Jewish homes and beg for civilian clothing. They sought to avoid being with

the Russian anti-Semites who were already surrounded by Germans. And they were equally afraid of falling into their hands as prisoners.

Nissen, too, could see that we were practically in the clutches of the Germans and he came home the day before the Russians retreated. It turned out later that all the Soviet soldiers of our district did, in fact, soon fall into the hands of the Germans. The soldiers who were not Jewish were soon returned home. The Jews among them were never heard of again.

The Russians left and for several days we did not see any Germans.

As soon as the Russians left, our "good neighbors" took to the Jews. Things were terribly dangerous in the villages. Jews were robbed, beaten and killed. Bodies of murdered Jews were seen floating down the rivers. Those in Korolowka mobilized and armed themselves with axes and steel rods. We even had bags of sand ready to throw in the faces of anyone who would attack us, to blind them for a moment. We did not sleep nights, in anticipation of attacks. But they did not come into town out of fear of our men.

I should tell about what befell those who fled the Nazis across the San into the Soviet occupied areas.

One day the Soviets had announced that all who wished to be repatriated to their homes under German occupation should register. This was but at the beginning of German rule and the Nazis had not yet revealed completely their intentions in regard to the Jews. On the other hand, the "golden future" under the Soviets had become clear. Also, most of these refugees had left behind homes and families whom they were eager to see again.

As a result many of them did register and, of course, gave their addresses. At night the N.K.V.D. came and they were taken from their beds for slave labor endless miles away deep into Russia. Later some of them wrote to their friends of their hunger and of their suffering. This was so severe that we collected food to send them.

At that time we believed that their lot was sad. But it turned out that this was their good fortune. Thousands of them survived in their distant exile as a result; although they did suffer greatly.

Many of them probably believed at the time that upon their return home after the war, they would be able to tell their relatives all that they had suffered in exile. Tragically, few of them had anyone to talk to upon their return to the scene of the holocaust. Their sufferings were indeed child's play compared to what the Germans did to human beings in the areas where their crooked cross flag flew.

IN THE GERMAN TRAP

Several days after the Russians left our region, the Hitlerite hordes came in.

Thus began the Hitler age, the most tragic and cosmically cruel period ever endured by the Jews of Poland and of the other European occupied areas; indeed one of the most fearful ages in the history of humanity.

In our town, as elsewhere, a Jewish Council (Judenrat) and Jewish Police under the supervision of the German Gestapo came into being. All Jews were ordered to wear a white armband with the Star of David. The Ukrainian police were given instructions by the Gestapo on how to deal with the Jews and were given authority over the Jewish police. In the regional town Borszczow the police was German. Czortkow was the headquarters of the Gestapo, with Kelner, the well known murderer, in command.

Soon we saw them driving transports of Jews from the other side of the Dniester through our town. These were Roumanian Jews. As we later learned, they were being taken to Kamenitz Podolski, where they were all killed.

A woman from the village of Bavanchuk, near Czernowitz, managed to escape the transport and to reach our town. My daughter Henia saw her on the street and brought her home. She stayed with my daughter for two years and was treated like her own mother. The woman even gave food and other help to friend refugees from her area who had also, somehow, reached our town. They, too, may have escaped from the same transports, but we never asked them about this.

The woman was a refined and clever lady. She told us much about what had happened to the Jews of her area.

At first the Roumanians drove them all to one place and tortured them cruelly. Then they were taken to a river crossing. Many of the Jews were thrown into the deep waters and were drowned. Those who managed to swim across had to climb a mountain on the other side while the murderers kept shooting after them with machine guns. Most of these died there.

Mrs. Edelsman had left three daughters and a son in Transnistria. Some of them may have survived. She remained with my daughter

and then she was with us in the caves and other hiding places, as I shall have occasion to tell.

One cruel order came after another. There came requisitioning of furs and of other articles and products which the Germans needed.

Then began slave labor. Summertime, all were driven to work in the fields. My two sons, Nissen and Shulim, were also mobilized for labor, Shulim as a carpenter and Nissen to care for the horses.

One day the younger children rushed in to tell us that a transport of Jews was being driven through our town. Ukrainian mounted police were driving their Jewish victims who were stumbling along on foot, scarcely alive. We still had some provisions and each of us came out with whatever we had left for them.

My husband and several other Jews from the town went to the mayor, a Ukrainian, and promised him several thousand zlotys if he would permit those Jews to pass the night in the town; no one would hear of this. Each one of us would accept into his home as many as he could find a place for, and we would provide all with some sort of sleeping accommodation. The mayor was strongly tempted by the gift and he agreed.

I was home when my younger son came in with a man, a woman and six children and said that father had asked that we take them in. I was deeply moved by the plight of those unfortunate people. I immediately took them into a large room and the kitchen which we used to rent out in the past and I gave them whatever I could.

Later, when I looked at the woman and the children more closely, I saw that they were dressed in clothing that was familiar to me. They also told me that they had some food.

It turned out that their transport had stopped in a town not far from ours for a bit of a rest. There they had met a very charitable woman who treated them like a mother. She had just baked and she gave them food. She also still had some chickens in the yard; so she sent a child to the shochet (the learned man who is authorized to kill fowl in a ritual manner which permits Jewish people to eat the meat). She cooked several chickens which she gave to them for the road. She also gave the woman and the children fresh clothing because what they had been wearing had become torn.

I asked her where all this had taken place. I soon realized that the woman who had been so hospitable to them was my younger sister Leiche. I write this with particular pain, knowing that she did not survive.

The Jews who stayed in our town had come from Carpathian Russia, somewhere near Munkacz. The family which had come into our

home was from a village in the Carpathian mountains which had belonged to Hungary; the village was called Studene. The family consisted of Abraham Hersh Kopelowitz, his wife Chayah, and their children, three sons and three daughters, ranging in age from eight months to eleven years. Other families from the same village were also with us; Solomon Gross, and the two Bercowitz brothers, Isaac and David with his wife and children.

The following day my husband and several other members of our community went to Borszczow to the Governor of the region. They brought him presents and begged him to permit those who had reached our town to stay with us. He consented and these were not driven any further. Some of them remained in our town, while others went to nearby villages.

Such transports of Jewish men and women, driven from one place to another, often passed through our town in the months ahead. We sought to do what we could for them. The Jewish people in the surrounding towns followed our example and helped them to the limit and did everything to have them remain.

MY SISTER LEICHE, MAY SHE REST IN PEACE

Just before Rosh Hashanah (the Jewish New Year), they drove a number of other Carpathian Jews into the village of Bilcze Zlote where my sister Leiche was living.

One woman who had broken an arm on the road begged my sister to let her in. My sister immediately gave her a room all to herself. In the morning, when my sister looked at her, she found her terribly beset by vermin. It was frightening to look at the woman, her black hair speckled with grey lice. Because of her broken arm, she had not been able to wash or comb her hair and thus had come into this condition.

When my sister saw the state of this woman she immediately heated water, helped her undress and put her in the bath. With a pair of scissors she shore the poor woman, washed her, and gave her a complete change of clothes.

However, she did not have a warm coat to give her. It was late fall and the cold season was already setting in. It was a matter of survival in the coming frigid months.

But Leiche thought of a solution. She had a big pan that was used for boiling clothes, as hand laundering was done then. She heated the full pan and boiled the poor woman's coat and her other clothing. People on this continent, accustomed as they are to hot and cold water taps, will find it hard to appreciate the processes involved there, the work of drawing water from a well and of boiling it. After this it was necessary to take the clothing to a running river and wash them all out well and then dry them. When it was all over, the clothing could not be recognized.

On the festival day my sister took her to synagogue for prayers. When they came into the synagogue the people there, who had been on the road with the woman and knew how she had been infested with vermin, instinctively moved away from her. Others approached more closely to see for themselves. When they saw how much my sister had helped the woman and how clean she now was, it became a matter of general conversation.

My sister with the golden heart, who had toiled so devotedly and unselfishly and with so much ingenuity for the unfortunate Jews who had been driven from their homes—why should such a person have

been cut off in the freshest years of her life?

There are many questions, but all we can do is to honour her memory. Only one son, Sol Wexler, now in New York, remains of her entire family.

MATTERS BECOME WORSE

Conditions in our town became worse every day. The Germans put forth new demands and issued new decrees every day.

However, in our home conditions were still tolerable. They had not yet seized our household and we were able to take in the crops from the fields. We were forbidden to deal with our Christian neighbors or to buy from them, but we found some way around this.

Even those Jewish people who came to us from other areas managed somehow to get along. Our people helped them as much as they could and shared all that they had.

The family which hid out in our home managed to stay from July till the following March. We had some flour hidden, so we were able to bake bread for us and for them. They quickly recuperated and soon looked much better.

Abraham Hersh spent his days teaching his children. His wife had enough to do with her six young children, washing for them, dressing them, feeding them. It took up all her time. Our children were already older and more mature.

Our fields and gardens were not very far from our home. Abraham Hersh would go there with one of my children and bring potatoes, beets, carrots, beans and other vegetables. We had quite enough to get by. We would go to our fields in roundabout ways so as not to meet the police.

But conditions became worse every day. People were being driven to slave labor and were beaten severely on the way. To make matters worse, some men were being taken to distant camps, such as those in Stupka, Borke and Kamionka. Rumour had it that these were extermination camps.

At first the Germans demanded several hundred young men to work for four weeks. They promised that after this period these would return and others would be called out. But the four-week period passed and no one returned. The wives and the parents of these young men appealed to the Jewish Council for the release of their husbands and sons. The Council told them to bring whatever precious objects they had hidden. After these articles were taken away a few were returned from the labor camps.

But this did not last long. Soon the Germans came again and

began to seize more men. Some of those who had been redeemed but a few days earlier were captured again and were taken back to the camp.

When we would hear that the Germans were coming into town, there would be a general flight. The men would attempt to run away through side streets beyond the town. The ghetto in our city was not walled in because ours was not one of the large cities. We were only forbidden to leave the ghetto streets or to appear in the Christian districts of our town.

Our town was situated on a hill. At its foot there flowed a river beyond which were the sown fields. The land around was fertile and rich, all cultivated and well planted. It was to these fields and gardens that whoever was strong enough to move would flee, just to get further from the town and from the murderous Germans and from the Ukrainian police. These raids became ever more frequent.

Those that were taken to the camps were forced to very hard labor and were given scarcely enough food to survive. They were also terribly beaten. When someone became sick or too weak to work, he was killed immediately. When one of these slaves managed to escape, ten others were shot in retaliation. It is difficult to tell how many Jewish men died in one of those camps where a railway line was being laid.

The Germans were building trenches some distance away and people were seized for this work from our areas. Girls and young women were seized for work in the fields. In short, whoever did not manage to escape was lost for good.

My children worked in an estate and learned to do what was needed by the supervisors, so they were able to remain there. This estate was under German administration and they were given very little to eat, barely enough to keep body and soul together. They would boil a large kettle of vegetables in the field with all sorts of flies and insects floating around in it. It was with this that they sustained themselves.

"ACTIONS"

We heard reports about the "actions" which the Germans had begun to carry out in the cities somewhat further from us.

This was the innocuous name given to the horrors which the Germans introduced as part of their murder of thousands of Jews in the countries they came to rule. They would assemble hundreds of Jewish people in one place, on a city square or at a railroad station, and would load them indiscriminately into cattle cars or freight trains and send them off to death camps. Few of those thus rounded up were ever heard from again.

Sometimes the Jews of a community would be ordered or lured to assemble at such points. At other times police and soldiers would seize Jews on the streets or in their homes and drive them to the point of assembly.

For a long time the fate of those thus caught in the German net remained unknown to other Jews.

Those who were as yet spared found it difficult at first to believe that human beings—and cultured Germans at that—could really perpetrate such horrors. But soon words as Actions and Selections acquired their German meaning in the languages of civilization.

The Jews of our community began to prepare hiding places and to dig covered bunkers. We already had such. We had even hidden out there from the Soviets and now kept the more valuable articles from our home there. Our neighbors also hid their valuables in various other hiding places.

As we saw that conditions were worsening, we dug more such bunkers during the night, in different spots, until we had as many as half a dozen.

It was suggested that Nissen become a policeman in the police force that had been set up in our town. Nissen said that he would sooner go to slave labor himself rather than occupy himself with forcing others to such labor. They made the same suggestion to Shulim, but he, too, refused.

Several Jewish policemen said that there had been an "action" in Yaroslav and that none of the families of the policemen were touched. But none of these arguments were of any avail; they both refused to serve in the police, for they would never harm anyone. The way mat-

ters finally turned out, when we did have an "action" in our town, the wife of Chisdis who was a policeman and their three children were taken away. Chisdis, too, did not survive, nor did any of the others who believed the murderers. They had hoped that the Germans would spare them and that at least they would survive. It is most profoundly to be regretted that they too, poor unfortunate men, died.

Other people from our town, and even those who had come from the Carpathians, hid out in our bunkers. One of them, David Bercovitch, fled to our barn in the course of an "action" and hid under a very heavy door. I do not know whether he survived.

The terror and the agonies grew from day to day. The pursuits and the raids were repeated regularly. Everyone was in despair.

Winter was coming and this added to the terrors. Summertime it had been easier to escape and to hide in the fields. But where does one hide during the winter cold and snows? . . .

We were continuously receiving reports from Congress Poland and from the capital about the expulsion of Jews from their homes there and about the "actions" there. Whenever we heard that Germans were coming we were thrown into a panic. Often the flights from the town would come as false alarms. If someone but whispered that the Germans had arrived, we would run wherever our feet would carry us.

There were also a number of strangers who had come to our town. Some of them were caught and taken to various labor camps. The family who hid out in our home had been saved thus far. The children were still small and their father unwell and incapable of any work.

When the Jewish Council received an order from the Germans to supply them with a set number of persons, a frightful confusion seized our city. The Jewish police ran through all the streets to catch the needed number of men. They spared no one.

Our sacred books tell us that in the ancient past we had had such great periods of hunger that mothers ate their own children. Such a time had now come upon us and no one was being spared in each person's effort to save himself.

I have before my eyes a vivid memory of what I had myself witnessed: A man whom we had always known as a refined and educated gentleman, with a long beard and forelocks, was running in the street trying to catch a poor orphan so as to redeem his own children with this poor boy. The orphan was faster and would not let himself be caught.

Now they are both gone, the old Jew who had been chasing him and the orphan child who, for the moment, had evaded him. It makes

no sense today to speak of the Jewish Council and of the police. They were daily carrying out the orders of the German authorities, and when they received an order to supply a number of men they did everything they could to carry it out.

Those who were taken and sent away to labor went through terrible experiences. They were forced to do impossible tasks even while they were being beaten terribly doing their work; all this time agonizingly hungry.

There were several cases of such slave workers who had succeeded in buying their way out with very large sums of money. Even when they came back from the camp which was located two days travel from our town, they were unrecog-nizable. It was frightening to look at them, blackened by the toil, burned by the freezing weather or by the scorching sun, and so emaciated that one was terrorized to see them. Only their eyes, and in many cases their teeth, remained of their features, and their gaze drilled one through with their terrible knowledge.

In these labor camps they practically had no food. At first the authorities permitted them to receive food packages. At the time we all did what ever we could to send them some bread through any conceivable means. At times someone would receive a travel pass to deliver these food packages. He would not be permitted into the labor camp but would hand them over to the guards. It is easy to imagine that these Germans and Ukrainians took what they wanted from the packages for themselves.

The Hungarian Jews who were hiding out in our town began to receive word from their homes that conditions there were more tolerable and even that Jews, natives of Poland, were fleeing to their areas. In our region conditions were terrible and becoming worse every day. The trapping and the deportation of our men to the labor camps was continuing.

One of these Hungarian Jews went to the same German who had permitted them to remain in our town and bribed him for a permit to return to their homes. The Nazi accepted the gift and gave them papers permitting them to travel to the Hungarian frontier. They hired wagons and horses. My husband padded the wagons for him with straw and as many as could piled in. They were taken to the Dniester River where they crossed over at night and reached the Carpathian Hills.

Later we heard from them: they had arrived but had found their homes sealed. Hitler did not spare even them. In 1944 their turn came and they were taken to Auschwitz. It was impossible to escape the

claws of the murderers.

The Germans took to "cleansing" the small towns and villages of Jews. My sister, Shancie and her late husband and three children came to stay with us, as did my other sister, Leiche, may she rest in peace, with her two sons. All the houses in our area became crowded with people, family and strangers. We began to suffer from sheer shortage of space.

But this did not last long. The Germans saw to it that our numbers should become thinner and thinner. About Purim time there was another panic. We lost very many men.

They came to our home and took me away. My Chana ran to the mayor of the city who had been a very close friend of my husband and asked him to see that I was freed. He promised to intervene, but his word was worthless.

My daughter then ran to Chaim Leib Hollenberg and offered him hundreds of zlotys to get him to act on my behalf. He was a member of the Jewish Council himself and knew the police well. He gave something to the guard who was keeping us. This man opened a bit of a door into the cellar and I crept inside. I stayed there until night time, in the dark I was able to leave for home. The others were also freed later.

In addition to continuous "contributions" which were imposed on the Jewish population, the Jewish people were being robbed by requisitioning. They took cattle, horses and whatever they saw in the hands of Jews.

The pursuit of men for the labor camps and the expulsions from the homes was becoming ever more intensive. It came to be dangerous to stay home. Most of us began to live in our bunkers and dugouts.

THE JEWS OF BORSZCZOW LURED TO THEIR DEATH

On the eve of Passover 1942, the Jewish Council issued an order which they had received from the Gestapo, to the effect that all men from twelve to sixty must report on the morrow, the first day of Passover, to Borszczow to receive identification cards. Whoever would be found after that date without such a card would be shot on sight. It was also decreed that the Jews from four other towns near Borszczow were to come there to register the same morning.

In Borsczow tables and seats were set up where these identification cards were to be distributed.

By this time we had already heard of various tricks which the Germans had thought of in different places to lure the Jews into their trap.

I recall one such tragedy of which we had heard a few months earlier.

The town of Zaleszczyki was not far from us. There, too, the Jewish people were going through the same sufferings. There, too, they caught Jews and drove them out to slave labor.

As was to be expected, the first victims were those without means. The members of the Jewish Council and those of better families managed somehow to avoid the net.

Under these circumstances the murderers thought of a scheme. Behind the town there were barracks where Polish soldiers had been stationed. The Germans had occupied these and had taken people there to dig deep trenches behind these barracks. Then they ordered the Jewish Council to supply them with workers, possibly women and girls, who would come with pails and rags to clean out the barracks because more soldiers were scheduled to arrive there.

Those who had escaped being caught for the labor camps were anxious to impress the Germans that they were not intending to sabotage the government program. They felt that this was a reasonably safe opportunity to show their willingness to work. Word went out and the best people of the town—women, young people, girls, even members of the Jewish Council—reported for this work.

When evening came and none of them returned it was again the Season of Lamentations of our century. The wailing and the cries of their families still ring in my ears. But all to no avail. None ever returned. They disappeared as if into deep waters.

Later it turned out that they had not even been taken to the barracks in the first place. It was believed that they were deported immediately somewhere into the slave camps.

Not far from those barracks, on top of a fairly high hill, there was a hospital where a number of Christian people from our town were working. One evening one of these women whom I knew well came to us after work. She told me, after swearing me to secrecy, that from the upper floor of this hospital she had seen all those Jewish persons being shot and buried in the trenches that had been dug there earlier.

We were getting to know the German beasts better and had come to the conclusion that we must reject every one of their decrees.

The men in our home were in a dilemma. Should they report for the registration or not?

I decided that this was a new German trick which we should avoid. It was a repetition of the tragedy of Zaleszczyki.

We argued about what to do, what would we tell the police if they stopped us. We recognized that we were faced with danger in any case and we constantly avoided men in uniform. I felt that we must henceforth hide out in the bunkers. I decided to go to the town and see what others were doing.

On the road there I saw many people standing around aimlessly, not going anywhere, and others fearfully downcast and dejected. Some were renting wagons and going into Borszczow. No one seemed to know what to do.

I heard that a Jewish girl and two other women had removed their armbands and had gone to Borszczow to see what was going on there. It happened to be a market day and they mingled easily with the peasant women. Some time passed and they did not return. We had the feeling that people were being allowed into the town but that no one was allowed to leave.

About noon I saw the brother of Moishe Moneit running, sweating, his face horribly distorted with terror. He told me of the catastrophe of Borszczow.

There had been no talk of I.D. cards. The Jews who came from the five cities named in the orders were met by the German and Ukrainian police and were all taken away. We never heard of any of them again. The towns which were struck by this calamity were Korolowka, Borszczow, Ozieran, Mielnica and Skala.

This is how we learned again, most dearly, the meaning of obedience to the orders of the Germans.

Of course, no I.D. cards were ever distributed and no one was ever asked for them.

IN CONSTANT TERROR

The atmosphere of terror was becoming blacker by the day. We were under constant menace of new oppressions and dangers. Food was becoming scarcer.

During the night refugees from various parts of the country would arrive at our homes. Now these were mostly Jewish people from Carpathian Russia who had not been able to find their way back across the border to their homes. There were also Jews who had been driven from the smaller villages around.

The younger people would lie hidden all day for fear of being caught and of being taken to slave labor or concentration camps. The older ones would beg from door to door for some food.

The condition of the younger people was worse than that of the elders. They would lie in their hiding places all day enduring the pangs of hunger. It was dangerous for one of them to leave the holes in the ground and caves where they had found some sort of refuge. When one of them did leave his refuge for a time, we never knew if we would ever see him again.

People were being caught on the streets of the villages and in the fields. The fate of those who were taken to concentration camps was even more frightening than those taken to labor camps. None of them were ever heard from again. There were seldom any witnesses to tell of the last sufferings of these innocent martyrs.

The town was full of unfortunate strangers who crowded the synagogues and schools.

We had our daughter and her family with us, and my sister Leiche with her family, because they did not have bunkers of their own. My sister Shancie and her late husband Mendel and their three children also came to live with us. They had been well to do and had brought a considerable amount of food, grain and valuables with them.

We were able to cook large pots of plain food to keep our expanded family and others who would come to eat at our table.

At the end of the summer, when the crops had been taken in, they released my son Nissen, telling him that there was no more work for him. After he came home he hid out of sight for weeks.

One day there came to our home two Jewish people from Borszczow, one of them was a lawyer who was somewhat close to the

Gestapo. They said that they were looking for about a dozen persons who could pay several thousand zlotys each. It would be possible to provide these people with special badges which would indicate that they were officials of the authority engaged in collecting old rags and metal. These men needed to have horses and wagons and would be permitted to travel beyond the town to collect this junk.

It seemed a blessing not to have to be in constant hiding and in fear of "actions", to be able to travel about the countryside and to buy food from the peasants.

We paid the required amounts of money and Nissen and several others received the documents and the badges. Others also secured horses and wagons for this collection of junk.

Soon they were bringing in old pieces of iron and other things which they piled up in our buildings. A neighbour of ours, too, had a barn in which he used to store wheat in better times. We now took down the partitions and made one big storehouse out of it all, piling the old metals on one side and the rags on the other.

From time to time the Jewish people who knew the Gestapo men would come and would bring us receipts and documents listing the quantities of junk collected. We would give them money again and they would go away. In point of fact, we never delivered any of these collected things.

It is hard to describe the life of the Jews in our town at that time. We were facing death every moment. Whenever we heard that the Germans were coming into town there would be great fleeing. Everyone, including the children, would scurry to their hiding places to escape the murderers.

Our town stood on a hill. It was better to hide down below in the fields where Christian peasants were living.

Most of these were the meanest people and bitterly anti-semitic. They would not let us pass through their properties. When they would see us running into the fields, they would come into our homes and rob us of everything that was there. The Ukrainian police were armed with leather belts and guns which they would use mercilessly on whoever passed. The Germans, also, spared no one and would not only beat passing Jews but would shoot them on impulse and at whim.

The festive days of the Holy Season were approaching. On Rosh Hashanah services were held in private homes. After the New Year we heard that in Chortkow the Germans had carried through a large scale "action" on Rosh Hashanah.

It had been carried through suddenly. During the night the Ukrai-

nian and German police surrounded the town and wreaked terrible havoc. Three-quarters of the Jewish inhabitants of the town were seized that night. Many were killed on the spot. Others were packed into railway freight wagons and were taken to Belzec, into the gas chambers. This time there was no such "selection" as the Germans had often made in other places. All were caught and all, without exception, were taken to their deaths.

This news crushed us completely. Each of us felt nearer death than life. We began to dig our bunkers and dugouts deeper and in less accessible places than before. Those who did not have barns and other farm buildings beneath which to dig such hiding places dug under their bedrooms. Each of these holes in the ground was enlarged to take in the entire family. The hole was then covered with flooring and otherwise masked so that the Germans might not be able to locate it.

Yom Kippur was approaching and we were afraid that the German murderers were coming our way. Since the horror that had happened in Chortkow there was no longer any sleep in our house. We removed one of the window panes and took turns listening for any sound of people approaching or of shooting. Those whose hiding places were further from their homes, in the fields or in the orchards, would sleep nights there, if one could call this sleep.

We had six such hiding places in our home. Each member of our family hid in his own bunker so as not to be together; if some of us were to be taken, at least others might survive.

Yom Kippur passed without an "action". As on Rosh Hashanah the services were in private homes. The weeping and prayerful pleading during this Day of Judgment, the tears and supplications which were our liturgy that day could rend the heart.

Each of us had a great deal to beg from the Almighty, for himself, for the family and for all Israel.

NOT SUKKOTH, BUT THE NINTH DAY OF AV

On the eve of Sukkoth we were suddenly visited by the greatest murderers of Jews, Koelner, the chief of Gestapo of the whole district. He came to the Jewish Council and made a number of demands. If these would be met, he promised, there would be no "action" in our town.

The members of the Jewish Council immediately set out over the town and had every Jewish person give away everything which he possessed. No one kept anything back in the effort to redeem his life from this murderer. After taking it all away, Koelner bade farewell to the Jewish Council and passed through the town, assuring everybody that now they could rest secure; no harm would come to them.

You thought, then, that all was well . . .

Early in the morning on the first day of Sukkoth we heard much running and shooting. We immediately fled into our bunkers.

My husband, may he rest in peace, Nissen and Shlomo did not want to go into the dugouts but, instead, ran through the back gate to hide outside the town. My husband went into the home of a peasant whom he knew. My sons crossed the river into the nearby fields.

As he was crossing, Nissen saw a Jewish girl who was also trying to escape and was drowning. He pulled her out of the water and continued to run through the fields.

The Germans noticed them and began shooting at them. Nissen, who had had military training, had learned how to find cover. He yelled at Shlomo not to run in a straight line but to zigzag, so as to make it harder for the Germans to aim at them. Shlomo, who was very young, suddenly got cramps in his stomach. He called back to his brother that he could not hold out any longer. Nissen screamed back that he should make in his pants and that under no conditions should he sit down, for the Germans will surely kill him.

So they continued to run, too fearful even to look back. They had run quite far and it seemed to them that the Germans were still all about them. Every bush seemed to be a Nazi and they thought they heard the enemy constantly after them.

They ran so until they reached a village where one of the peasants who had served in the army with Nissen was living. He let them sleep there overnight. Two days later they came back home.

All of us had stayed the whole day in our bunkers. None of our family were discovered.

One of our friends by the name of Hirsch, who lived in a neighbor's house, had many precious objects. My Shulim helped him dig a hole in our barn and there they buried a copper pot in which they put various valuables, including gold and silver.

Our friend Hirsch felt that the lives of his wife and two wonderful children were not secure in our bunkers. So he and a number of others joined and dug a deep, well-masked bunker on the grounds of one of the Jewish Council members. I do not know exactly how many hid in that bunker. However, in digging the bunker they made too much noise and someone, probably a passing peasant, noticed them and reported to the authorities.

In the course of the following "action" they went directly to that bunker and took all the Jews away. The captured people were taken to the market place and were ordered to sit on the ground. They stayed there a whole day, guarded by German and Ukrainian police armed with machine guns. All this time the Nazis searched for Jews all over the towns and took away any that they found. The wailing of these people must have reached the heavens. Later they were all loaded into trucks and taken to Borszczow.

Mr. Hirsch was very friendly with everybody in town. He let the Germans know through some Ukrainian friend that he was very rich and was ready to give all that he owned to anyone who would procure his release and that of his family. The Germans agreed to that and Hirsch took them to the spot where he had buried his belongings.

My daughter and her two children were hidden in a bunker in that barn. This bunker was under a wooden structure from which the cows ate their food. Opposite this barn there was another where we kept our two cows. It was there that Shulim and Hirsch had buried their precious possessions.

We were sitting quietly in our bunker that afternoon when we suddenly heard Germans coming. They never talked quietly but were always yelling. We heard them enter the other barn. There were certainly Ukrainians with them because we also heard Ukrainian spoken. When they reached the buried pot with its gold and silver we heard one of the Germans yell out,

"The God damned Jews. They certainly are rich!"

Then we heard a light ringing. It must have been the silverware as they were picking it up. And then they screamed about sabotage. Of course, the Germans took everything.

They released Hirsch and his wife but not his daughters. All the weeping and pleading and intercession served no purpose.

I never met with them again because it was unbearably painful to look at them. I heard that his wife lost her reason soon afterwards. I do not know how long they lasted after this catastrophe or how they passed away from this life. Our roads divided.

Our own family and my sisters and their families were fortunate enough to escape from this "action". But all our cousins and their children, my relatives by marriage—some eight or ten people, fell into the hands of the Germans. Not one of them survived.

The same catastrophes took place in all the five towns. All these unfortunate persons were packed into railway cars which had been used to transport horses in better days. Now, crowded like herring in a barrel, they were full of human beings.

The cars were sealed and the Jews were sent off on their last voyage. They were taken to Belzec and all were gassed there. Not one of them escaped to bear witness to the bestiality of the Germans. I would like to record the names of my son in law Fishel's family who were seized in this action and were taken away with the other Jews to Belzec. The father Nechemia Dodek, his wife Branchie, their children Velvel, Rachel, Elke, Mirke and Charcie.

The following day, when we went out on the streets, our hearts were broken to see the ruination caused by the murderers. Of many families only single persons remained. Other families disappeared, completely, from their roots up—parents, children, infants. Most of those who did survive this time did not live through the war. The Germans remained in our area for another year and a half.

The following day these beasts went from house to house and picked up everything they could find, from the very same houses from which they had taken so many people but the day before. They came with wagons and removed the furniture and whatever else they could cart. The murderers inherited the possessions of their victims!

No sooner had the survivors made some sort of accommodation with themselves and with their fate, in the prayerful hope that they may be left alone for a time, then the Germans came again and seized others to feed the death machines.

Now someone remembered that my Shulim had been working in the estate. A German and a Ukrainian policeman went to pick him up. All who were seized this time were assembled in the Jewish Council.

I was quite unaware of what was happening when suddenly my sister's daughter Czarna, who now is married to Shulim, came

screaming that Shulim was being taken away.

I ran to the Jewish Council but I did not see him there. I did see the manager of the estate arguing with the German that he must have the boy to help him pack and deliver what he had been ordered to supply.

They released Shulim and he went back to his work.

No hand can describe the agonies which we suffered those days, and especially all those who lost their most beloved and their dearest; All were depressed, despairing. No one knew what to do next. My grandchild, Sima-Pearl, who was only three, would stand before me, spread her arms and ask,

"Where can we go? What can we do?"

My daughter and this child were hidden for a time in the barn of a Christian woman. They were hiding in a straw bin. The child saw the dog and the chickens walking around the yard. She asked her mother quietly, already aware that she must speak in a whisper,

"Why can the dog and the chickens walk around freely and I can't?"

How can one answer such a child? Please God, may the world never again bear witness of such experiences.

KOROLOWKA BECOMES "JUDEN FREI"

A few weeks after the "action" an order came that all Jews must leave Korolowka. The town must become "clean of Jews". A similar order was also issued in the nearby towns. All the Jews in these towns were to be removed to the ghetto in Borszczow.

The worst was approaching. In their own homes each one had some means of getting and concealing food. Above all, each one had a bunker or hiding place where he might escape during an "action".

The Jewish Council ordered that a certain sum of money be raised in the town. The money was to be used to bribe the Gestapo to void these decrees. We were naive enough to believe that we could buy our way out of this menace and each gave according to his ability. The delegation did, indeed, go and returned with jubilation: the Jews will not be driven out of their towns.

When I heard this I asked, "How long will this last?"

We continued in our sufferings for another two weeks and then the same order came. The most vicious murderer of them all, Koelner, had decreed that all Jews must leave the town within several days.

Each one in desperation sought his own escape. Some went to their Christian friends seeking refuge. They still had some valuables hidden and they brought these to their neighbors to pay for their refuge. Others rented horses and wagons, piled them up with their families and all their belongings and set forth for the Borszczow ghetto.

We decided that we would not go to Borszczow but would try to hide out somewhere. My sister Shancie, her husband and their three children decided to leave us and to go to the ghetto in Borszczow. There they stayed together with cousins. During that winter the Germans and the Ukrainians carried out many killings in the Borszczow ghetto. At the time of the spring festival of Shvuot in 1943, during the final liquidation of the ghetto, my brother-in-law Mendel Kimelman was killed. However, his family managed to escape and to survive the war.

In the meantime we were hiding in our bunkers in the attic.

A space was walled off there and we made room for some sixteen people. However, we did not think it was wise to hide out there for long since it did not seem very secure, though we had hidden out there during the most intense "action" and had survived.

On the very day that we had been ordered to leave the town, the neighboring peasants began to arrive in search of their inheritance. They came ostensibly to buy our possessions, but in fact they set their own prices, next to nothing.

One of these people was the man in whose home Nissen and Shlomo had passed the night of the great "action". My husband, may he rest in Eden, asked him to take Shlomo, then a young child, and to hide him out. The man agreed to take him, not to his home but to a sister who was living in a forest not very far away.

You can imagine how happy we were in the hope that possibly our child would live through the war. As for ourselves, we were certain that we were doomed.

My husband began selecting of the best which we possessed and he loaded the wagon full of furniture and other valuables. We had buried a chest with our best clothing under the barn, including Nissen's new winter coat and very good shoes. My husband remembered this and suggested that we give it all up to this man. If we lived we will have other clothing.

When all was packed up on the wagon, we told the man to make sure that at all costs Shlomo should survive. His full reward would come after the war.

The following morning we were sitting in our attic bunker, just after dawn, looking out upon the street through a hole in the wall which we had made for such observation purposes. Suddenly I saw my Shlomo walking with a small package under his arm. My first words were, "thank God Shlomo survived the war, I am so happy to see him alive again."

What had happened was that the peasant had led him to sleep in the granary. In the middle of the night the man's wife rushed to Shlomo and told him to come into the house. She said that the Germans had just come and had seized her husband for slave labor in Germany. Shlomo became very suspicious and frightened of her story. He didn't trust them and felt that he had best leave the place quickly. He grabbed a package of food and ran as fast as he could.

Such things did indeed happen.

Some Christians were indeed, seized for slave labor and for other purposes in the Nazis' homeland. However, there was no comparison between the treatment which they received and the manner in which Jews were dealt with.

I have already told about the people from the Gestapo who had issued official papers and badges to a number of Jews indicating that they were collectors of junk and could travel from town to town.

My Nissen had secured such a badge.

My husband was afraid to have Nissen travel alone, so he, too, bought a badge like that and they both travelled together. Those who had such badges could remain in town, but their families had to move to Borszczow.

We had earlier decided not to go into the ghetto, because it was evident that the Jewish people in the area were all being concentrated on one spot in order to make it easier for the Germans to catch them all and to bring them to their death. So we remained in our bunker and Nissen went in search of a better place to stay.

I used to cook at night. We still had some flour hidden, so I baked at night and would bring it up to our attic bunker.

All our thoughts were on how to save our lives. We considered going into the forest, as others had done, and dig a cave there. Anything rather than go like sheep to slaughter.

So began our endless wanderings.

I cannot in this work narrate all the varied places where each of our family and our nearest friends, our blood relatives, were blown as by the wind. We sought refuge from a whole world dedicated—with all its energies, its intelligence and its instruments—to destroying each one of us for no reason that we were aware of. A madness of murder had seized this world, a madness that attacked not only Germans but also Poles and Ukrainians; it is hard to tell who was worse.

The madness seized strangers and neighbours who had been living at our side all our lives; the people we had dealt with and whom we had helped had become as murderous as the Gestapo officers.

There was no appeal to humanity, to justice, to friendship. The world had turned animal—or worse.

In this search for safety—at least for the day, at least until some sanity and normality return to the world—anything rather than go like sheep to the slaughter—Nissen and my late husband one day came to the town where I was born, Bilcze-Zlote.

Long ago there must have been a large Jewish community there, as is evidenced by the fact that the town had two large Jewish cemeteries with many tombstones which had long ago sunk into the ground. In my time no one was being buried there because there was no one in the town who could carry out the ritual procedures. When someone in the town passed away, he was taken for burial to a neighboring city. I never did learn how it had happened that in my time there were so few Jewish people in Bilcze-Zlote. Perhaps they had been killed during the crusades, or possibly during the Chmielnitzki period, or possibly they had been martyred at later times.

A Count Sapieha lived in that area. His manor was magnificently equipped. Behind the town, in fields belonging to this count, there was a deep valley, round like a plate.

In the centre of this valley there was a very extensive cave which was one of the great features of Polish geography, a grotto which in normal times attracted tourists and speleologists from all over Europe. When I was a child at school our teacher told us about it.

As one entered the grotto by steps chopped into the rocky ground, one found himself in a huge hall from which a maze of passageways and low hallways led endlessly far into the ground. Some of it was charted out and maps of this area were available. Anyone wandering in that maze without the guide and map would surely be hopelessly lost.

There were professional travel guides who knew many of the corridors which were called streets and were given names.

At one time workers were hired to clean out and to excavate the grotto a little. At the time they found many old artifacts and human bones there, evidence that it had been a hiding place during the evil times of the Mongol invasion long ago. I remember seeing a clay pot as large as a barrel that was found there.

All this was known from before the First World War, when the entire area had belonged to Austria. After the First World War, during which we suffered very much, I lost my father to the bandit gangs of Petlura. It is strange to speak now of the troubles of those days when we have had so many since. The Poles occupied this area and called it Galicia, incorporating it into the Province of Tarnopol. During the Polish occupation, tourists would come from Warsaw and from other places to look at the grotto.

In Bilcze-Zlote there was a Doctor Bodyan whose parents, a sister and her fiancé Weinrob, a veterinary doctor, lived in Borszczow. Dr. Bodyan was very anxious to get them out of there and to hide them.

There were other families that were seeking a hiding place, too, the Franks; and the Zinreichs of Roumania, who were driven with a transport to Russia and had succeeded in escaping and remained in our region. The family consisted of six: Mr. Frank, a dental technician, his wife, two daughters and a son. One of the daughters was married to a dentist, Zinreich of Chernowitz. The police did not want Dr. Bodyan and his wife, who was also a doctor and a dentist, to go to the ghetto, but to stay and serve them. They did insist that the Frank family go into the ghetto.

Dr. Bodyan had a friend in the manor, the manager Trautman. He asked this manager for advice about hiding out his parents. The manager suggested that the grotto might be the best place.

When my husband and Nissen came to Bilcze-Zlote, the doctor and the dentist were awaiting them, since we had a horse and wagon and they wanted us to help them move to the grotto. It was already very cold and they were certain no one would come looking for them there during the winter.

They also advised us to hide out there, too. Nissen could bring what we needed there, they suggested, because it was far too dangerous to trust any of our Christian neighbours.

My husband and Nissen returned with the good news that they had found a safe place for us to hide out.

We immediately began to prepare.

We dug up some of the valuables which we had buried, always thinking that in case of difficulty at least some things would remain in one of the hiding places. We gathered as much food and fuel as we could.

I remained in our bunker while my husband and the children travelled all night through country roads to the grotto and began to arrange things there. My daughter Henia with her two children also went with them. My son-in-law Fishel had a badge and therefore could safely remain in town.

My sister Leiche and her two sons also went to the cave. Later others joined us. Even the wives of the members of the Jewish Council came, although they did not have to suffer so much because their husbands had paid off the police and they might have remained in their homes. Hersh Barad with his wife and two children; and Chisdis, the Hebrew teacher, also moved in.

The wives of the members of the Jewish Council stayed in the cave while their husbands returned to the town. At first these men, too, were considering staying in the cave, but when the Ukrainian police saw that the Gestapo men were not coming back for a while, they accepted the bribe from the Jews and let them stay in town.

In the meantime we were receiving sad reports from Borszczow ghetto. The terror was increasing daily; more people were being taken constantly. They were beaten, shot or deported to the death camps.

Once a number of men in our town were seized and transported to Czortkow where they were imprisoned. But after being kept there several days they were released and returned to their homes.

It soon appeared that the Nazis had infected them with typhus. Soon others contracted the disease from them and many died. I do not remember exactly when this happened because we were already in the grotto, but I heard of this from many people who knew the tragedy in all its detailed horror.

BURIED ALIVE

Here we were in the grotto, underground, buried alive. We had to arrange our lives somehow and adapt ourselves for possible survival. Who could tell how long we would need to remain here?

We first had to find a spot for our "home". We sought out a tunnel which was so low that one could not stand in it. In this tunnel we made several sleeping places.

Nissen brought a tin stove so that we could cook. But another problem arose; the smoke was torturous and we had to remove our stove very far away.

We spent much time crawling around the grotto and familiarizing ourselves with its tunnels and labyrinths. Slowly we came to know our way about. It was possible to move about only with candles and the darkness reminded us of the Egyptian plague.

Water was a great problem. In some spots water was dripping from the walls. We would put pots there and in the course of the day we would collect a bottleful of water. We only found two such spots; obviously, it would not be sufficient for us to survive. So we would sneak at night into the village and bring water from there.

We had bats in the cave when we first came there, and we were quite afraid of them. But they never harmed us.

We did have trouble with foxes later who would eat our food, when we had dug deeper into the interior. But one of my sons caught a baby fox and tethered it up for a time. They all disappeared after that.

Nissen was our most important contact with the outside world, and Shulim was the manager inside the grotto.

Every trip the children made outside was an odyssey more hazardous than anything the Greeks ever dreamed of in their nightmares.

We selected a spot deep in a far corner of the grotto, gathered stones and closed in a section so as to make it a little like a real home.

It was cold and damp inside the grotto and it was impossible to sleep upon the ground. Nissen brought logs and boards which were placed on the ground and arranged some sort of beds. Shulim also made a sort of a table with the help of some of the people in the group.

The dental technician even arranged a sort of a work stand in the cave. His son-in-law the dentist who remained in town, would accept orders and take the measurements and Mr. Frank would make the plates.

We lived in perpetual terror, constantly tense, fearing discovery, constantly listening for sounds of the murderous German or the Ukrainian police.

After we had been in the cave for several weeks a deep snow fell.

The temperature in the cave was unchanging; the cold winds blowing outside did not reach us. But with the snowfall Nissen found it much harder to come to us.

He would come every few days and would bring us wood and supplies for all. He had procured a cask and would bring us water. His was a dangerous life and a hard one, his morrow ever under question and in shadow. He would spend all his time searching out safe side roads to our grotto, the very life line for all of us. Those who have been spared our tribulations can hardly imagine how much courage, ingenuity, strength and dedication his daily activities called for.

In the case of our family, what saved us during these impossible years was the infinite dedication of each one of us to the entire family. As one of my sons once put it, after the end of the horror, when we were looking back on it.

"When one of us was in danger, the others did not hide out. We went forward to save him, never counting risk."

Winter and its snows were of some advantage to us. We felt safer, for people were less likely to stray our way.

So the days and weeks passed, days of fear and horror, days without joy, without hope, days of being buried alive. Aside from the uncertainty and danger of our own lives inside the cave, I was always afraid for my children and for my husband who were outside our refuge. Each time I would see Nissen and he would tell me that they were all alive, I would be relieved for but a moment.

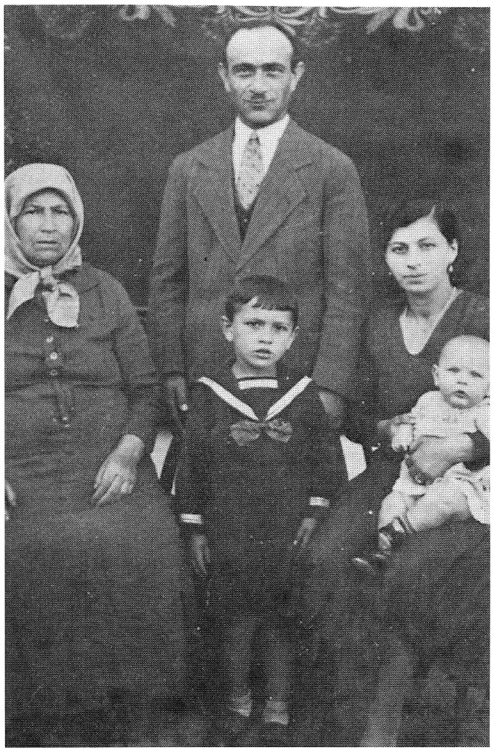
One night, while Nissen was driving his sleigh in a blinding snow storm, with a supply of food, fatigued, weakened in the wet wind, his horse suddenly stopped and would go no further. Whipping the stubborn creature proved of no avail. So Nissen descended from the sleigh to see what had stopped the horse.

It was then that he realized that they had arrived at the entrance to our grotto. The horse had known the destination.

My daughter Chana had a Christian friend who was living alone. She was a very decent and refined woman and she gave my daughter refuge in her home which happened to be on the road which Nissen



Bilcze Zlote, 1912—My parents David Schlomo and Chayah (maiden name Horowitz) Sternschuss. My father was killed in August 1920 by the Ukrainian Petlura gangs.



Bilcze Zlote, 1933—My mother Chaya Sternschuss, my sister Leiche, her husband Munie Wexler with their sons Siome and Loncie.



Montreal 1964—my sisters and I. Standing (L to R)—Shancie Kimelman and Henia who immigrated to Montreal in 1931. Seated next to me, my sister Mary, who immigrated to South Bend Indiana in 1912.



Korolowka 1936—Our family photograph, (L to R) Standing: Nissen, Chana, Shlomo, Shulim, my son-in-law Fishel, and Yetta. Sitting: myself, my husband Shabsy, Henia and Soniale.



My daughter Henia with her late husband Fishel, in Korolowka. This photograph was taken in 1932 when they were engaged to be married.



New York 1951—My granddaughter Sonia and her husband Harold Hochman.



Montreal, Canada, 1968—My granddaughter Sima with her husband David Blitzer.



Korolowka, 1917—This is Korolawka, our home town. I came here from Bilcze Zlote my native home, when I married Shabsy Stermer, whose family had been living here for generations. This is where my children were born and we remained here until the tragic destruction of our people. This photograph was taken on a typical market day.

would travel on his way to our hiding place. Sometimes Chana would join him to visit us. At other times she would come alone through the snow fields, bringing candles to light her way into our cave. She always brought whatever she could for us.

Once, as she was making her way alone into the cave, the doctor saw her and remarked on the courage of the woman who did not fear to travel alone at night under such conditions. "She is fearless," he repeated several times. Before the war Chana used to be afraid to walk the streets in the evening. Now she had lost all fear.

Every time, Nissen would come from the city he had "good" news for us. This one was shot, that one was killed, this one was taken, these were sought out and done to death in the forest. We would continue to hear such news without cease until our eventual liberation. To the very final day of their defeat, to the moment of their very destruction, the Germans continued to search out Jews and to kill them. Our very "good neighbors" the Ukrainians were very helpful to them in this work.

Jews were constantly fleeing from the ghetto. They knew of our bunkers in Korolowka and would hide there because the ghetto was being constantly searched. More and more men were being seized and sent to destruction. Every living person was constantly exposed to this terror.

Not far from Barszczow there was an estate known as Dobronuvka, with extensive fields about it, the property of a member of the gentry.

Someone organized a camp in that courtyard where only select people, the best of local Jewish society, found refuge. The word got around that no one would be taken from that centre.

One day the Germans surrounded it and shot everyone there.

Among those who died there were my cousin and her husband and three children, Hershel Sonenclar, his wife Yocheved, their daughter Edzia and two sons who were students, all from Borszczow. Only the son-in-law, Abish Eckstein, succeeded in escaping and is now living in Israel.

In the meantime everything was proceeding more or less as usual in the grotto. Each one of us tried to adjust to this cave life, if only to survive and to live to see the downfall of Hitler.

We had great trouble cooking. No matter how far we would put our little stove, the smoke would reach us and we would nearly faint choking.

One day little Sima-Pearl, now Mrs. David Blitzer. was so deeply unconscious that we barely brought her back to life.

Four years old at the time, she was the joy of the grotto, reciting songs off by heart, having learned them from her elder sister Sonia, who had attended the Soviet school in the first grade. Sonia used to memorize the songs which were assigned to her in school. Little Si-ma-Pearl used to listen to her sister memorizing the poems and learned them, too. Now in our monotonous and tragic life in the cave she brought us joy with her recitations.

Eventually we had no alternative but to put the little stove at the entrance to the cave so that the smoke could be dissipated. Naturally, this meant that we could cook only at night; so our day became night and our night became day.

But it was easier now with water. We could melt the snow and we had all the water we needed. It did take additional wood, which was also precious, but in this we had no choice. After we had finished cooking, we would take the little oven somewhere far into a corner. Mornings Shulim would go outside and remove all signs of smoke with a thick flax. We were always afraid lest someone pass here and see signs of human habitation.

Coming into the cave was not simple. We could enter it only by sitting down on the ground and sliding into the grotto. So, too, were our provisions and fuel brought in, because the entrance was deep and slippery.

Nissen was the main supplier not only for us but also for the wives of the doctor and the dentist. My late son-in-law Fishel also used to come to us and would bring whatever he could find for his wife and children.

OUTSIDE THE GROTTO, TOO, THE SUN DID NOT SHINE

We spent a number of months in this underground cave.

All this time we did not see daylight or the sun's rays. Except for those who would come to us and would bring us our necessities, we were isolated from the outside world. We were afraid of the outdoors and sought to mask our presence and to hide the more deeply, so that no one would ever suspect that the cave held a group of Jews.

The air in the outside world was poisoned by Naziism which spurred all peoples to kill as many of the surviving Jews as they could. Even above the grotto there was no sunshine for the pursued persecuted Jews.

Those with the official badges, the collectors of junk and of old wares, were still in the city. These several protected men lived in four neighboring houses, in the homes of Chaim Leib Hollenberg, Shlomo Waltzer, Chaim Dodek, and in our houses and in bunkers. The fences between the houses were torn down so that they could pass from one house to the other without going on the streets. Those who fled from Borszczow to Korolowka knew where to find the few Jews in the bunkers.

My husband's sister Toba Metzger and her family, who lived in Tluste, some thirty or forty miles away, was a very fine woman and well to do. She was fortunate she did not live to see Hitler in power.

One day the Germans caught her eldest daughter, Pearl Fahariles, and shot her. When her younger sister, Rivche Hessing, saw this from her hiding place, she ran to the Germans. and asked them to shoot her too, because she did not wish to live without her sister. The Germans obliged. Is it possible to describe the agonies of their children who had seen their mother shot before their eyes!

Of the entire family of my husband's sister, Taube Metzger, there survived only two grandchildren; one of them Pearl, the daughter of her eldest son Mendel, now married to my son Nissen; the other, Nusia Silver, now in California, whose mother was Taube's younger daughter Rivka.

One evening Nissen came to us and brought my sister-in-law's youngest son from Tluste, Usher Metzger. Metzger told us what had happened to him. He was fleeing through the snowy fields pursued by a policeman on horseback and had succeeded in hiding in the

snow on a side road where the policeman could not find him. When Metzger saw the policeman had given up and was no longer chasing him, he set out wearing little but a sweater in the cold weather. He had been walking a whole night when Nissen found him and brought him to our grotto. He was very happy to have evaded the bandit and to find such a secure hiding place with us.

Before the war, Usher Metzger had been a rich man. When the Soviets came to our town in 1939, he barely escaped them and remained hidden during the entire period of the Russian occupation.

They were pursuing him because he had had an estate and fields and was what we call in our country, a squire. Aside from this estate he also had houses and other properties. He had even arranged to build an entire quarter of homes and businesses, as well as a theatre. Building materials, stones and much mortar required for this project had already been purchased.

Naturally, with the outbreak of the war and the coming of the Germans, his riches, lands and houses became nought. All that remained in his hands was the gold and silver and the few dollars which he had hidden. The police began to force him to disclose where he had buried his treasures. But Usher counted on these valuables to enable him to survive and was in no hurry to surrender them.

The children who remained from his sister Pearl were later hidden in the home of a friendly Christian in a village. They were two lovely children, Nissele and Blumche. It is difficult for me to speak of their beauty and refinement. He gave this peasant a fortune to hide them out, but as soon as he received the money and valuables he called the Ukrainian police and they killed them.

My daughter-in-law Pearl, too suffered beyond words until she was liberated.

As soon as the Russians liberated them, they came out of their hiding in great joy. Unfortunately the Germans returned and bombed the area, killing Pearl's mother as well as many other Jews.

My niece Nusia shared her sufferings. Her little sister Udale froze to death on the day of liberation. After the liberation Nusia wanted to go to Israel. She was aboard the "Exodus", the ship which has become historic for it ran the British blockade which kept Jewish survivors of the Nazi holocaust from reaching the Jewish homeland. It was seized on the high seas and its refugee passengers—were forced to return. These unhappy victims of the German and British policies towards the Jews actually remained in the camps until the Jews proclaimed the restoration of Israel after nearly two thousand years of homelessness. They then were brought triumphantly to the Jewish

state of Israel. In the violence that attended this post-war horror Nusia was nearly blinded.

If I should attempt to describe the sufferings and the tribulations of all my friends and my family, ink would not suffice. It is even agonizing to recall this epic of terror now. It is impossible even to enjoy the privilege of fresh air in Quebec with the heartache of my memories. But I promised my children to record this and I hope that God will enable and will permit me to keep my promise to them.

My sister Shancie Kimelman, was bereft when her husband was shot in the course of an "action" in Borszczow in the Spring of 1943. After the liquidation of the ghetto they somehow escaped to their home town, where they continued to struggle for their lives.

I do not know many details because we were not together. They did not know where we were and we did not know of them.

From what they told us after the liberation it appears that they had suffered very much. They never passed the night where they had passed the day. They fled across fields and over forests, sleeping in the attics and the barns of peasants, all of them suffering hunger and cold. Their clothing had become nothing but rags and in the frosts of the Polish winter they walked with their feet wrapped in rags. There were but two peasants to whom they would run from time to time and who showed them friendship.

At one moment, when the Germans had already begun to suffer defeats, my sister and her children were hiding in an attic in a barn. Suddenly they were surrounded by Ukrainians who were determined to kill them. Several Ukrainians, former neighbors, came to their rescue. They persuaded the murderers to let them go because they were afraid. They had heard that the Russians were approaching and believed that the Soviets would avenge any such crime. My sister and the children were torn from the claws of the murderers and were permitted to escape. There was a forest not far from that spot and it was there that they fled.

Their suffering and fears before their final liberations are unspeakable. They are still sending parcels to the peasants who had saved them at the time. I believe that my sister will herself describe her experiences.

The terror and the murders in the ghettoes and in the forest where Jewish people were in hiding were continuing without cease. Every day conditions became worse. It became more dangerous every day to reach us from the city. Death stalked each step.

At first we made our home not very far from the entrance of the cave. In the winter months we felt relatively safe. But we feared that,

with the coming of warmer weather, visitors might find traces of us there and would hand us over to the Germans.

Also, summertime the peasants would come here and hew out a shiny stone from this quarry which they would burn to make paint for their houses.

We had no map of the cave, but we knew that maps existed, at least of the front areas of the grotto, and that these were available to the Germans. We had to go deep into the unknown for greater safety, where no one had ever explored. My sons spent considerable time searching for such spots.

One day Nissen told us that we have to hide more deeply inside the grotto because peasants were being seized for labor. When the warm weather will come, they may want to come here to hide, too, and then they would discover us. We began to look for a more secure hiding place.

Also, it became more urgent to find a second exit. If we were discovered, we would be in danger of death even if we did find a place deeper inside the grotto. The entrance would be closed to us and we would all starve to death in the heart of the cave.

We began exploring even more feverishly, venturing ever more deeply into the maze of passages, cases and halls, after tying a string to the original point of our departure to make sure we could return to our people.

The passages were often too narrow and low to crawl through, and we were constantly moving dirt, clearing corridors, heightening the passages—this in search of safety, deeper from the entrance. We were also very badly in need of another exit to escape through in case our entrance was discovered or in case other people moved into the central opening hallway, which would block our means of supply.

The spot we settled on was about a mile from the entrance. At that point we were at a depth of some hundred feet from the surface, but we had no way of knowing this.

Once my sons discovered a mound of earth, some of it wet. It seemed to indicate that earth had fallen from the ceiling and possibly that water dripped in from above.

We set to digging at that spot, and arranged "rooms" for each of our groups nearby. In despair we also began to chisel at the rock above us in the hope of breaking to the sky.

The earth was clayey and very hard, but we had no choice. It was vital for us to establish a secure exit.

Nissen came every other night and dug with us all night because he was very strong and handy with tools. The men worked day and

night in shifts. It took us about four weeks or perhaps more before we had completed an exit which led us into a field not very far from the road, a full mile from the first opening.

Now it became our problem to mask this second entry and to ensure that there were no suspicious tracks. Shulim dug all around and placed a log over the opening. At night he went to a field where there were wells from which the peasants drew water with pails hung on chains.

They removed one such chain from a deep well, so that the chain was rather long. They tied this chain to the log and the other end of the chain hung down to the floor. When the opening was finally made, we would climb up, holding on to the chain in the centre and resting our feet on the "steps" dug up the side.

Shulim made a door over the opening, on which he poured much earth, so that when the peasants would come in the spring to plow, they would not notice that there was anything underneath. It was all covered with grass and was completely invisible. He returned to the grotto through our first entrance.

WHERE NO HUMAN FOOT HAD EVER TROD

After completing the second exit we began to move to our new spot which was a cave completely remote, where no human had ever trod.

It was all wild and primitive. The ceiling was so low that we could not walk upright. We begun to dig out areas to put our beds. Each family had to find a separate spot and arrange its life there. We were now quite scattered and far apart within the cave, but we would gather at other times when we were not sleeping.

The kitchen was set beneath the second entrance. Nissen brought sheets of metal and we put up long pipes reaching to the exit. Shulim climbed to the top and arranged the pipes so that the smoke would go out.

Nights, when we cooked and worked, when we had a fire in the stove, someone was constantly outside watching for travellers on the road or people wandering around. When we heard sounds, we immediately blocked the smoke from going out. When it became quiet again, we let the smoke go out again.

Within a few days we had all arranged our sleeping places in our new location and began to move to the new quarters. This was a very troublesome and painful process. It was quite far and we had to walk the entire way bent over, carrying our possessions, because the new area was very low. My sister Leiche was so dispirited that she said that she would sooner expose herself to an "action" rather than continue to suffer so.

But this was only talk, for we all did everything that was humanly possible and perhaps much more, to survive. In normal times when things do not go well, a person may be prepared for suicide. But in those days of our great suffering, no one had such thoughts. The will to live and to survive Hitler was much stronger than in good and normal times.

When we had removed to our new location we began to dig along our passages so that we might be able to walk straight and not have to bend our backs constantly.

Spring was approaching. The snow in the fields began to melt and the rocks began to drip with more water. This was useful for us because we would put dishes down and collect the precious water.

Every morning Shulim and Shlomo would go outside to see if all was in order and if there were any signs of strangers around. We also had to erase all tracks of our own people and of Nissen who would come around during the night.

Once Shulim came back from such an inspection all shaken. He told us that someone had actually made some steps to descend into the grotto. We were all terrified because we understood that a great catastrophe was about to befall us. At night Nissen came and told us what Dr. Bodyan had told him.

The director of the estate, a German murderer, had passed not far from our hiding place and had remembered that there is a grotto somewhere in the area. He approached to look at it. He was not able to come down because of the deep hole. As I have said, one needed to slide down into it. So he instructed that steps. be chopped into the entrance.

Nissen advised us to leave at once. The others felt that the Germans would not come so deeply into the grotto. Even with the assistance of the guide to this cave, they would never find the spot where we were hiding. It seemed to them, therefore, that we did not have too much to fear.

Nissen replied that each of us must act according to his own judgement. He would not take the responsibility of suggesting our course of action.

When we heard this we decided to leave for home with him. There we immediately went into the bunkers, again deep into the ground. We lay there several more days.

The joyous festival of Purim was approaching, but the season was joyous only for the Germans. For the Jews it was another Day of Lamentations, another Tishah B'Av. It was during these Jewish festival days that the Germans usually made it a point to perform their worst atrocities.

This time, too, they carried through an "action" in Borszczow.

At other times, when they would catch people for labor, they would take only those who were more or less suitable for work. But now they paid no attention to this. They took everyone who came within reach. Old people and children were seized indiscriminately.

After gathering all these Jewish people—I do not know how many there were that day—they took them all to the cemetery and shot them. As they threw them into ditches and covered them with earth, some were still alive.

In our hiding place we heard shooting and soon we learned that Germans were around. I found it impossible to lie any longer in the

bunker. There simply was no air to breathe. So I put a shawl over my head and I slowly went to the river.

I saw people running in panic and soon heard shooting. A friendly Christian passed by and warned me to hide quickly because the Germans were coming near. He, too, was looking for a hiding place to avoid being shot. I kept on walking so that they should not suspect that I was Jewish and that I was seeking to escape.

I came to the home of a peasant whom I knew well. He had been quite friendly with my late husband. He still remembered the favors my husband had done for him during the First World War. They had met while this peasant was in deep trouble. My husband then gave him a substantial amount of money and long after the peasant was always telling how this kindness had saved his very life.

Now the peasant showed me a place behind a hay rick and told me to sit there. I asked him to cover me with the hay so that I should not be seen by any people who might be passing by. He did give me a handful of straw, but nowhere near enough to help me hide. He was thinking that, if I should be found, he would be able to plead ignorance. There was very little I could do because the hay that he had thrown on me was bound tight with wire and I was not even able to cover myself with it. From time to time the peasant would return to cheer me up by telling me who had already been shot.

At one point he told me that Risie Hollenberg had been killed. The son of Hollenberg was a member of the Jewish Council. He had been well acquainted with both the Ukrainian police and the German police. Risie Hollenberg, a very clever woman, had known the Germans well, too, and was highly regarded by them. They would visit her home frequently.

After they shot her, they went to her son Chaim Leib and told him, "I have just killed your shitty mother. She is lying there shot on the street." When Chaim Leib heard this, he began weeping for his murdered mother.

Chaim Leib Hollenberg, a member of the Jewish Council, had done no harm to anyone, and indeed had helped many people. He had a fine wife and a young daughter. Even when it was forbidden to live in the city he still hid out in his home. The Ukrainian police would come to visit him and his wife would prepare good food for them. He and several other families paid the police off and they were permitted to stay in town. Later when the order came that whoever remained in the city would be shot on sight, they went off to hide with some peasants. Eventually they were all sought out and killed.

Now that his mother was so cruelly killed, he was weeping terri-

bly for her. Their house was but three doors away from ours. Our children in the bunker heard him cry and thought that it was Nissen crying and calling "Mother." They too began to cry.

I was at the peasant's farm at the hay rick all day. When it became dark I returned home.

When my late husband and our children saw me they were ecstatic with joy.

We knew that we were all doomed to death and not fated to live. Nevertheless, as long as life was in us there was still hope, and we were still seeking some way of saving our lives.

When the senior member of the Jewish Council, Max Glickstern, his wife and two sons were caught, they were locked up in a butcher shop. A wealthy Pole, one of the "fine citizens" of the city, passed by the stall with a friend and remarked, "Tomorrow we will have fresh meat."

Such were our neighbors with whom we had lived side by side for years; we had dealt with them and had fought at their side at the beginning of the war against the Germans!

In the morning the Ukrainian policemen who used to eat at the Glickstern home and had received much gold from him came to them and told them that they were releasing them from the stall, but that they were to flee the area. As soon as they went out of the door, the police followed them and shot the entire family.

We stayed in our homes for several days in great danger and felt that it had been safer in the grotto. We therefore decided to return there. We prayed that, at the worst, the Germans would not crawl that deeply into the darkness where it was so difficult to move.

So, in the black of the night, we fearfully moved back to the grotto, taking care that no one should see us. When we returned, those who had remained laughed at us for having gone away in the first place.

Back in the cave we returned to the old labor of chipping at the passages with shovels and chisels.

THE GERMANS DISCOVER US

In the cave we had turned the order of the universe about and made day out of night and night out of day. We would sleep all day until about four in the afternoon.

One day Hersh Barad with his wife and two children rushed to us to tell us that the Germans had entered the grotto. He had heard them speaking to each other, and one had said, "We have found the place."

Soon we heard their yelling.

What were we to do? We were completely confused. I told my children to hide under the beds while I would go to meet the Germans.

Hersh Barad's quarters were the first, then came Chisdis and then Weingreb the veterinarian.

Hersh and his family had also managed to crawl under our beds. My late sister Leiche was opposite our beds, and the Germans were already near her. They were also near my daughter Henia.

They entered with Chisdis and Weinreb before them and began screaming that we should all come out, otherwise they would throw hand grenades and would close off the entrance. No one moved.

They ordered the two Jewish men to repeat their command in Polish.

Shlomo who was lying near Usher, said to him, "Usher, if we could only kill at least one of the bandits." He said this without thinking how many Jews would pay with their lives for such an act.

One German who was standing near us with a reflector in one hand and a revolver in the other ordered us to move. I rose and said to him in German, which I had learned in the school,

"Very well, so you have found us. What do you think? Do you think that unless your kill us the Fueher will lose the war? Look at how we live here, like rats. All we want is to live, to survive the war years. Leave us here."

One of the Germans replied, "We are not doing anything to Jews. We are only sending them to camp."

I told him that we knew exactly what these camps were.

I heard one of them screaming to another, "Mr. Obersturm Fueher, who is talking so loudly there."

Shulim was surprised by the Germans. He had one torn boot on his foot, the other was bare. He lay still, half hidden in the darkness which was only dimly lit by the Nazis' flashlights. A German near him might have noticed an old boot.

In the meantime the children crawled under the beds, my Chana and Yetta, my grandchild Sonia and my sister's son Sol. My Henia and her younger child Sima-Pearl, Shlomo, Usher Metzger, our cousin from Tluste, my sister Leiche with her son of eleven and I were taken by the Germans.

As we were leaving, they stopped at the kitchen standing under the new entrance without noticing it. They asked us where the others were. We said that there were no others. They asked us whether there was another entrance to the grotto and we again told them that there was none.

The Gestapo had come with a map. They did not bring the Ukrainian police with them nor the guide to the grotto who knew all the passages.

They came with large flashlights and looked on the ground for tracks. Where no one had trodden the earth was covered as with a moss. In the passages leading to us they had also found the bottles which we had placed there to catch the water. This had led them to the certainty that there were, indeed, people hiding here.

Only later did we learn how they came to search for us. The German director of the estate had come one day to look at the grotto. Near the entrance to the cave he had seen potatoes.

There is a story about how those potatoes happened to be there.

The dentist had given Nissen a sack of potatoes to take to his family in the cave. The sack was torn and while lowering it into the grotto some of the potatoes spilled. It was impossible to pick up all the spilled potatoes in the snow. Now that the frost had gone, the German found the remaining potatoes and informed the Gestapo about them.

These Germans assumed that the Ukrainian police had known about the Jews who were hiding here all along, and they therefore came alone, without them.

As we were walking out from our hiding place in the grotto, a German gave Shlomo a lamp to carry. He himself followed the women and the children and the three men. At a certain moment I grabbed the lamp away from Shlomo and I shoved him as a signal that he should run away.

When we came to another narrow passage I slipped aside. The others went ahead as the Germans were screaming murderously. I moved deeper inside the cave and soon found myself alone in the dark; I looked about for a match or for something with which I could make a light, but could not find anything. I began to crawl hither and thither feeling my way looking for a track, but could touch nothing.

I sat down and began to think. Possibly I had not done the wisest

thing in running away from the Germans. Here I could starve to death, lost in the grotto, a fate worse than a bullet in the head.

I suddenly remembered that Nissen, who had come to know the grotto well, had once been on his way to us when his light went out as he was walking in the cave. He, too, did not know where to go in the dark, so he began to call loudly, hoping that the sound would reach us. But we did not hear him. It was not only that he wasn't able to reach us, but he could not even remember the way back to the entrance. His terror was all the greater because his horse and wagon were outside. If anyone had seen them, we were all lost. Miraculously, one of us happened to be going for the pots with the water, and met Nissen. He led him to us and to safety.

But what hope could I have to come out alive from this situation?

I arose again and began feeling the walls and the floor in the hope of finding something.

Suddenly I heard one of our people, the veterinarian, cry "Elsa!" He was looking for the doctor's wife.

I began to call him and he approached. But he too did not know where we were.

By this time I was exhausted and could walk no further in the dark. I asked him to go back to our people and send somebody for me with candles.

For some time I sat and I again became desperate. How could I be sure that someone would come for me? Perhaps they had all gone out through the other exit. Possibly I was fated to pass away from hunger.

But soon I heard footsteps and saw my Shlomo.

SHULIM BREAKS DOWN

When I came to our "home" in the cave, I saw that all had crawled through the exit except Shulim who was sitting on the ground trembling, head thrown back. I ran to him, spoke to him, but he did not reply. His eyes were glazed, his teeth clenched and he was drooling at the mouth. I was very frightened.

They were calling to us from the exit to send Shulim to them because they were unable to open the exit door without him.

The dugout exit was like a chimney about a hundred feet long and about thirty-six inches in diameter. Across the top of this entrance was a log with a long chain hanging from it that reached to the bottom. We had dug footholds on the right and left sides from the bottom to the top to enable us to climb up. When going up we had to hold the chain as we braced our feet against the steps we had dug out. Only Shulim knew how to open the exit door since he had invented the mechanism.

But how could I send Shulim to them? It was as if there was almost no one to speak to. I tried to put some food into his mouth, but his teeth were clenched so tight that I couldn't open his mouth. Hersch was standing beside us and was watching all this.

Chana pushed Yetta under the bed and the two had hidden out until after the Germans left with some of our people.

Chana was the first to climb up the difficult opening. It was almost impossible for her to open the exit; there was so much earth covering it as camouflage. She tried to remove it with her hands overhead. The rocks and sand poured down half choking them as they stood screaming to her to open the covering. But they could not help her, for there was barely room for her in the aperture.

Fortunately, all this took hours, for if they would have emerged in daylight the police would have seen them. The Germans stood at the grotto waiting for the rest of us to emerge.

When we succeeded in opening the entrance we all rushed out.

Hersch held Shulim up and we lifted him out of the grotto. Chana was the first to climb to the entrance and Yetta helped to push my grand-daughter Sonia up. They were followed by my sister's son, Siome. Then the others climbed up.

We all fled in different directions.

Chana knew the way to a village, so she, Yetta, Saul and Sonia made their way through a forest.

Running through the woods they saw a light. It was a police detachment coming from the village to relieve the watch over the grotto. Chana told those with her to lie down silently, and they all waited in great fear until the men passed.

They then continued to the village, to the farm of the Christian woman who had hidden her. They crawled into a small barn and climbed into a straw pile in the attic where they clung to each other, hungry, frightened, ill-dressed, barefoot, in the wintry cold.

They soon decided they could not remain like this for long, and Chana made up her mind to ask for some food and clothing.

When she appeared at the farmhouse door, filthy, bedraggled, the Christian family was frightened. She told them her tale and asked for help for those with her, and they did give her some warm food and some clothing.

The anxiety about what had happened to the others was unbearable. But on the morrow Nissen came with father and took them away.

This is not the first time I write about such things, an indication of the terror and inhuman sufferings which all of us, including our small children who had enjoyed so little of life, now had to suffer. The truth of our horror must be told fully, in no sense purged. I did not even know myself all the tortures and sufferings that they underwent because my children did not tell me everything. Certainly they tried to spare me unnecessary agony. Also, I am writing so long after the events so that I have forgotten much.

Outside all was dark. It was very cold, and the rain mixed with snow was blown by strong winds against us. Each one of us ran with no destination in mind; I was leading half carrying Shulim, holding him up with both hands so that he should not fall. He couldn't stand on his feet. I was practically carrying him, with his feet dragging helplessly.

Suddenly I saw a light flash in the dark. I lay down on the ground and pulled Shulim with me, but the man had already seen us and I saw the light approaching us.

He stopped near us and asked in Ukrainian who we were. I sat up a little and I told him who I was and that my son was sick and asked the way to Korolowka.

I looked at the policeman—for it was a Ukrainian policeman who had approached us—and I recognized him. He, too, knew who I was, for he had eaten and drunk in our house often while we were still in our home.

The policeman said that he could not let me go because the commander of the police was near. In fact, the man soon approached us. He, too, knew who I was, but he did not let us go either.

He dragged us back to the entrance of the grotto and insisted that we shown him where our hiding place had been. I told him that I did not know exactly where it had been myself. I had been taken there and I had been sitting on one spot all the time without knowing exactly where. If I were to enter the grotto now I could not find my way to our spot.

He told me that, indeed, they too had been there two days ago with the guide to the grotto and that even he had not been able to find us either.

I suddenly remembered that a few days earlier, when we were still in our home, my husband, may he rest in peace, had told us that the commander at Bilcze-Zlote had pressed him to procure a bicycle for him.

The Jewish people with the badges were still legally in the town and were still travelling around looking for old things. It was thus that my late husband had come to Bilcze-Zlote and had met with the police more than once. My husband had told me that he had found a bicycle in the home of a Jewish man he knew at Borszczow, one Nives. He had hidden the bicycle and was expecting to hand it over to the commander one of these days.

When I recalled this, I mentioned to the officer that my husband had already found a bicycle for him. He softened remarkably and let us go.

I didn't have the faintest idea about how to reach Korolowka, but I took Shulim in my arms and we began to walk. My son was trembling all over, so I took my jacket off and wrapped him up in it. I remained only in my dress and soon began shivering of the cold.

Somehow we soon came to a road which I half knew, and I believed we were going in the direction of the estate where the barns for the horses and cattle were located.

I was practically carrying Shulim in my arms and I calculated that we were still two miles from my destination. The rain and the snow were beating in our faces and it was nearly impossible to move on the slippery, muddy road.

But a fury was bearing me. Everything slipped from my mind except the hope of entering some warm house where I could put my sick son to sleep. I didn't believe that I would ever see any of the others but I was praying to God that the son in my arms would be spared. I tried to speak to Shulim but he could not reply. In agony and pain I

kept on dragging him, asking only where we might both find a refuge for a moment.

I remembered that across the road from the barns there lived a peasant who, several years earlier, had come from Canada and had bought an entire field from the squire. He had built a home and barns there. He had dealt all these years with my husband, who was the only person to know what produce this peasant grew. Every week his wife and daughters would come into town on market days. They would often borrow money from us to buy their needs, and leave them with us until they were ready to return to their farm. Whenever he would come into town he would stay with us, put his horses in our barn and feed them with our hay. He was very much at home with us. Surely there could be no better friend.

I was already approaching the road. There was no electricity. It was so dark that our eyes nearly fell out of our faces. The buildings and the trees hid the skies. The darkness was even thicker than before. Drawing upon the last of my energies I managed to reach the fence of the peasant's fields and found the entrance gate.

As I opened the gate dogs the size of bears attacked us. I bent down to pick up some stones to throw at them. They drew back a bit, but soon they were jumping on us again. They were barking without cease and I was waiting for someone to come out. But no one emerged.

I began to look for the house. I had never been there, but once, when I had driven past with my husband on our way to my mother, he pointed out the house and told me that our friend was living there.

The dogs quieted down a bit after a while and barked less. I crawled around looking for the house. There were many small structures there; finally I saw a window.

I knocked. There was no answer. I kept on knocking.

After half an hour a woman's voice asked, "Who is there?". She certainly recognized me after she heard my first words. I told her it's a neighbor and that my child is sick and I want a favor from her. I told the woman that I was a neighbor, careful not to mention my name. Even if she recognized me she was more likely to open the door to me if I did not mention my Jewish name.

She answered that she never opens the door at night.

I didn't leave and kept on pleading with her to let me in. At first she answered, but soon became completely silent.

I saw that I was standing there in vain and I began looking for the way back.

A bit farther down the road there were several small houses where the workers of the estate lived. Each house was some distance from the next, and was fenced off.

I kept on dragging myself with my sick son. I knocked at the first house; there was no answer. I kept on for a time, and then tried the second house and the third. In six houses there was no response to my pleas for admission.

I saw a light in one of these houses. I knocked at the door persistently and the woman let me in.

As I came in I saw a man lying there with two sons. I recognized them immediately. He had worked for several years at my late father's.

I turned to him and asked him to let me put my Shulim down. His sons knew Shulim well because he worked in the carpentry shop at the estate.

They asked me what the trouble with Shulim was and I told them that he had suddenly taken sick.

The man replied that I cannot stay with them and that I was to move on.

I appealed to his conscience and reminded him that we had known each other from childhood and that he once had a good home with my father. The man had no parents so he would eat at our home, was married from there and received presents from us at the time. I reminded him of all this, hoping that I could move him.

All this time Shulim was lying on a bench. In peasants' homes there were broad benches along the walls which were used as chairs; at night people slept there. But the man was stubborn and began to scream for me to leave.

Again I asked him to let us stay at least until dawn. My husband has a horse and wagon and would come to take us away.

"No," he cried, "out of my house". He even screamed at his wife for having let us in in the first place.

He turned to me and said that if I did not leave immediately it would be worse for me. He told the boys to get dressed and he, too, began to dress.

I saw that things would become intolerable within minutes. I took Shulim and we left.

Where are we to go? There was still one more hut, but I had no more courage to drag myself there. I could see that it was all in vain.

Should I go to the village? The road there is dangerous, it is a main road. Before the war it had been maintained in some sort of condi-

tion. It was repaired regularly and the holes were always filled. But since the war, the road was neglected. It was full of deep holes and mud.

I decided to try the last house. I might possibly meet a human being there.

I knocked at the door and someone answered. A woman came out and asked me to come in.

We knew her, too. She looked at Shulim and asked what the trouble with him was.

I told her that I did not know but that he had suddenly taken sick.

She had two sons who were asleep, but they came out of their bed and put Shulim in. They, too, knew Shulim and were very sorry for him. They tried to feed him, and after considerable effort he swallowed several spoonfuls of milk. His appearance didn't change and he still could not speak.

The woman told me that she had seen the Germans lead five people away, three adults, two women together with a man, and two children. They were not shot; they are under arrest in the hands of the Ukrainian police. The hope awakened in me that they might not be lost. Possibly they could be bought off.

I asked one of the boys to go to my husband in town and to tell him that we are in their home and that five of our Jewish people are arrested. I wanted him to come here immediately.

The boys replied that they cannot go because they were tired and because they had to be at work in the barn at four in the morning.

The woman told me that I did not need to hesitate to leave Shulim with her; she would take care of him. She led me out and showed me the way to Korolowka.

In normal times I would have been able to find my way in daytime, because I had travelled that road from time to time. But at night—and such a night at that, travelling as I was by side roads—I didn't know my way.

But I had no choice.

I kept on going. I came to a small forest which a peasant whom we knew had planted a full acre of land. I was lost there in the grove and went around in circles for a while. Eventually I emerged, but I was so exhausted that I fell on a rock and remained sitting there, my eyes shutting from fatigue.

Calling upon my last reserves I stood up.

I suddenly saw the grotto in the distance, and people moving around there with flashlights. The Ukrainian police were looking for Jews there.

I had kept on walking and was wondering why I had not yet reached the valley which should lie across the road to Korolowka. Now I understood that I had lost my way. It was getting near dawn.

I looked about and I saw that I was back where I had started from but on the other side. I heard the bell ringing, calling the workers to the barns. It was four in the morning.

Now I could see the road and I began to go in the direction of Korolowka. I still had eight or nine kilometers to go.

No sooner did I reach the town when I saw my Nissen walking towards me. It was about six in the morning.

He knew all. Hersch Barad and his wife and children had run home at night and had told him everything. I told Nissen that we must go to Doctor Bodyan in Bilcze-Zlote to see what he could do about freeing those arrested. Dr. Bodyan knew the chief of the police well and was on such good terms with him that he could possibly slip him some money to release those detained.

Nissen first went to Shulim and from there he went to Dr. Bodyan.

Going back they took Shulim with them because the woman was afraid to keep him any longer.

We called Dr. Teibels to see Shulim. He was a Jewish doctor whom the police had still permitted to live in Korolowka to attend to their sick. Dr. Teibels was well known as a good doctor. He examined Shulim and diagnosed a nervous shock which had occurred when he heard the German murderers screaming while he was sleeping. He assured us that he would give him a series of some thirty needles and that Shulim would recover.

At night my husband and my late son-in-law Fishel also went to Bilcze-Zlote with their horse and wagon.

They began to negotiate with the chief of police about releasing the five members of my family. At first he didn't want to hear about it but Doctor Bodyan said that he wanted to speak to him privately.

In the meantime the chief of police of Bilcze-Zlote had met with the chief of police of Korolowka and consulted him about taking a large ransom from those they had arrested. The Germans had turned the Jews over to the Ukrainian police who were ordered to question them about where other Jews were hiding and where Jewish treasure was buried. Then they were to shoot them.

So it was that the Korolowka commander also knew about the entire case.

He came to our house and he saw Shulim lying in bed. He also saw me because I was attending to my son and I didn't want to hide

in our bunker this time. The others were all hidden in the bunker except those who had the badges, the collectors of the junk who still had the right to live in the town.

My late husband, my late son-in-law Fishel and my son Nissen again went to Bilcze-Zlote to Dr. Bodyan to see about saving the unfortunate people who had been arrested. Dr. Bodyan said that he had spoken to the chief of police who was indeed very strongly tempted by the promised ransom but he didn't want to risk his life. The Gestapo had ordered them to shoot the arrested people. They might well come one day and ask to see the graves of those shot and might even dig up the graves to see whether the Jews were buried there.

Eventually the chief of police hit upon a plan; he wanted us to deliver him the bodies of Jewish people who had recently been shot.

We had no choice but had to agree to this horrible plan.

WE EXHUME THE DEAD TO SAVE THE LIVING

I have already told about my nephew Usher Metzker who was a wealthy man. He had buried much silver and gold and he had promised the chief policemen a great fortune if they would release the arrested people. I also gave what we possessed for the same purpose.

We had arranged with the chief of the police of Bilcze-Zlote where the members of my family were detained in prison, spelling out all the details about how the whole matter was to be carried through.

We were to dig a grave for five persons in the Jewish cemetery in Bilcze-Zlote. At night we were to bring from Korolowka the exhumed five dead and place them in that grave. At dawn the officer was to bring the five detained to the cemetery. He was to shoot a number of times in the air and the prisoners were to run away. Then the grave was to be filled, so that it would appear as if the execution of the five Jews had taken place.

In the evening, my late husband took with him a young man, Leib Sandberg who lives now in New York, who knew where a number of Jews had been shot several days earlier and had been buried. Nissen and Fishel took shovels with them and went to the same spot, walking at some distance from the others so as not to be particularly observed.

But it so happened that a policeman passed by and saw my late husband and Leib Sandberg with their shovels. He asked them where they were going and they told him that they were on their way to dig a bunker. The policeman took them to headquarters and there my late husband was beaten inhumanly. They were then locked up to wait for the commanding officer.

He appeared two hours later. When he saw them he ordered them released.

After being released from the police station they went to the cemetery and began to dig at the graves where the Jews murdered by the Germans were lying buried. The digging was hard. The earth had become muddy and clayey.

My husband having been detained for hours at the police station and having lost precious hours of darkness, the dawn came much too early for them. By the time they reached the cemetery at Bilcze-Zlote with the bodies on their wagon it was already daylight. In accordance

with arrangements they had made, they placed the bodies in the grave and covered them with earth.

It is difficult to imagine what they went through that night and what emotions swept them, this macabre night of life-saving.

Dr. Bodyan had not slept the whole night waiting for the arrival of my late husband from Korolowka. The chief of police also came several times to ask why they had not yet come. He expected the bodies to be brought in the dark of night and then he proposed to bring out the arrested people to the cemetery and carry out the exchange.

But it was full day when my husband arrived in Bilcze-Zlote. The chief of police found himself unable to take out the detained people because the peasants from the town would see the Jews escape. He was afraid for his own life.

Now another tragic development occurred.

The very morning when they were to be released a Christian neighbor of my sister Leiche came to the chief of police begging him not to shoot her and her child because she was a fine woman who had never done anyone any harm.

When the chief of police learned that my sister was from the same town and was well known here, he told Dr. Bodyan immediately that he would not be able to free her. Wherever she would come, whether in the Borszczow ghetto or in Tluste, the peasants would recognize her and would report to the Gestapo. The Germans would certainly shoot him.

The chief of police was himself a stranger in our district. He had come from far away and was very unpopular among the peasants because he had requisitioned their crops and would seize them for forced labor. He was therefore very careful not to expose himself to unfavourable reports to the Gestapo.

Dr. Bodyan argued with him endlessly and promised him that no one would ever see her, that she would go far from here and would hide out. The doctor begged him with tears but the officer wouldn't listen. He warned the doctor that if he insisted on arguing that he would shoot them all.

Dr. Bodyan told us all this much later. He was a very fine person who was most anxious to save my sister and her child.

But what could he do in the face of these murderers? In the end he proved unable to save his own life or his own family. He himself hid out in the bunkers until the liberation, but on the very eve of that day the peasants hung them all. That was the reward the doctor received for services of many years of healing them and curing their sick and of saving scores of them from the angel of death.

We waited for the next night when the arrested would be released. Usher had his fortune buried in Tluste and he promised to turn it all over to the chief of police. The officer had warned him that if he wouldn't bring the treasure with him he will shoot his uncle and the entire family. There would be no escape from him.

In the meantime, the police were searching our hiding place in the grotto for the second day, and were still unable to find our quarters, They took Usher with them and led him on a chain to show them our hiding place. The guide of the grotto also accompanied them.

Usher took them to the entrance of our hiding place. The guide said that there was no entry there. He claimed to know the entire grotto well and he didn't know of any entry at this point.

Usher took them into our quarters and suddenly they were struck by the light coming in from the secret exit as if the sun had shone there. They were amazed at what we had done there. How we could dig through such a height in order to reach the outside?

We had taken all our possessions into the grotto. Those who came from Rumania and the doctor's family didn't have very much. But we, Hersch, Barad and Chisdis and my sister had very many valuable objects.

My sister's husband had gone to America in 1938 to join his brother who had sent for him. He had already arranged for documents for his wife and their children to come to America, but the war between Germany and Poland broke out at this time. He then sent them documents to enable them to travel through Russia, but at this time the war between Russia and Germany broke out and again she was trapped and was forced to remain in Bilcze-Zlote.

During the First World War we had lost a sister, Gittle. This had happened when they were crossing the river and a Russian soldier pushed her from the boat into the water. Another Russian, to be fair, did indeed jump into the water and tried to pull her out. But it was too late to save her. Her blood had chilled and she died.

She was buried in the old cemetery, for as I have already mentioned, deceased persons in our district were customarily not buried in this town but were taken elsewhere. However during the First World War, we had no choice and she was laid to rest in the old cemetery. This is a digression and we must return to our own story.

When the police saw our valuable things in the grotto they didn't leave the place, but sent for horses and wagons and began to carry away their loot.

The entire village came to slake their curiosity, to see how Jews had learned to live while buried in the grotto. At the same time they

came to collect their inheritance, hoping that they too would be given something of this treasure trove.

My own best things were in the grotto. Among the valuables which I kept there, was the dowry which I had assembled for my two daughters. In those days we were accustomed to provide for our children for as long as possible, and when they were married we would give them as many valuables and household possessions as we could. Now the bandits were loading all this on their wagons and were taking it home for their own wives and children.

Later the Gestapo learned about the second entrance we had made and came to wonder at it as well. They, too, were amazed at what "the damned Jews" could accomplish in their desperation.

When it became dark, the five arrested people were led to the cemetery. My late sister Leiche was walking with my Henia. She was trembling so badly that she could scarcely walk. Her fears communicated to Henia, for who knows what the murderers could think of next? They had been drinking the whole day, dancing and making merry. It is impossible to imagine the experiences they went through as they were being taken to the cemetery.

When they arrived there they were told to lie down and to cover themselves. They told the children not to be frightened when they would hear shots.

The Ukrainians did shoot into the air and immediately told the Jews to rise and to run away as quickly as they could.

My daughter Henia and her child Sima-Pearl rose, as did Usher Metzker. They saw that my sister Leiche and her son Lonche were not moving. The murderous chief of police had indeed shot them.

Henia broke down at once and Usher barely brought her back to life.

Who can describe the agony of our hearts? Whoever knew her, loved her as a sister and her son Lonche was a golden child. The agony of this bereavement is undiminished to this day. We constantly think of her and speak of her. Her husband lives in New York and has remarried. He has a son with his second wife Fay and he always recalls Leiche with tears, for there is none like her among the living.

I think there is very much worth remembering about our late nephew Usher. At night he went to Tluste, dug up his treasure which he had buried there and took it to the chief of police, as he had promised.

All this was done in the shadow of death. He willingly endangered his life many times to ensure that no harm come to us. If only he had stayed with us longer! We have managed to survive and he might still

be with us. But he saw what was happening around us and he went to some other place. I do not know where he went and what was the manner of his death. We certainly treasure the memory of this brave and beloved man.

I was home taking care of Shulim while all these events were developing in connection with my family who had been arrested. I was in agony and despair, sitting and waiting for them, praying to see them return alive. But for long hours no one came. My heart was failing in terror, fearful as I was that all of them had been done to death.

Eventually they returned. They had wandered about on the roads in the darkness during the entire night and came into the house half-dead.

I immediately asked about Leiche. My Henia burst out in bitter weeping and told me what had happened. Our whole household was in paroxysm of wailing.

After we escaped from the grotto, Chana, Yetta, Sonia and Sol all ran away to a Christian friend, Mrs. Mirwald. Nissen brought them home the night before. Now our whole family was in the bunker.

Those who were in hiding heard our weeping.

Sol was also in the bunker, and when he heard that our people had returned he ran to us looking for his mother. We must have been made of iron or of harder metal not to have broken down at this scene. We tried to quiet him and to console him by telling him that his mother had remained somewhere and would come back later. But he was not foolish and he could sense from our condition that this was not the truth. It will be very difficult for any human being to imagine what we were going through and how the child felt . . .

The doctor came everyday and gave Shulim his needles. The sick boy began to show signs of improvement. Usher remained with us several days and then he left.

We began to wonder what our next step might be. It was beginning to be impossible to remain in our house. The chief of police began to insist that we leave because he had received orders that no Jew was to remain in the area except those who had the badges.

In addition, a policeman began to insist that we give him our horse. It was a good horse which the policeman wanted for his father. He promised us a package of fox furs for the horse. We had no use for these skins but he insisted and finally we had no choice.

One day his father came from a distant village to take the horse and he saw other possessions in our house—a good sleigh and other household articles. He wanted all we had and we were in no position

to refuse. We were dependent on their good will for our very lives. So we loaded our possessions on his wagon.

As we bade him farewell my late husband shook his hand and expressed the hope that we would survive the war and would join him in time of peace to drink with him. The policeman squirmed when he heard this saying, "They'll probably come to take the horse back" . . .

We began to worry about our son Shlomo. During the night he ran away from the grotto. He went with the Zinreichs and Dr. Weinreb and they all reached a village Mishkov, The Zinreichs went somewhere else and Shlomo was trying to go to Korolowka but was caught by a Ukrainian and taken to a house. Later he told us that the people in that house wanted to report his presence to the Ukrainian police, but the peasant was hesitant. He had known my late husband and would often come into our home. In short, our Shlomo succeeded somehow in getting out of their hands.

But we did not know this as we were lying in our bunker. So my late husband and Nissen set out to search for him. They went to all possible refuges where he might be hiding. One of these places was a small forest near Korolowka. There they drove around calling Shlomo but our son was nowhere to be found.

Their search was fruitless, but on the third day he staggered into our home, nearly dead from fatigue.

THE WORLD HAS NO PLACE FOR US

We must leave the city. But where?

Already Nissen had procured another horse and wagon. He picked us up at night on the wagon and took us somewhere, by deserted side roads. Behind some forest a caretaker had set up a barn half filled with straw, and it was there that Nissen took us.

We climbed to the attic and settled down in a corner of what was to be our new refuge. We had taken some food with us and we sat all day in the attic without moving. Only at night did we go down on the ground. We then stole quietly to a nearby well and drew some water. My husband and Nissen would return at night and bring us some food. It was the Passover week but perforce we ate chametz.

There were two peasants' huts not far from our barn. Through the cracks in our walls we could see the women and their children cleaning and whitewashing their houses, readying for the Easter festival.

The spring days were bright, the sun warm, but there was no peace for us. We were lying hidden in an attic because we were Jews! We had committed no crime and done no ill. Yet we were being hunted and threatened with destruction. All were pursuing us—the Germans, the Ukrainians, the Poles. All were persecuting us. Even little children knew to point us out as Jews, and we fled from them in fear.

Outside the sun warmed the fields which were beginning to turn green. All was awakening to life. But we sat there like condemned men.

While we had been still hiding in the barn, the Germans carried through another of their "actions" in Borszczow. They would not let the occasion of the Jewish Passover go by without making merry. The sadistic criminals particularly enjoyed torturing and killing Jews on Jewish festival days.

I recall a tale of a dream which I cannot explain.

While we were still in the barn and without knowledge of what was happening in Borszczow, Yetta, then still a young girl, awoke from her sleep and told us of her dream. She had dreamed that there was an "action" in Borszczow during which they had killed the uncle of my son-in-law, Mannes Kavalek, and his family.

I listened to her and told her not to speak of such things because sensible people do not believe in dreams.

At night our men came back and told us that there had indeed been a roundup. The Germans had found very many Jews, had taken them to the cemetery and had shot them. Among these there was, indeed, the entire Kavalek family. One of their daughters, Rachel, had sought to run away, but they saw her fleeing and shot her.

The catastrophe was shattering. Only two sons out of the four families had escaped. They had all been shot in the cemetery and were buried half alive.

Witnesses later told that the ground heaved and spurted blood. The murderers were afraid of a cholera epidemic and fresh graves were dug and the victims were buried again.

Soon even this refuge of ours was denied us. Some time after our arrival there somebody came to the barn and loaded a wagon full of straw. We hid deep in the rafters so as not to be seen.

When Nissen came at night with some food for us, we told him how we narrowly escaped being found. He told us that he knew the barn was no longer safe and that he had been looking for a better hiding place.

In the meantime he said he would take us home until he found a better hiding place. The forest was becoming very dangerous. They were continuously looking for Jews there and were finding them one at a time. Those found were shot.

We came back to our home at night. The house was already forsaken. The doors and windows were gone, the rooms were windy. Nissen boarded up some of the openings.

I looked through the cracks of our attic bunker and I saw our neighbors coming out of church, well dressed, happy. It was their Easter.

Most of them were dressed in fine clothing which had belonged to Jews. In most cases they had stolen them; some had gotten them as gifts. Every Jew had a Christian friend to whom he had entrusted his valuables until after the war. But these Christians knew that the Jews were all condemned. They knew who had already died and that those who were still alive had escaped the angel of death but for a moment. Soon they, too, will die. Without shame or fear they promenaded at ease wearing the Jews' clothing.

There could indeed be no doubt that Jews were doomed and that the murderers will kill us to the last man and child.

We were not surrendering to this fate and desperately sought means of escape.

Our family in particular would not let the Germans have their way easily. We had vigor, ingenuity and determination to survive. Above

all our family would stand together. When one of us was in danger, the others would not cower to escape. They proved their personal strength and character time and again.

Nissen had once been told that in the region where I had come from there were fields and hills where there was no plowing. They were said to be overgrown with weeds, thistles and briars and riddled with caves.

He travelled there to search for these caves. He found one and managed to crawl in, but once inside, he nearly choked. I do not remember all the details, but I know he told me that he barely escaped with his life at the time.

Our situation was desperate. Where can we survive? Clearly, there was no place on the earth for us.

Nissen had a Polish friend, Munko, a forester who lived in the woods he guarded. Nissen went to his home to consult him about where a good bunker might be built to hide us out. Munko suggested a cave in the fields belonging to the parish priest not far from there. He also told him that our friend Zundi Kurz, Fiderer's grandson, was hiding in his forest. He recommended that we get together with Zundi Kurz and that we should both go down and look over the place.

On the 1st of May 1943 Nissen and Shulim met with Zundi, Mendel Dodyk and his brother Yossel, and they all went to see the place. When they came there they saw a narrow valley. At the end of the valley was a deep crevice where all the water from the surrounding fields was dropping down. They approached the crevice and slipped down approximately 40 feet. At the bottom there was mud to the knees. When they reached the bottom they saw a small opening on the side.

Nissen slipped through the small opening, feet first while holding on to a pole. Inside this hole it was completely dark, he lit a candle and looked around and called the rest down. Inside, it looked like the interior of a small cabin. There were big boulders and cracks.

On the side of this "cabin" there was a narrow, low opening between the rocks. They started to crawl through this opening. They crawled on their sides for about seventy-five feet. The further they crawled the bigger and wider the tunnel became.

At the end of the tunnel they found themselves in a very huge place. It was so high and wide that they could hardly see the ceiling. All the walls and the ceiling were of rock, only the ground was of earth. They had a huge roll of rope and tied it up at the entrance. From this huge hall they went deeper into the grotto, all the time unrolling the rope and holding onto it so as not to lose their way.

They kept on walking into new places for several hours. Suddenly as they walked, a stone rolled down a little hill and splashed into water. Much to their amazement they found sweet fresh water. They were overjoyed, as they realized that in here they will have their best chance to survive.

They returned to us with the encouraging news that they had found the best imaginable spot.

"The only thing", said Nissen, "I'm afraid that you, mother, will not be able to get in there because the space between the rocks is so narrow". I told him that whatever will happen to me is not so important; first I must see all of you safe. Possibly, too, I hoped we might chisel the stone a bit so that I, too, might squeeze in.

The boys took ropes and candles and went once again to examine the place.

I should tell about Zundi's grandfather, Fiederer. He had forests in the general area of the grotto and Zundi knew that area very well.

Before the war, Fiederer had been a wealthy man. His troubles began when the Soviets came to us and he barely escaped deportation. By the time the Germans arrived he was already destitute. He lived in our town and suffered greatly.

My husband remained in close touch with him. In earlier days when he was selling parcels of forest, my husband bought some of them. Now, when he saw that Fiederer was declining rapidly he invited him to our home and he offered him assistance. But he was a proud man and wouldn't accept charity. In order to spare his dignity, my husband made a deal with him whereby we would provide him with all necessary food and Fiederer would repay him for all this after the war.

The man was very grateful and was deeply impressed by my husband's offer. My husband brought him a sack of wheat and some corn. In fact, my husband took this directly to the mill, had it ground for him and brought him the flour. Fiederer also came to our home and we would give him milk. As long as we had our cow he received everything he needed from us.

Some time later his grandson was seized for slave labour. The old man remained alone. Everyone was sorry for his solitary state. The Jewish Council didn't bother him because he was well known as a refined, decent gentleman. When his grandchild was in the labour camp and many families would send parcels to their close ones there, I would bake some bread and send him some together with anything else I could spare. When it became possible to ransom those who had been sent to labour, we helped the Jewish Council to bring Zundi back home.



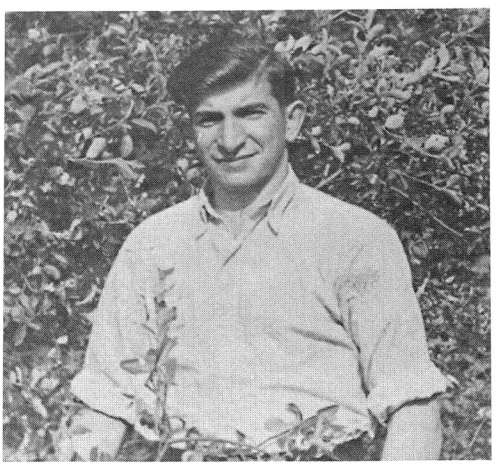
Linz, Austria 1947—My son Nissen, his wife Pearl and their son Mendel.



Borszczow 1944—My son Shulim and his bride Czarna.



Fehrenwald 1946—My daughteer Chana and her husband Joseph.



D.P. Camp Fehrenwald, Germany, 1946 —My son Schlomo.



Poland 1936—My son Nissen in the Polish Cavalry.



New York 1951—My son Schlomo and his wife Bella. My daughter-in-law Bella and her sister Sally born in Przemyslany, Poland are the only survivors of a large family.



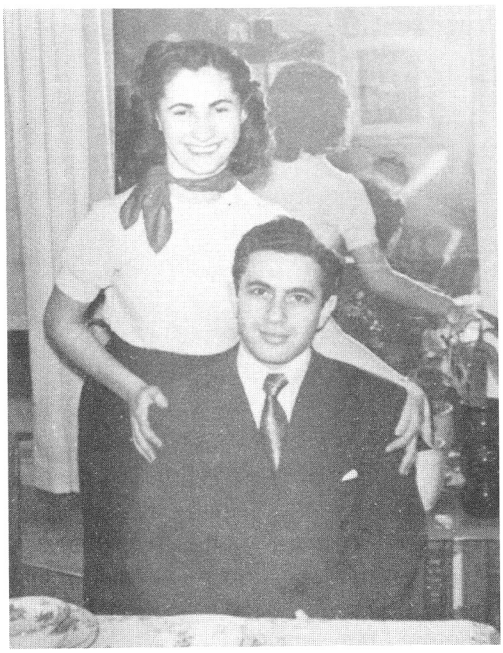
Fehrenwald 1946—My daughter Yetta and her husband Abraham Katz. My son-in-law is the only survivor of a large family.



D.P. Camp Fehrenwald, Germany, 1947—My daughter Henia with her two children Sonalie and Simale.



Korolowka 1922—My family (L to R) Nissen, my husband Shabsy holding Shulim, myself, Chana and Henie. Yetta and Shlomo were not born yet. Photograph taken by Mechel Geller.



New York 1950—My nephew Sol (Siome) Wexler and his wife Hella.



Myshkoff, Poland 1937—The Wexler family—Standing (left): My sister Leiche, sitting in front of her: her husband Munie and their two children. The others are my brother-in-law Munie's family. All of them perished except one son.



Tluste, Poland – 1916—The children of Toba Metzger (my husband's sister) left to right, standing: Mendel, Usher. Sitting: Pearl, Rivkeh.



D.P. Camp Fehrenwald 1946—My sister Shancie Kimelman (left) and I.



Bytom, Poland 1945 (L to R)— Zundi Kurz and my son Shulim.



Bytom, Poland 1945—Four boys from the Grotto. (L to R)—Mundyk, Reibel, my nephew Siome, Luzer Reibel and my son Shlomo.



Bytom, Poland 1945—A group of children who survived the Nazi holocaust. (L to R)—Two orphaned daughters of Motyeh (Frimales). Schechter, Jona Dodyk residing in Haifa, Israel. He fought in the 1956 and 1967 wars also served on the Golan Heights in the 1973 war together with his son. My niece Nusia who was on the Exodus ship, a boy from Borszczow, my granddaughters Sonia and Sima.

To continue with our life in the grotto:

The boys crawled into the cave and were amazed at its size and, most important, that there was water there.

We already knew how important it was to have water. I remember a Greek philosopher who taught that water was the one basic element in the universe. We can confirm this. All sorts of food can be stored, but we were never able to keep a supply of water. When we had been in the first grotto we distributed no more than a glass of water to each person every day, and this had to suffice both for drinking and for washing—until we found that water was dripping down the walls, and that it was possible to collect several bottles every day.

The boys returned to us and told us to pack. We were on our way to the second of our grottoes. This was going to be our own grotto. We had discovered it all by ourselves. Apparently no human being had ever set foot there. There were no signs of any life about the place.

We had lost most of our belongings in the first cave, and we knew that it would be cold in our new refuge. We would need clothing and bedding.

In Europe it was customary for families to have quilts of feathers and of down which are very warm. There was no central heating in that part of the world. Heating was done during the day only, and at night we needed the feather quilts to keep us warm. It was customary in those days to give pillows and quilts to bride and groom as wedding presents. During the winters I used to keep geese, not only for their meat and fat but also for the feathers. We used to pluck the feathers for the down to make bedding.

I had given a sack of feathers to a peasant I had known to hide for us. I had a great deal of trouble to get it back from this peasant. Apparently he was a decent man; indeed, he had let me hide in his hay rick. Nevertheless, I was barely able to get him to return my feathers to me. They did return the pillows but she insisted on keeping the pillowcase. Eventually they promised to give them back to me but I was faced with another problem: what was I going to keep the feathers in?

I began to dig about in our barn and found two old torn cloths. I washed them out, patched them and threw the feathers there, thus making two quilt cases of a sort.

The following day, on May the 5th, 1943, the police officer in command ordered that by the morrow all Jews must leave, even those with the badges. In the morning he would go from door-to-door to check, and any Jew found would be shot on the spot. In fact, he did kill a young man whom he found in the city.

That night we left for our second hiding place. We still had at home a large bed quilt with a new cover, two pillows and some other needs. All night Nissen helped everybody carry whatever furniture, boards, fuel, food and other necessities we could find.

We had planned that the refuge would hold my family: My husband Shabsy Zeide, myself, my children, Nissen, Chana, Shulim, Yetta, Shlomo, my nephew Siomo and Zundi Kurz; my eldest daughter Henia, her husband Fishel, their small children, Sonia and Sima-Pearl and Fishel's cousins Mayer and Hersch Kavalek; the Dodyk family, the mother Chancie, the son Mendel, his wife Yetta and their small daughter Regina; the other son Yossel, his wife Pepcia and their small son Nunia; a daughter Meimel, her four children, Mania, Mundik, Luzer, and Dorcia; a daughter Ecia, her three children, Mania, Dunie and Marek; a daughter Fradel and a grandson, a young boy, Yohna. The Kittner family, Shimon, Leib and his young son Sunia, Frida and Ulo Barad.

Altogether we were thirty-eight persons.

We all began to slide down into the hole. The entrance seemed frightening. But each of us somehow managed to get inside. Chancie also managed to get down, though how she did it I do not know.

We began to lower the parcels. It was not possible to handle them as they were, so we had to untie the packs and lower each object separately. Later we got the hang of it and were able to lower the larger packages. We worked the whole night before everything had been lowered into the cave.

I was the last to enter. I tried to get through the two rocks but it was impossible. They began to dig under one of those rocks. I stretched out fully. They held me from above. From below they manouvered my body and placed me wherever they could until, finally, I found all of myself in our new home. The children, of course, were more mobile; they did not have too much difficulty in lowering themselves into the grotto, and they were managing the descent of the people and of our supplies. The horse and the wagon were given to our peasant friend.

IN THE SECOND CAVE

We now found ourselves in the cold and frightening underground. The darkness was frightening. It took us a little time before we began to feel more "at home" in our new environment. We would all sit closely together about a candle which one of us would be holding.

The men went off to explore the area to find a spot where we could most conveniently settle. They were gone for several hours on their expedition.

We began to move, tripping on stones, crawling into holes. It was fatiguing and depressing. However the passages were higher here: the ceiling wasn't pressing on our heads and we didn't need to go bent double as in our earlier cave-home. Only in certain spots the passages were low and we had to bend down. On the other hand there were some parts of our ceiling which were much hollowed out. They almost seemed like chimneys to us. We shone our candle there and a flashlight but we could see no end to their hollowing.

It took us a while to reach the spot which our men had chosen for our "home".

They had to go back several times to bring our boards and the other supplies. It was no easy matter for them to drag themselves through the ruts and holes. At the end of it all they were completely exhausted.

The spot we had chosen was walled entirely of rock. It was about as wide as an ordinary room but very long, approximately 200 feet. The rock ceiling was half rounded-out as if in a tent or a covered wagon, and met the ground on both sides. The ground was full of holes and mounds. Our men worked a full day before they leveled some of it.

We then set about to put up some sort of sleeping places.

Another twenty-four hours of labour, strenuous and unremitting, was required for this. After a bit of food we threw ourselves fatigued on these resting places in our new home and tried to sleep. We did not know if it was day or night. In the cave it was the same darkness all the time and we lost all differentiation. In our first cave, too, we had changed night into day.

When we arose from whatever sleep we could manage we were a little rested and our nerves were more relaxed. After the tension of

the last two weeks we felt a little more secure. We began to organize our lives here.

The first question that arose was cooking.

I had brought with me a sort of a tripod which we call in Polish a triniszka, the type of oven our grandparents had used. We would put a pot on the tripod and would make a fire with some wood underneath. Another one of our families also had such a tripod. I also had a large copper pan which held about a pail of water. In normal times we used it for making jams and desserts,

We went to look for a distant spot where we could set up our kitchen and found a large stone, about the height of a table. Not far from this rock there was a pool of water where we would descend by several natural steps. We decided that this was a suitable place for our kitchen.

We had been pleased all along to find water in the cave and now we noticed that there were several pools of water, fresh and clear as crystal. These pools were connected and the water assembled in one spot.

Having found a site for our kitchen, we returned to our "home". We chopped some wood into kindling and peeled several potatoes. We also had some barley. We returned with all this to our kitchen. There we put up our two tripods, made fire under them, and before long our "dinner" was ready.

No sooner were we through than the others took their turn to cook.

The bowl of porridge tasted better than the most delicious food today.

During the cooking we swallowed enough smoke to choke. The remarkable fact was that, passing over a large stone which was not far from our "kitchen", the smoke disappeared as if it were chopped off. To this day I cannot explain this. Possibly there was an opening above that spot, but it is difficult for us to know this today.

After we had eaten and rested a while we went off to explore our underground kingdom. Walking was very difficult. In spots the earth underfoot was clayey and muddy. It wasn't long before we tore our shoes walking in this hostile darkness. We crawled through the labyrinths of the cave with its crooked and sometimes narrow passages where we were often bent double and triple.

If this cave were now in the hands of the Allies, it would be possible to make a film there about our life in this grotto which would have surpassed the fantasies of scenarists in showing how human beings can survive under such conditions. But now the area is under

Soviet control.

We curtained off our home on one side, made a sort of a door, and hung a sack over it. It began to look like a human habitation. For a time the walls sweated dampness and the moisture penetrated our bones. But after we were there for a while it dried out through our very presence.

The men continued the exploration of the cave. In one spot they found a large body of water like a lake. Zundi, the grandchild of Fiederer, even named it the Black Lake.

Zundi is now in Israel and Shulim corresponds with him. They had been friends before entering the cave, and in the intimacy of those conditions they have became very close. Zundi is an agronomist for the Israeli Government.

On one occasion our men took ropes and candles with them and were gone for over six hours. We became worried and frightened for fear something had happened to them or they had lost their way. When they returned they laughed at us and said that they knew the grotto very well by now and we have no need to fear for them. They felt in command of the place.

Several days passed and we began to run short of food and kerosene. We were short of candles, so we had been using kerosene for light.

We had brought a kerosene lamp from our home. When we would go beyond its light we used little bottles which we filled with kerosene and had put a wick in the bottle neck. This gave us enough light to move about. It was economical because it did not use up very much of the precious kerosene.

We also had great problems with sanitation which was of particular importance under our conditions. This cleanliness was essential for our health and for our survival.

We arranged a spot for washing in our kitchen. We warmed water for washing ourselves. We would wash out our clothes and then boil them in hot water. We would then rinse them again in some nearby water. Drying our clothes was much more difficult. We learned to wring them well and then spread them out behind our sleeping places. After a short time they would dry out somewhat.

We had a meeting to organize our outside contacts. Several of our people had to go out and arrange for flour, barley, potatoes, kerosene, detergents, matches and other necessities. This could only be done through friendly peasants. It was of course impossible for any of us to appear in a store.

We also had to procure wood. When we first entered the cave we

brought with us a large saw, a few axes, shovels, picks, crow bars and other tools. The men sharpened their saws and their axes and, at midlight, ten or twelve of the men went out into the forest about a thousand feet from the cave and cut down some twenty large trees. They chopped off the branches and cut the trees into logs about five feet long. Four of the men would cut the logs and the rest would carry the logs out to the grotto. At the entrance outside some of the men lowered the logs; inside the younger boys and some men pulled the logs in.

While the men were outside, the small boys would sit near the entrance to await their return. When they would hear them coming they would run to us and tell us of their arrival. It was a great relief to see them back, for our fear was constant and indescribable. Nor was it an imaginary fear or a needless one. Each time anyone left our shelter it was to face instant and constant death. Even after their arrival at the entrance to the grotto it would take several hours before they could bring everything inside.

They would always bring back news. This Jewish man had been shot in the forest. Another family was found hiding in the home of a peasant and all were shot. Of course, we didn't know who was hiding out safely or where they were. It was only when we heard of a family being discovered and killed that we learned that other Jews, too, were desperately fighting for their lives and for their existence. The murderers had their willing helpers, the Ukrainians, who would very diligently look for traces of Jews hiding out and who would reveal their tracks to the Germans. Then the Germans would come and shoot their victims on the spot. The Ukrainian police were particularly industrious in searching out our people in hiding and shooting them.

While still at home I remember a surprising expression I heard from a peasant, "If there is no accuser there will be no judge." He meant that if they kill all the Jews, who will remain to accuse the Ukrainians and the Germans of their horrible atrocities?

It reminded me of the traditional Jewish cry of protest and outrage, "There is no law and no judge," the world is anarchic, immoral, irresponsible and murderous.

Before the eyes of the entire world, the Hitlerites, the German master-race, murdered an entire nation that had been living for centuries in the countries that these Germans now occupied.

Our entire city of Jews lies slaughtered. Possibly one out of a hundred survived.

Several friends from our city had gone to Canada some ten or twelve years before the war. Each of these friends had left behind him

parents, brothers, sisters, children in his home town who had already married and have had children of their own. Each of these migrants must have left an extended family. Not one of them survived; not one. My husband and I, too, had more than thirty members in our family; of them not one is here today.

Who can describe the misery and the outrage which the murderer and his helpers have committed against the Jewish people? May their names and all that is theirs be erased from the knowledge and memory of man!

Inside our cave, each one of us did his assigned duties. We cooked, we cleaned. We did everything possible to maintain cleanliness.

None of these were simple matters under our conditions. The slightest details were difficult and grave problems for us. If a spoon or a fork or another object would fall on the floor and someone would step on it, it was permanently lost, sunk into the earth.

As our people went out we would arrange for a sign which they would give us upon their return. It might be a number or the name of a town. Each time there was another password.

At the very narrow entrance to our cave, we always had two men armed with axes who were waiting for friend or enemy. Our own people had to give the password before entering back into our hiding place. The entrance to our cave was very narrow. If any of the murderers had tried to come in, our men were ready with axes to chop their feet off. One could enter the cave only by climbing down feet first.

This was of the very greatest importance to us because no one could come in holding a rifle. He could only bring his gun behind him. When we were all inside we blocked the entrance with a large rock, wedged in with logs, so that it was practically impossible to enter.

Shimon Kitner, one of our cave members, went out of the grotto to bring his sister Freda, a brother Leib and his son Sunia. By that time his father and his married sisters and their families had all been killed,

They told us about the terrible things that had happened in the last several weeks that we had been in the cave.

Among other things they told us that Yetta, the wife of Mendel Dodyk, has lost all her family except for the son of a brother who was living somewhere in the forest. But he was not likely to survive long. He was suffering from skin diseases and looked terrible. When Yetta heard this she begged her husband to go and find the boy and bring him to our cave. The next night he did, indeed, go to search for him

and he brought him to us.

It was frightening to look at the boy. We had to set up a separate sleeping place for him so that we would not become infected ourselves from him. Many of the Jewish people who were hiding out in the forest had become dangerously ill with skin disease, with open sores and infections, and were infested with lice. This was the result of their living conditions. Ravaged as he was by his illnesses and hunger, it was clear that he would not have lived long if he had remained in the forest.

His aunt Yetta devoted all her attention to him. She saw to it that he should have enough to eat. She would take him away somewhere deep in the cave and would spend hours with him, cleaning him, washing him and trying to dress his sores. Her husband managed to secure from some friendly peasant some salve to spread over his skin. She cut his hair, changed and washed his clothes, boiling them many times. The overcoat which he wore was permeated with persistent lice. Even this garment she managed to clean somehow.

He improved slowly. His aunt had virtually brought him back to life.

Today Ulo Barad is a rich man, living in New York, the owner of many hotels. He is well known in Jewish organizations and is very generous and charitable.

Life in our grotto went on with its own normality. We cooked, we washed, we made needed repairs. Someone always sat at the entrance on guard. From time to time we had to leave the cave to secure food and fuel. Each time our terror grew ten-fold. The great question: would everyone return?

For no matter how little we ate, thirty-eight persons do consume substantial amounts of food and we did have to go out often for reprovisioning.

It became difficult to secure flour. The Germans seized the mills which were now producing only for their military. Let the peasants eat potatoes, the Germans said; the army comes first. We were in a grave predicament.

Some of the peasants still had grain which they were hiding from the Germans. They also made home-made mills and ground their own grain.

Constructing such a mill was not very complicated. The peasants would put two large round stones in a frame like millstones and would turn the upper one with a handle. They would put the grain in through a hole in the upper stone and the wheat or corn would be ground fine. But what were we to do?

However I was always able to rely upon the ingenuity of my sons.

One of them went to a friendly peasant to see how such a primitive mill operates. At night they went to a peasant who had dealt badly with them. They removed the upper stone from his mill and brought it home to us. I never could understand where they found the strength to carry this heavy rock as well as a lamb that they had managed to snatch from him.

The peasant from whom they had taken the rock had been very friendly in times of peace. But when we lost our possessions and our status he came to our house one day with a wagon and just helped himself to everything he could find there.

To resume the story of our home-made mill:

My sons found another stone and chipped it for the purpose.

Shulim built a wooden stand and set the stones upon it, and so we had a kind of mill to grind flour.

We were left, however, with the problem of securing grain. When we were already in our second cave Nissen had bartered two sacks of flour from a manager of a mill for Chana's sewing machine. That night my son went to this peasant and arranged that he should bring the flour for us at a determined place near the forest. My sons were at the spot at the set time and waited the entire night for him, but the peasant never showed up with the flour. As dawn was coming they returned quickly to our cave, deeply upset.

Some time earlier my sons had procured two large hooks and attached them to sticks. From a distance they looked like rifles and they would carry them wherever they went.

The following night, they went to the peasant's house. They crawled in through a window and found him asleep. When he saw them he was very frightened and told them some story about the Germans taking his flour while he was on his way to them.

"It's a lie. There were no Germans here yesterday," my son told him.

His house was at the end of the village, somewhat removed from the other cottages, so that they were not afraid of any noise they might make. They pressed him to return the flour, and threatened him, but he refused. My sons set about to search for the flour themselves. They found some, but he had hidden the rest beyond their reach.

Such was our experience with the "good" peasants.

THE ENTRANCE TO THE CAVE IS FILLED IN

One day my son-in-law Fishel left the cave for several days together with Mendel, for he had some business to attend to with a peasant friend of his.

Some distance from the cave several peasants approached Mendel and took everything away from him, including his old torn cap in which he had hidden a ten dollar bill.

He pleaded with them: "My God, even this old worn out cap you have to take away from me!" The peasants threw the cap back to him.

He barely escaped deep into the forest so that the peasants might not suspect that he was hiding in the cave. Later he returned to us alone. Fishel remained outside at one of his peasant friends.

But it seems that they had noticed where he had come from. Soon an entire village of peasants came to the spot and worked for many hours covering up the entrance to our grotto with tons of earth, without our knowing it.

That night Mendel decided to leave the cave again to secure some food. When he came to the entrance and saw it all packed thick with earth he became very frightened and returned screaming that we were all lost. The entrance was closed and we would all die of hunger here, a fate worse than strangulation.

We all began to look around for a spot where we could make a second entrance. Some ten yards from the first we found a gap between two rocks where we might be able to dig. It was a low spot and it took us three days and three nights of strenuous labour before we began to see the outdoors. Shulim made a sort of a door, a frame covered with a movable board about two feet square. The opening was arranged so that a small hole was left at the side of the board through which a hand could spread some soft earth which had been prepared for the purpose to cover the board so as to camouflage the entrance. After the arm was withdrawn, the hole was blocked with a rock.

Fishel finished his business and returned to the cave. He was horrified to find the entrance blocked with tons of earth, and us buried inside.

He ran back to the peasant. Together they hired several men to clear the entrance, paying them twenty American dollars, a rare for-

tune under the conditions then prevailing.

He managed to squeeze inside to us, while the men were waiting outside.

He came running to us screaming, "Get dressed fast and let us run. The Germans and the Ukrainians know we are here."

But we all agreed that we had no other place to go to, so we decided to remain in the cave. In order to deceive the men waiting outside, Fishel returned to them, yelling that he had found no one there, that we had probably become frightened by the discovery and had run elsewhere. To prove his story he told them to fill the entrance again.

A few days later it became necessary to go out from the cave to re-stock our supplies of wood, kerosene and food.

The door to our second entrance had been set in place, very well located behind a rock. The ground about it was hard and carried no footsteps, nor was there any grass to leave marks. The entrance wasn't as secure as the first one, but we had no choice. We had no other hiding place.

In our underground refuge our life was proceeding as normally as we could make it. We had gotten to know the cave better and knew where to move.

We had worn our shoes to bits and the children walked about barefoot. Our mill was grinding and we had enough flour. The potatoes were beginning to grow in the fields, so our men would go out at night to steal some. But every step was bound up with terror and death.

We were terrified of being trapped again as we had been when our first entrance was filled in. So we began to look for another spot where we could open an emergency exit. We began to dig several times, but the earth here was not as easy to work as in our first cave. We were deep underground. It was sandy between the rocks and much of our effort was in vain.

As we were looking for a possible spot for another exit, we found a little mound of earth that had fallen down from between two rocks high above. We climbed up on this hill and began to dig in the crack between the rocks.

We dug upwards continuously for days. We dug approximately fifty feet up and were very optimistic that we would reach the outside. The digging was very difficult because we had to work upward. The earth formation was made up of heavy blue clay on one side and on the opposite side sand and gravel. As we were digging upwards we made shallow steps on the sides for our feet,

so as to be able to work farther up.

One day Shulim was working high up in the tunnel when his kerosene lamp gave out. Apparently there was not enough oxygen there for it to burn. He came down and went back to our living quarters to get another lamp. Upon his return with several other men they found that the tunnel had caved in during his absence.

They immediately began to clear away the fallen earth, but much to their dismay, the more they cleared away the more the ground kept coming down. It was an impossible task. They struggled with this for weeks and finally had to give up. This was a tremendous setback for all of us.

It is difficult to describe the frustration and labour which we passed through in those days.

At one time my sons got a compulsion for some jam. Shlomo and Zundi went into a nearby orchard to steal some apples. Shulim and Nissen went in another direction for sugar beets. To reach the field for the beets they had to cross the main road not far from the police station. This, of course, was a dangerous task, but they were so set on having some jam, and jam they got. Our food had been simple and monotonous, so that this beet jam was a great delight for us.

Once my son-in-law Fishel went to a friendly peasant to buy some wheat. He also asked if he could sell him a bottle of oil. The peasant was shocked at his request, "What? In your situation. you still hanker for oil?!"

Another time my sons brought back a bit of sour dough from a peasant. I kneaded it with two additional pounds of flour and let it stand like bread. We baked nine "pletzlach" on a metal sheet out of this dough and we ate them as if it was the richest of cakes. It was a bit of an extravagance for us because we could have made two meals out of it by mixing the flour with potatoes into a soup.

The wheat which the peasants sold us turned out to be of the worst type. The grains were black and after milling it, the flour looked like ash.

We were mostly in the dark and did not see very well because we were already not using our lamps. The lamps were consuming too much kerosene. So we used the small bottles which were shedding but a very dim light.

After we were liberated—following many months of continuous and unspeakable sufferings—we came out and saw daylight. When we looked at the bread which we had been eating we could scarcely believe how the Peasants had cheated us and sold us such poor grain.

We were not quite alone in our cave. There were other living creatures there, such as bats and foxes. We were always afraid that the bats might get into our hair and we didn't want the foxes around us.

Once we caught a small fox and tied him up near our quarters. For a while we kept him there and then we let him go. We never saw the foxes any more.

Every time the men returned from the outside they had bitter news. It was a great relief when the little boys would come from the entrance and tell us that our own men have returned to the cave. But soon they would arrive and from their faces we could tell that this time, too, they had tragic stories to report.

I remember one time when my sons were particularly upset, I pressed them and they told me that the police and their helpers had boasted that they had discovered a bunker in the forest and had killed very many Jews. Among these were our best friends. They had hidden in the bunkers long before we had come to our cave. There had been twenty-four people in the bunker, among them Mendel Geller with four children, two boys and two girls. These children had all been friends of my children.

After the liberation we learned that the youngest girl, Frieda, had survived. When the Ukrainian police had shot them, her brother fell on her and she was covered with his blood.

She remained motionless among the dead. Slowly the girl came to and realized that she was alive. When she heard no noise about her, she crawled out at night and went to a Christian peasant who had been a friend of the family. The man was afraid to keep her in his home, so he hitched a horse and wagon, covered her up with straw and took her to a sister in a nearby village where she remained. Her name is Freidele Geller. Today she is Mrs. Gold and lives in New York City with her husband and two sons.

After the liberation, when we already had the Soviets in our area, Freidele Geller went to the police and told them that she had recognized one peasant. Petre Shemkiew, who had brought the police to them in the bunker.

Everybody knew that this peasant had made it his objective to kill as many Jews as he could. But the Soviets said that they could not arrest him due to the lack of witnesses.

A few Jewish survivors testified that they had seen him hack Israel Bretschneider to death. The Russians arrested him. He was tried by a military court in Czortkow and was sentenced to death.

When Fishel had told the peasants that none of us were in the cave any longer and that if they wished they could cover up the entrance

again, they proved that they were not lazy and did, indeed, fill in the entrance, however with a bit less earth than before.

Now we had to use only the second entrance. We thought of a trick which might add to our security. We made a sort of a doll out of rags, something like a scarecrow. Before coming out we would raise this effigy and listen for shots or for people walking above us. When we were assured that there was no one around we would come out.

We were weakened from lack of food and scarcely had any strength to work or to carry the heavy lumber and other loads. Even if we had money for better food the peasants would not have sold it to us.

Things got so bad that we resorted to stealing. At night the boys would creep into the barn of a peasant and take several ducks or a lamb. We would do it rarely, but the food would serve to revive us a little and to restore our strength.

My late husband and I did not eat of this food, but the younger people who had to work hard were glad to have it. We did not work as hard as they did, so we would content ourselves with a little soup; then we would go and lie down again. We spent most of our time lying down. I ate only enough to keep alive. We had to consider every bite because food had become so difficult to procure.

Time moved on and fall was already upon us. It was potato-picking season. The peasants used to dig up the potatoes, pile them in heaps in the fields and cover them with the upper greens of the potatoes that they had dug up. Later they would come to take it home.

When we would come to a heap of potatoes in the dark we never knew whether anyone was hiding there watching it. We would call out "Good evening" quietly as we would come to a heap, and would wait for a reply.

In the silence we would quickly fill our sacks and run to the cave.

At this time of the year the fields were full of the best gifts of the earth and my sons also brought some corn. This was our opportunity to stock up with some food for the months to come. We brought in as much food as we could.

For us this was salvation. We would run out into the fields filling our sacks with potatoes and dump them through the entrance into the grotto. Those inside were standing about to take them away. We would wait several days before setting out for more potatoes.

When the corn comes in from the fields, it usually is somewhat moist. We brought thin sticks from the forest and stuck them in the cracks in the rocks above us. We would tie the corn in pairs, would half peel them and hang them on the sticks. After a time they dried

out so that we were able to take out the hard seeds of twenty such corns and would grind them in our mill. This gave us flour which lasted for several days.

EVERY DAY OF LIFE IS A MIRACLE

One day when we came to the entrance we saw that the door was torn off and was lying inside our cave. You can imagine our terror.

Fortunately we had just supplied ourselves with several weeks' supply of food. So we rolled a large stone to the entrance and immobilized it with a log so that no one could enter.

For several weeks we didn't move from our grotto. However, when we found it absolutely essential to go out to re-supply ourselves, we decided to go through our first entrance and thereby to maintain our link with the outside world.

We worked for several nights and finally the entrance was open again. We put out our scarecrow as before, "our radar", and when we saw that no one was watching us we came out. We had no choice. Otherwise we would have died of hunger.

My Nissen went to the Christian peasant whom he knew. Nissen would come there at night and would climb up into the attic of the barn. When the peasant would look in the morning and find him there, he would bring out food and supply him with whatever he could.

This time the peasant told Nissen that there was talk in the village that Chana was hiding out in the home of the Mirwald woman, which was indeed the case. She had been there ever since they had discovered our first cave.

When it became dark, Nissen brought us the bit of grain which he had obtained from the peasant and took Shulim with him to Chana. It was a long and difficult road there, but they would run any danger to save their sister.

They reached the peasant's house and told Chana that they had come to take her with them because it had become known in the vilage where she was hiding out.

The woman begged Chana not to leave. She was weak and Chana did all her hard work for her, beside knitting sweaters for the whole family. Chana had become an unpaid servant for them.

My sons told the woman that we are hiding in the forest and that their mother had become ill and wanted to see her. They promised that Chana would soon return.

God was good to us and all three returned safely to our cave.

This was several days after Rosh Hashanah. We had observed the New Year with services and were preparing for the Day of Judgement, Yom Kippur.

When she was told that it would be Yom Kipur in a few days, Chana was surprised and said that Yom Kipur had already come. She had fasted a whole day and had prayed to God. It turned out that Chana had remembered the date of Yom Kipur last year according to the general calendar and not the Jewish one.

In our cave we kept up very careful calendars both according to the general style and according to the Jewish chronology. This was my responsibility. I knew about the rising of the new moon and its passing every day. They would ask me when they were about to leave the grotto. It was important for them to know whether the moon would shine brightly or not. I was familiar with the calendar and always gave them correct information.

We also had a prayer book for the high holy days. On the Yom Kipur Day we fasted and prayed the entire day. My son-in-law Fishel conducted the service.

A few days after Chana left the home of the peasant, the Germans did indeed come and tore the house apart looking for her. The peasants in the village had let them know where the Jewess had been hiding out.

Our life was continuing in its own routine, with occasional expeditions outside to secure food and fuel. As long as there were potatoes, corn and other grain in the fields we helped ourselves to them as much as we could, knowing that later none of this would be available to us. This was also the time for us to stock up with as much wood as possible because when the snows would come it would be much more difficult to get wood.

Even now it wasn't either easy or safe. Each exit from the grotto was at danger to life. We fought a difficult battle for our lives and risked the death of all of us constantly.

I remember one Sunday when Shulim and Shlomo went to a corn field where the peasants had planted beans between corn. They were away the whole Sunday because generally there are no peasants in the fields that day, and they picked many beans. I nearly went out of my mind before I saw them return.

My heart was affected from these constant anxieties and to this day I live on pills, but I am grateful to God that he performed many miracles on our behalf. The greatest tragedy that befell me came after the liberation, when the Ukrainian murderers killed my husband and my son-in law Fishel.

Having supplied ourselves with potatoes and some other essentials, we shut ourselves again into the cave. Again we barred the entrance with a huge rock and with logs, so that it was impossible for strangers to enter. The days when we did not need to go out were a breathing spell for us, when our nerves could relax a little.

Inside the cave we felt a little more secure. Danger didn't stare us quite as starkly in the face.

My son-in-law Fishel had to provide two of his cousins as well as his own family with the necessary provisions. They used to give him money and he procured for them what they needed. They were older than Fishel. They did not leave the grotto even once. To this day I am troubled by this. They survived and I am very happy for them, wherever they may be. But they never once went outside, and it was my son-in-law who had to risk his life for them. Why this should have been so isn't clear to me even now.

THEY ARE SHOOTING AT US

In the evening of the 10th of November, 1943 my sons Nissen and Shulim and my husband went to Bilcze-Zlote to buy grain and fuel from Semen Sawkie, a friendly and good man, the only peasant who helped us during the war. That night they arranged for the peasant to have everything ready the following evening. It was decided that my husband would return immediately to the cave, and that our sons would come the following evening.

Nissen and Shulim slept in the barn. Towards morning they were startled by the sudden return of their father. He was terrified.

He told them that as he was approaching the grotto, someone near the entrance began to shout, "Stop or I'll shoot!" In panic he dropped the sack that he was carrying and fled.

He remained with the children until the next evening when the peasant loaded everything on the wagon and brought it over to the forest, as had been arranged. My sons crawled on their stomachs from the forest towards the grotto. Some distance from the entrance they stopped, listening particular carefully for any unusual sounds.

When they saw that everything appeared normal, they quickly slipped down the entrance and found Shlomo waiting for them inside.

He told them that the night before he and Zundi were bringing in wood from the outside when a log blocked the entrance suddenly, leaving Zundi outside and unable to reenter.

Suddenly a man appeared. Zundi was terrified, but shrewdly cried out, "Stop or I'll shoot!" Of course he had no weapon. The stranger dropped his pack and ran off.

Zundi picked it up and later brought it into the cave. When they opened it Shlomo recognized his father's belongings. Zundi came out to look for my husband but, of course, couldn't find him.

Relieved that everything was normal, the boys returned to the forest and brought back the grain, entering the cave together with their father.

No sooner were they inside than they heard footsteps near the entrance, which were quickly followed by a barrage of shooting into the cave through the opening. The bullets did not hit anyone. However, if they had come but a few minutes earlier they might have killed them all.

Again miracles occurred to save our lives. The day is engraved in my memory.

After the shooting we were all very fearful.

We barred the entrance even more heavily with large rocks. It was somewhat encouraging to know that we were not in immediate danger as long as we were inside. The police could never enter with their guns before them. The entrance was so narrow that one could barely push through it with hands at the side.

Nevertheless for several days we were in deathly fear. We could never tell what devices the bandits might contrive to get into our hiding place. Only Zundi insisted that the enemy could do nothing to us. Even if they were to throw grenades into the cave these could do but little harm amid the huge rocks that protected us.

The great danger was that they might catch one of us and force him to enter first with them by giving the password. We could never know whether our man was alone. Before we could be certain, they could already be inside with their weapons.

But the miracles recurred. A friendly peasant later told us that the Nazis had been watching our cave entrance from time to time, but each time our men came out into the open none of the Germans happened to be around.

The police remembered that we had had a second emergency exit in the first cave. So they began looking for another such entry here too. They examined the whole area in the fields around, tracked every footstep in the snow but found nothing.

Someone reported to them that we did have a second entrance which emerged in the fields of a peasant in a nearby village. They insisted that he show them the entry to our cave. The man knew of no such opening. They said that the Jews were paying him to be silent and beat him mercilessly. But what could he tell them since he knew nothing of our hiding place?

They thought of another scheme: they brought peasants to the entrance to our cave and ordered them to descend. None of them would do it out of fear of us.

The police could do nothing.

By this time the paths about our cave were well beaten. People from the entire region would come to look curiously at the place about which they had known nothing before. Now they heard that there were Jews hidden there and that no one dared to come in and to kill them.

For about a month after the shooting none of us left the grotto. The winter frost and snows had set in.

Some four weeks after the shooting it became essential to go outside to procure food. We opened the entrance very carefully and listened for a long time. We stuck our scarecrow out and waited. When we saw that all was quiet, two of our men went to the forester Munke who was our friend. He told them all that had happened during the past weeks while we were inside the grotto.

They immediately returned to the cave with all the news about it being safer to go out. Each of us went his own way to procure his needs.

My son Shulim made a kind of a sleigh. He had taken long wooden logs, sharpened them and steamed them in hot water. Then they bent them into shape and let them dry. By then they had become rounded like a sleigh. Instead of nailing the parts together, they drilled holes and used wooden pegs. This also enabled them to take the sleigh apart quickly and lower it into the cave.

In Bilcze-Zlote, at the edge of the village, there was a peasant to whom my late husband had given some valuables to hide. My sons decided to visit him this time.

They knocked on the door many times but there was no reply. Eventually he answered. When he had heard who it was he became silent again.

They saw a sack of laundry near the entrance, clothing the peasants used to make of homespun linen. My sons took the sack with them, loaded it on the sleigh, and went to another peasant to seek some food. They did procure some grain there and returned home safely.

When they arrived home we celebrated as we took the shirts and the trousers from the peasant's laundry sack. They were very useful because when our men would go out above wearing this white clothing, it provided a natural camouflage in the snowy landscape. They were also very strong.

It was thus that we took advantage of every possible situation in our fight for life.

After we had secured a minimum of the utmost essentials we locked ourselves in again for another several weeks.

Again we began to look for a spot where we might dig an emergency exit. Eventually we found a place which seemed suitable.

We had dug a good deal and had already reached a substantial height when suddenly one of the walls began to crumble and then the second wall collapsed. It was only by miracle that none of us was buried alive in the accident.

The problem of an exit had become more urgent. Now that people outside knew that we were here, we feared that in the warm summer

weather they would put a permanent watch on the place and then we would be lost. All our efforts to escape during the past three years would have proved to be in vain.

We kept on searching in different places where we might dig, but without success. The earth everywhere was sandy and would pour in after any digging.

We were considering obtaining boards and shoring up the walls but we didn't think that this would work. So we crawled about, examined every cranny and sought some security. But we could find no way out.

By this time most of us had our shoes and boots all torn. Inside the cave we had learned to walk about barefoot in order not to wear out our shoes. But those who went outside had to have them.

Under the circumstances, my Nissen became a shoemaker. He made wooden peg nails. He got flax from some peasant and made thread. I remember seeing peasants work a spinning wheel. Nissen made me such a wheel and I began to twist the flax.

We were also beginning to be short of spoons. As I have said, when any cutlery would fall down in the dark and someone stepped on it, it became impossible to find it again. So Nissen began to carve spoons from wood. We were living like Robinson Crusoe.

So our life proceeded day after day. When we were all inside, we were all more or less secure. When our men would return from above, they would always tell us that we ought to be happy with our home, for what Jew in our area now has a home like ours?

We realized this later when we met those who survived in the bunkers. After the liberation we saw the condition they were in. Many of them remained crippled and were unable ever to straighten out.

We were also happy that we were masters of our own fate in the cave. There was no one to whom we owed our safety or upon whom we depended. It was different in the bunkers and in the dugouts. There the peasants, their protectors, could do what they wanted with them. They could drive them out or turn them over to the Germans or kill them with their own hands. Who was there to say nay to them?

In our case, after our men came in from the outside and scraped off the mud which clung to their clothing as they slid through the entrance, and they had washed, they were free men.

Our young people would often sing as loud as they wished. Even if we had shot off cannon, no one outside would have heard. In fact, when they were shooting above us we didn't hear. Later, when the war front passed over, we learned that there had been a great deal of shelling there, but we didn't know it at the time.

We told each other that God had Himself created this grotto for us, so that we might live to the redemptive day of Hitler's downfall and destruction.

We carried on our household duties in the cave in our own way. We ground flour. We didn't peel potatoes. We ate them washed and boiled with their skins on. We washed our laundry and, when it was slow drying because of the dampness in our cave, we would put it under us on the beds and would dry it with our body heat. May God never test us with the conditions which we can bear and to which we can accustom ourselves. Remarkably, none of us ever became ill; none of us had a cold or any similar illness.

We had become so accustomed to our cave that we didn't fear to crawl around in the absolute darkness. We were only afraid that we might wander too far and not find our way back.

Long ago people believed that spirits and ghosts lived in ruins and in caves. Now we could see that there were none here. The devils and the evil spirits were outside, not in the grotto.

Time passed. After a few weeks inside we again had to prepare for an expedition in the outer world. We needed wood, grain, kerosene, washing powder, matches, salt.

The other families who were with us in the cave had friendly peasants nearby who would sell them their needs.

My son-in-law Fishel knew a peasant who was keeping a Jewish lad, Leib Warenbrandt. This lad had Aryan papers and no one knew he was Jewish. He had come from another region. His father had a mill which he had assigned to the peasant with the stipulation that it was only after the war that the mill would belong to him. The lad would help my son-in-law bring the grain to the entrance to our cave. He survived and is now in Israel.

My sons had it harder. Nissen left one evening for Bilcze-Zlote to get grain. The peasant agreed to sell one hundred and fifty kilos. By the time Nissen had arrived and had made all the necessary arrangements, it was late and he remained there for the day. In the evening he returned to the grotto and Shulim took the sleigh. Together they returned to the peasant for the grain. They picked up the load and proceeded back to the grotto.

It was very hard pulling the sleigh because they had to go mostly by side roads. As they were pressing on they realized that daylight would soon be approaching and that they were still about two kilometers from the grotto. They decided to leave the grain on the fields covered up with straw and hurried quickly back to the grotto.

In the daylight they looked at each other and were frightened at

how each looked. Nissen was wearing a pair of pants covered with patches. One couldn't tell which was the original material of the pants. He was covered with yellow mud from top to bottom, and his face was pale and yellow.

Shulim hadn't seen Nissen in daylight for eight months and was shocked at the sight. Shulim imagined he must have looked the same way.

As my sons were running through the forest they met one of the peasants. He looked at them and recognized that they were Jews.

He asked them where they were going and they told him that they were going to the forest for wood. He looked at them ominously, and went away.

They returned into the cave more dead than alive. We had already begun to block the entrance, seeing that it was so late or rather it was early—that it was dawning. We were sure that my sons intended to spend the day in the village.

They told me that they had left the grain with Munkin, the peasant who was living in the forest. They had a hard night and were late so they were forced to leave the grain. Nissen cried out to me. "Mother, it is so terrible in the daytime outside!"

When it became dark again my sons ran back for the grain. We knew that it wasn't far and that it ought to take them only about a half an hour. However, an hour passed, two and three, and they were still not back.

It wasn't until dawn that we saw them. Underground where we were, we had not known what to think or to imagine had happened to them. I must be stronger than iron to have lived through the night.

At dawn someone came running to tell me that they are back. I had not expected to see them alive again, and thanked the Almighty that I had them with me again. My sons told me what had happened.

When they had left the grain in the straw rick it was already quite light, and probably the peasants had seen them hiding their sack. So they stole it.

When my sons arrived and saw their misfortune they decided it could have been only the neighboring peasants.

They went into the house of one of them and told him clearly that he must return the grain. He denied everything. My sons told him that they had followed his tracks from the straw rick, but the peasant again denied everything.

Then Nissen told him, "If I looked in your house, I would certainly find my grain. But if you don't want to return it to me yourself and you want us to go away empty-handed, remember! You will not

eat your own grain either."

When the peasant heard this he said,

"Don't scream. I took some of the grain and my neighbor took the rest. I'll give you back the part I had taken."

Then they went to the second peasant and he, too, returned them the grain. But surely neither of them returned all thay had taken.

I pray to God that they may be damned for each grain which they had kept.

When the war began my eldest daughter Henia was already married to Fischel Dodek and had two daughters, Soniale eight years old and Simale three years old.

Henia was the rose of our family. She had grown up with wonderful friends and their society was considered the intelligentzia of that time. She and her friends had studied Hebrew and belonged to the Zionist Organization. My other children later participated actively in the Betar Zionist Organization. Henia was also an exceptional student, her note books were kept by the teachers and were shown years later to other pupils, even to my daughter Yetta when she came to attend grade school.

Henia's first job in the grotto was, of course, to take care of her husband and children. In addition she also cooked for Fischel's cousins Hersch and Meyer Kawalek. My nephew Siome helped her with the cooking and he would go with her to the kitchen.

Henia was very compassionate to this boy; while preparing our meager meals she would secretly give him an extra portion of food. No one had more than just enough to keep from starving.

When we first entered the grotto and had no kitchen to cook in or any grinding stones, we had to rely on bread brought in from the outside. During those first days Fishel had brought in only one bread. Henia knew this loaf had to last several days. She rationed it very carefully. Every few hours she would give her children a bite of the bread. Simale, her little girl, knew she must not ask for more and said to her mother "I don't understand, I eat and I eat and I eat and I'm still hungry."

Fishel struggled very hard to provide for his family. He risked his life countless times in order to bring in food. Once he sprained his arm while cutting down trees, but this did not stop him from carrying heavy loads of grain and wood into the grotto.

My grand-daughter Soniale, who was a very smart and sensitive child, understood her father's burden. She would stay up with the women till the men came back safely and then would give her father half of her food.

THERE ARE MANY WICKED PEASANTS, FEW GOOD

It was already the end of December, between Christmas and New Year. My husband seldom went out, but since it was a Christian holiday and the police were certainly drunk, he felt it was safer to go out for a while.

He remembered that he had a friendly peasant, the mayor of a village. So he decided to go there. Before the war this man had become ill and stayed in our home for a few weeks while seeing the doctor. I had given him a room and he was very grateful to us. Not only did we give him the room but we also fed him—free, of course. His wife and son would also drop in on us on Sundays when they came to church and would thank us for the favor we had done them.

So my husband went to this man in the village where there was no police station.

The man awoke and seeing my husband began to scream, "Why did you come? Run away from here fast."

His wife was a kinder person and suggested that my husband wait until she would give him something. She brought him a loaf of bread and an old sheepskin coat such as all the peasants were wearing. She said, "You are in the forest and you must be cold. Take the coat for your wife so that she may cover herself with it."

The man, however, ran and grabbed the coat, yelling at his wife, "If they don't kill her today they will kill her tomorrow."

The woman remained standing, abashed. She went away and brought a small sheepskin jacket without sleeves, sidling so that her husband shouldn't see.

That was my husband's experience with a Ukrainian friend. Nor was he the only one.

My husband had given another Ukrainian friend of his, a sack of twenty sheepskins. The skins had already been worked, and were ready to be made into sheepskin coats.

One night he came to this man and asked him for five skins. The man pretended that he knew of nothing; he denied ever taking any skins from him. My husband gave him all the details which the man couldn't deny.

He then said, "Oh, you mean those skins?! But I had returned them to you a long time ago."

When my husband told me this story, he added, "This was the last thing I ever would have expected from him."

The Ukrainians whom their Jewish neighbors had given their valuables to hide knew that each Jew was doomed to death and that no one would ever come to them for an accounting. This is why many "friendly Ukrainians" proved to be creatures without conscience.

We were continuing our routine in the cave; washing, grinding flour and preparing our meagre meals. We would chop up the wood in small pieces and divide them among our people, making sure that no one used more than he had to. From time to time we had the unpleasant task of burying our refuse in our underground kingdom. There were all kinds of details to attend to.

We began to stock our food supplies for the longest possible time. When we were later liberated we still had two month's supply of wood and food in the cave.

A new problem came to plague us. With the passing of time the amount of water available to us became less and less every day. The underground lakes had dried up in some spots so that it became impossible to tell that water had ever been there. The "Black Lake," as we had called the best water flow that we had, had dropped to but two yards in depth and became much narrower than before. We lived in the hope that when the snows would melt in the spring our water reservoirs would fill again.

We were also worried about our food supplies. We had all decided that as long as the frost and snows continued we would take advantage of the time to expand our supplies of food and fuel.

Every time our men were to leave, we took turns as to who should go out first. Many times the entrance was covered with snow. We couldn't reach it with a shovel so the snow had to be brushed aside by hand.

Since all the peasants knew about us, and since they, too, used to go to the forest to steal wood, we were afraid that by chance we might meet them. We thought of a way of frightening them. We shaped a piece of wood like a rifle and put a kind of a spike on top. From afar it looked like a real rifle or bayonet.

When our men would go out to the forest, Shulim would stay near the road between the grotto and the forest as a lookout. If some peasants or the police would come from the town, it was his duty to warn our people of the approaching Ukrainians. Once peasants passing near the grotto saw Shulim with his weapon and they turned away to another road, afraid that he might shoot at them.

Our friend Munko, who lived in the forest, used to tell us that the

peasants were afraid of us. They said that the Jews in the cave had arms.

The supplying of wood was a common problem. All who went out procured as much wood as possible.

Aside from this gathering of wood in the forest, where our people worked together, each of us would go off in his own direction to another village where he had friends who would help him buy the supplies he needed.

My sons used to go to the village where I had been born. All the peasants knew us well and a few helped us to obtain supplies.

Most of the peasants were very wicked. Not only did they refuse to help us but would readily inform the Germans and Ukrainian police about us, or do us other vicious harm. But there were some, a few, who were good Christians, who felt for us and who showed some conscience and decency.

The manager of the manor who had advised us to hide out in the first cave was an acquaintance of ours. Before the war he used to visit us and would drink beer in our home. When we had to liquidate our household, this man came to our house and just picked out anything that he liked. He took a table and chairs, a pair of boots and riding trousers which Nissen had made, and other objects. He promised to pay for all this, but never hurried to do so.

One day we thought of him and decided to visit him. Possibly we could get something back from him.

At night Nissen and Shulim ran to his house. It was dangerous to go there because he lived in the center of the village.

They found him awake. They explained our situation to him and asked him for some wheat, for we didn't have any food.

He heard them out and said that at this time he could not give them anything.

His daughter, who worked in the office of the manor, heard this and began to beg her father with tears in her eyes. "Father, give them my wheat. See how they look. Do you remember how they used to look?!"

His wife broke down and gave my sons several dried pieces of bread. She couldn't bring herself to give them a fresh loaf.

It was difficult to appraise character and conscience.

The father was ashamed and told my sons that he would give them some wheat. But how would they take it out from that place? He suggested that they leave and that he would meet them on a hill beyond the town where he would give them the wheat.

My sons went there and soon a man who was working for the

manager appeared carrying on his shoulder a sack of some 150 lbs, of wheat.

When my sons returned with the wheat and the other supplies that they had procured, we declared a holiday, rejoicing in their safe return.

The news which we used to receive from the outside was always tragic and the occasion of constant agony. We were always hearing about Jews who had managed to hide out thus far but were now discovered and killed.

The only Jew who had still possibly remained in town was Dr. Teibels. He was not from our district; he had come from Lwow and had become known as a good doctor. When the Russians came to our town in 1939, they arrested many of our people who had been officers in the Polish army or who had been policemen. It was then they had arrested the doctor because he had been an officer.

He was jailed in Borszczow and was about to be sent deeper into the Russian interior. But the Christians in the city and in the villages in the area went to the Soviet authorities and pleaded for the doctor to be released because he was saving lives and was a loyal citizen. He was freed.

During the German occupation, Dr. Teibels continued with his medical practice in the town and in the nearby villages. The police protected him.

We also had another doctor, Dr. Boyarski, the son of the parish priest, but he had not been as highly regarded as Dr. Teibels.

During one of my sons' expeditions outside, friendly peasants told them that some unknown persons had come at night and had taken away both doctors. It wasn't clear who had taken the Jewish doctor and why they had also taken the Ukrainian Dr. Boyarsky.

There were Ukrainian bands roaming our area. When the Russians came in, the Ukrainian nationalists organized into groups ostensibly fighting for an independent Ukraine. In fact, however, they were only bandits, hiding out in the forests in bunkers. The talk was that it was they who had kidnapped the doctors.

Much later, in 1959, we met an acquaintance at a wedding in New York who had also survived the war and the occupation in hiding. Our friend had a restaurant in Syracuse. He told us that one day a man came in whom he recognized to be Dr. Boyarsky. Our friend approached him and said "How are you, doctor?" The man became pale. Our friend asked him about Dr. Teibels and what had happened to him. Dr. Boyarsky said that he knew nothing about him.

Ever since, he has been coming frequently to the restaurant, but

would say nothing, although my friend is certain that he had very much to tell.

I am recording this because I want the world to remember that there had once been a hearty, good Jewish Dr. Teibels. Who knows whether anyone is today alive to mention his name? He had healed many people and has saved my children many times, and others. Honour to his memory!

After relaxing a little for several days, we decided to go out again to accumulate as much food, lumber, kerosene and soap as possible. For who knows whether it will be possible to go out again later?

We crowded in the entrance and were ready to go out, but something got in the way. We feared that possibly they had blocked the entrance again. We strained harder and pushed away the object that had blocked the entrance.

When we got outside, we saw two frozen corpses!

We looked more closely and we recognized two people from our town, a young man by the name of Hersch Hollenberg and his eleven-year old son, Chatzkel.

We shuddered with shock. The family had been hiding out with a Ukrainian woman who lived at the edge of the forest near our grotto. Two peasants found out about them. They came at night, took them outside and killed them. They tied their bodies with barbed wire and left them thus outside the entrance to our cave. We do not even know what happened to his wife and to another child. One daughter succeeded in escaping. After the liberation, we buried the father and the son near the grotto.

That night my sons Nissen and Shulim set out to Bilcze-Zlote to get some grain. They were very fortunate and procured about 500 lbs. of wheat.

Bilcze-Zlote was in a valley and they had left the sleigh on a hill. It took five trips to bring the grain up to the sleigh, and now it became impossible for them to move it, due to the heavy load and the deep snow.

It occurred to Nissen to go steal a horse. Shulim remained there. Suddenly he saw someone riding on a horse. Sure enough, it was Nissen.

Now that there was a horse, Shulim said, "Where is the harness?"

Nissen said, "I forgot. I will go back for the harness."

But Shulim had another solution. They were wearing the heavy peasant shirts which they had taken from the man who had robbed us of our valuables. They took off their shirts, tied them together and

made a kind of a harness.

Shulim mounted the horse and Nissen sat on the sleigh.

Together they somehow reached our cave. They then let the horse go.

This load lasted us till the liberation.

As I write these things now I wonder how we were ever able to survive such experiences. Only those who were with us can visualize how much was involved in each of these incidents which I am now noting down. It is difficult to imagine how much strength, courage, faith and will to survive Hitler were involved in resisting and withstanding despair.

In that dark age, my sons displayed an epic will to maintain our family together. We would not be led to the slaughter like sheep. It was our passion to see the complete destruction of the Germans that impelled us to these efforts.

THE LIBERATION

We had been hearing about the defeats which the Germans were suffering and about their retreat on all fronts. The most recent reports which we heard through the peasants were of the Soviets approaching our area.

A few days later our men went out to learn what was happening in the world. Our friend Munko told them that from time to time they were already able to hear the distant echoes of cannon, and that at night the firing could be seen.

It is impossible to record our joy. We were still under the rule of the Nazi beasts and we could not imagine what new atrocities they could think up for us as the front neared our district.

Our men would return to us underground upset and confused. Their joy was great, but there was also anxiety whether help would reach us, or whether ours would be like the story of Moses, who saw the promised land from the distance but was not himself privileged to set foot on it. Might not the same happen to us? We have the joy of nearly seeing our liberation, but we may not yet live to witness it.

Our concern now was not only to procure more food but to hear the news from the fronts.

One day when our men came to the peasant they learned that the Soviets had been here for the last three days! ... The front had passed us by. There had been shooting and bombardments, but we had heard nothing and had known nothing in our cave.

Imagine our happiness. We had lived to bear witness to Hitler's defeat!!

The front was still close to us and one could never tell what might happen. We could still hear the cannonade and see the bursting of gunfire.

A few days later our men came running, fearfully: the Germans were back.

We could scarcely come to from this fearful report. We could not forgive ourselves for not having come out from the cave and fled with the Soviet troops.

But, it was too late; we could not seize again the lost opportunity. We had only to live and hope that the Soviets would return to our area.



Korolowka 1929—The modern Hebrew School was the pride of our town. The finest daughters of the town attended there. Few are alive today of that class of 1929. Standing (L to R)—Cyrale Singer, Cype Blutstein, Leah Cohen, Lena Dresler, Yetta Barad (a member of our grotto), Brancie Reibel, Mole Cohen. Seated (L to R)—the teacher David Chisdis, Leah Blutstein, Brancie Riesel, my daughter Henia, Melach Rozenthal.



A wedding photograph in my native village Bilcze Zlote. In this village lived only about a hundred Jewish souls, all were distantly related to each other. Photographed are the Brandes families, Reinstein families, Hershkowitz family, my sisters Shancie and Leiche and their families.



Korolowka 1930—We had a fine group of devoted Zionist youth in our town, members of the Gordonia Hitachdut. These were moderate socialists, dedicated to the restoration of the Jewish homeland. Only a few survived the Nazi Holocaust. Top row (L to R)—Moshe Sternshein, Cyril Singer, Mechel Hefler, Mole Cohen, Lumy Sternshein, Hinde Sternshein, Yosel Bretshneider, Pepcia Dodyk (one of our grotto members killed after the liberation). Duvke Cohen, Gusta Hoffman, Shamen Rosenstok. Second row from top (L to R) Buby Fuss, Shaindle Sandberg, Munie Shpitzer, Chipie Blutstein, Willy Wallcer, Munie Wallcer, Leib Sandberg, Venie Reibel, Leib Kalkstein, Leath Blutstein, Itziale Kerschner. Third row from top (L to R)—Sitting Mendel Dodyk (a member of our grotto), Dolek Bretschneider, Toba Sandberg, Blima Dodyk, Hersch Muster, Bonie Shpitzer, Chaya Bashias, Munie Hollander, Belrale Shpitzer. Sitting on the ground (L to R)—Moshe Rosenthal, Munie Dodyk, Chanale, daughter of the Shamus, Bunie Greenberg Willie Singer.



Korolowka, 1935—The town of Korolowka had an active Jewish cultural life. I have always been sympathetic to the Zionist Revisionist movement, and was glad that some of my children were in the Betar (Brith Trumpeldor) Organization. Top row (L to R)—Fradel Geller, my son Nissen, Alter Cohen, Avrum Goldsmith, Moshe Dodyk, Chatzkel Bretschneider, unknown boy, Gabriel Kalkstein, my son Shulim, Leizer Bretschneider. Second row from top (L to R)—Fradel Dodyk, Yosel Dodyk (both members of our grotto) Leiche Cohen, Shlomo Reinstein, Ruzia Hollenberg, Duvcie Flechner. Third row from top left (L to R)—Velvel Dodyk (my son-in-law Fishel's brother), Avrum Rothstein, Avrum Geller (leader of the Betar), Gershon Reibel, Avrum Rozenshtok. Fourth row from top (L to R)—Frida Reinstein, Freidze Goldsmith, Malcie Rozenbaum, Freidale Geller, Zlate Goldsmith, Mircie Dodyk (my son-in-law Fishel's sister), Siome Geller, Izie Dodyk. Bottom row (L to R)—Ezie Geller, Gitel "Kalemuk", Francie Reinstein, Gitel Reibel, Brane Stermer, my daughter Yetta, Esther Reibel, Leibale Geller.

We remained in deepest agony, scarcely moving to prepare food. We could no longer think of sleeping.

Suddenly the cave had become confining; we could find no place there.

When the Soviets retreated from our village, my son-in-law Fishel went to the peasant who was hiding out the Jewish boy on Aryan papers. He arranged with the peasant that, if or when the Soviets returned, he would put a note in a bottle and let it down on a string into the grotto.

Several times a day we went to the entrance to look for the little bottle which we were awaiting so anxiously.

Finally the peasant wrote us that the Germans had already gone. This was at the beginning of April, 1944. Much snow had fallen at the end of March and the Germans were not able to flee with their military equipment. So we saw burned out tanks, military trucks, cannon and other weapon at every step. The Germans had destroyed these arms so that they would not fall into the hands of the Soviets.

An indescribable relief seized us.

We were free!!!

We could walk freely in daylight and no longer fear death.

For years daylight had frightened us. It was only nights and in the dark that we had felt a little more secure. For years we had hidden in bunkers, caves and other dark places, and had been afraid to be seen in God's world.

Now we were able to walk in the middle of the day outdoors. It was difficult to believe that this salvation had come.

Our men went into town while the women remained in the grotto. We did not trust the Ukrainians; we were afraid that after seeing us all in the town they might come at night and kill us. We were waiting for sufficient authority to be established to protect us. We stayed in the grotto for another ten days.

When our men came into town they saw the great ruin and destruction. When we had left for our cave, our houses and all the buildings in town were still there. The houses of our neighbors had also been untouched.

When the Germans were liquidating the Jewish community, the Christian peasants began to take the Jewish houses apart. They began by removing the doors and windows. Then they pulled off the metal coverings, the bricks, the woodwork, until nothing remained but chimneys as memorials to the destruction.

It was frightening to look at the naked, staring chimneys. It was impossible to tell which house had stood where or who had owned it.

The peasants told us that, as they were taking our house apart, a boy who was taking part in this ravaging fell and was killed.

Much more horrible was it to know that the people who had lived in those homes were dead. They had all been murdered and destroyed in the most frightening, inquisitorial, and nightmarish manner. They had all been erased and uprooted. The city where Jews had lived for many generations was completely destroyed.

My sons dug in the earth and found the cement steps that led to our house. It was thus they recognized where they had been raised and where they had passed the years of their youth.

During our entire time in the cave we had never eaten our fill. We consumed only enough to keep our souls with our bodies, for we never knew what would happen tomorrow, whether we should be able to emerge again to get more provisions.

Now we decided to eat. The boys ground flour and asked for verenikes. We busied ourselves cooking. Each of us ate as much as he wanted. This was our expression and our celebration of freedom.

The news which we were receiving did not make us happy. We heard about all those who had attempted to hide but who did not live to the day of liberation. The Germans, the Ukrainian police and their helpers searched out and killed every Jew till the very day of liberation.

We were especialy shaken to hear of the fate of the dentist Wisenthal and his family.

Wisenthal had hidden out until after the liberation, with his sister, his brother-in-law and their little daughter. After the liberation they left their hiding place in the bunker and were staying with a peasant. At night a group of Ukrainian bandits came in and killed the four of them. The peasant probably knew who the killers were, but he was afraid to speak, for the Ukrainian bands in our area had begun their activities. Everyone was afraid of them.

The Soviets were but little interested in what was happening to the Jews. They did not receive our complaints gladly. There were many anti-Semites among them, too.

When the Germans retreated from my birthplace, Bilcze-Zlote, a big battle developed between the Germans and the Russians. A number of peasants were killed in the bombardments. Many houses were burned out.

My sister and her children were hidden in a peasant's attic during the battle and the Soviet bombardment was like music to their ears. They were not even afraid of the terrific explosions. They had lived to see and to hear the downfall of Hitler.

The Ukrainians, who had met the Germans with flowers when they had marched in several years earlier, now fled and hid like poisoned mice.

The heart nearly burst with happiness at this.

WE LEAVE THE CAVE

On April 12, 1944 we began to leave our grotto. We left our "treasures", the stones of the mill, the kerosene and other provisions in the cave just in case, God forbid, we should ever need to flee there again.

We also hid them so that the Ukrainians should not find them. There were organized bands who collaborated with the Germans and who were being pursued by the Soviets. It might have been possible for them to hide out in the cave, and we did not want our enemies to enjoy our supplies.

We put on our muddied trousers and various rags, and put into sacks the outer clothing which we wanted to take outside.

Now we realized how hard it had been for our men to go out each time and to come in again through all these months.

I had no difficulty in passing between the two rocks this time, I had lost much weight.

It was hard for me to walk and I barely dragged myself up the hill. The going out of the grotto completely exhausted me.

In serving for everybody I was generally the last to eat. My nephew Siome, my late sister's son, would finish eating and would stare at me hungrily with his big, beautiful, black eyes. My heart would hurt to look at the hungry boy and I would give him some of my food.

I had become very thin and looked ashen. With time I came to, regained my normal weight and the color of my skin.

As we approached the entrance of our cave we found the going very difficult. Water was running from above the entrance and we had to crawl through the mud.

Suddenly we saw a ray of light, the sunshine. My grand-daughter Simale began to scream that we should put out the kerosene light. The child had forgotten about daylight and had become accustomed to the dark. The strange daylight was too strong for her eyes.

Chanche Dodek, an elderly woman who had been with us in the cave with her children, fainted when she came to the surface. It was only with great difficulty that we revived her.

The sunshine at first blinded and immobilized us. Our eyes had been so unaccustomed to daylight and to sunshine that we could barely stand God's sun. We had not seen any light which went

beyond several yards distance for many months. We had become accustomed to a life in darkness; the daylight hurt us like pins stuck in our eyes.

We washed with the snow water, changed our clothes and sought to get as far away from the place as quickly as possible. We were afraid of the Ukrainian bandits coming here.

As we came to the entrance on our way out my Chana began to cry.

"We have survived but what awaits me now? Where is my husband Joseph? Is he still alive?"

I tried to comfort her,

"Don't worry, with God's help we will find him alive. We will hear from him. If we have survived, he is also probably alive."

I had guessed right. Not two weeks passed before we received a letter from him, from Siberia. He was a stockkeeper of food there—an occupation considered very highly in Russia—and he had been able to help a number of other Jewish people to survive.

As we approached the road, peasants looked at us from behind the wooden fences in curiosity. They had not believed that there were still any Jews alive. One of them who had taken my cow brought us several cookies.

We were going, but where?

At the edge of the town there was a new house which had been built just before the war by a woman whose maiden name was Hollenberg, a cousin of the man who was killed and whose body had been thrown at the entrance to our cave.

For a time she had lived in Fort William, Canada, and had returned home before the war. She had married and had a child. When she and her husband had been killed, their maid remained in the house with the child. Later someone came to the house and killed the child as well. We shall never know whether this was done with the consent of the maid.

Now she was living in the house with a teacher, a well-known collaborator of the Nazis. When there were still Jews in the town, he would come to their homes and take their possessions at will.

It was to this house that Nissen took us. The teacher was not home.

Nissen said to me, "Mother, wash up and go lie down in his bed."

My Henya was completely barefoot, so Fishel brought her a pair of slippers.

A few more Jews appeared in town one by one. They were like the walking dead, stooped so they were scarcely able to take a few steps.

They had remained in the bunkers all this time, bent over almost into rolls, their feet had become atrophied, and their were unable to straighten out.

At the edge of town there were still several houses which had belonged to Jewish people and where Christians were living now. The survivors whose homes still remained went there for some of their household belongings but nobody would return anything to them.

Our men went again to retrieve the furs which we had given a friendly peasant to hide when the Nazis had ordered that all fur garments were to be surrendered. The man refused to return them.

We had left a sewing machine at a neighbor's, a machine that cut straw, a bed and other furnishings. But they would return nothing to us.

His wife even screamed at us,

"Everybody has machines and other things which they took from Jews and they don't have to return them. Why do we have to give them back?" She added that had she known the outcome, she would have taken from other Jews instead of from us.

I asked her,

"Is it our fault that you are not lucky, and that we survived? If others would have survived, you would have had to return their things, too."

Nothing helped. They gave us nothing back. We were free now but we barely had food.

The men became friendly with the Soviet soldiers and began to sell them things to earn something. We would buy homemade vodka from a peasant whom we knew and would give it to the Soviets in exchange for different articles.

The military staff was located across the street from our house. Apparently the chief of staff must have been Jewish. He took an interest in our fate, would ask us about how we had saved ourselves, and would say that my children are also his children. From time to time he would give them something when no one was watching.

When the military were ordered to leave our town he gave my son an automatic rifle in a sack, slipping it to him so that no one should see. He warned us that when the Russian soldiers will leave we would not be safe here. We should at least have a gun. If anyone asked us where we got it, we were to say that we had found it.

When the soldiers left, my Nissen went to the city hall and reported that he had a gun and asked for a permit to keep it.

BUT THAT ONE MURDERER OF THE JEWS SHOULD DIE!

Now that Nissen had a permit to keep a gun, he went to look for the murderers of the Jews.

He took one of the Soviet men with him and they arrested a Ukrainian who was well known to have killed a number of Jewish people. They took the man to the N.K.V.D. where he was questioned. He admitted everything. He was sentenced to death and was shot. It was a great satisfaction to us to see at least one murderer of the Jewish people pay with his life for his crimes. It had to be asserted that the life of a Jew is not beyond the protection of the human law.

So Nissen went again to the peasant who had our sewing machine, our straw cutter and other of our possessions. When he saw my son with a rifle on his shoulders his answer was altogether different from what it had been before.

Yosel Dodek, another young man who had survived with us in the cave, also received permission to carry a rifle.

One day he and Nissen went to another well known killer of Jews, a Ukrainian who served with the S.S., by the name of Anufri Chechula.

As they entered his house he paled like the wall. His house was full of wealth which he had taken from Jews. Yosel went out to get a wagon to take these household goods away.

The Major of the N.K.V.D. had asked that criminals not be brought to him for reasons unknown to us. So Yosel told the peasant that they would do him no harm. They would only take away some of the things of which he had robbed the Jews.

As Nissen went outside for a moment to look around, Chechula slipped away, grabbed a rifle which he had hidden in the barn and began to shot at my son. The first bullet struck the trigger of Nissen's automatic gun so that he was not able to return fire.

The bullet also struck the tip of the little finger of his right hand. Nissen quickly hid behind a thick pear tree and remained behind cover while the man shot off his bullets and fled.

I was very frightened when I saw Nissen return with blood running from his hand, but a doctor bandaged it and it quickly healed.

A young Jewish woman from our town, Pepcia Dodek, the wife of Yosel Dodek who had lived with us in the grotto, one day went to a nearby village, and never returned. She left a husband and a two-

year-old boy, Nunia. Her husband never gave up looking for her. He even looked for her deep in the cave. Yosel went inside the cave in search of her and even came back with the clock which we had left there. But it proved a futile and tragic search.

One day he was told that the murderer who had shot at Nissen certainly knew what had happened to her. Possibly he had killed her himself. Yosel went to the Soviets, told his story and asked for two soldiers to go with him to the peasant.

As soon as his mother saw Yosel with the two soldiers coming she began to scream at them, probably so that her son should hear and run away. They did not find him in the house and they went looking for him in the barn. Yosel entered the barn and the murderer who was hiding in the attic began to shoot. He killed Yosel instantly and escaped.

The same murderer returned again and one night shot into a house where several Jewish couples were living. A young man, Saul Waltzer, was killed on the spot. His wife Toba was critically wounded and died several weeks later after suffering agonies in the hospital. The daughter of Hersh Hollenberg, whose body had been thrown near the entrance to our cave, was wounded in the leg. Leiche Dodyk was also killed that night.

So two of our people who had hid in our cave with us had died after the liberation. They had suffered so much, had managed to survive and to see the destruction of Hitler. Now they, too, died at the Ukrainians' murderous hands. Nor were they the last victims. We were to pass through very many troubles in the months to come.

We saw that we were not safe in our town, that the murderers might well throw grenades into our houses and that we would all die. So we rented a wagon and left for Borszczow.

For the first few days we stayed with the several Jewish people who had remained alive there. Then we sought out a deserted house whose unfortunate previous owners, Jewish people, had all been done to death. We cleaned it out a little and moved in there.

At this time a new menace arose. There was talk of the men being mobilized in to the Red army.

Here we had lost so much of our strength under the Germans. How could we begin military service now?

We began to search for employment which would be considered essential so that our men would not be drafted. Nissen found work in the office of the chief of the roads department and Shulim became a house repairman. He was taken to the N.K.V.D. where he was instructed to make repairs on a building which was in very poor condition. Shulim busied himself installing doors, windows, bookcases

and cupboards and other necessary installations. His chief would come to visit me and would drink in our home. We became friends.

My daughter Henia still lived in our home town. But conditions there became terrible and she had to flee.

My son-in-law Fishel was also supposed to come to us. He was waiting for an exemption from military service which he was supposed to receive the following day.

But it was not fated to be. The mobilization office of the army was located across the street from the home of his cousin who had been with us in the cave. The Christians who saw my son-in-law around pointed him out to a Soviet officer and he was taken immediately.

When we heard about it we were very distressed. He had suffered so much under the Soviets from 1939 to 1941, and then under the Germans, and here he was again doomed to suffering and to risk his life! His wife and two children were desperate and despairing.

It is normal for the living to seek a livelihood. Each of us did everything possible to earn his keep and to establish himself. We did a little business, and my daughter Henia also made enough to get by this way. Now she had to maintain the family.

We remembered the horse that the father of the police officer had taken from us. We could make good use of it now if we had it. The police officer had gone off with the Germans, so Nissen and Shlomo went to his father and took back the horse. We obtained a wagon from another peasant. Now we were equipped to search for a livelihood.

Some of our people began to travel to Chernowitz in Bukovina, a day's travel with a horse and wagon from our home.

We had believed that conditions everywhere in Europe were as they were in our area. However, it appeared that things were different in Chernowitz. A fine Jewish community had survived there. There was business to be done. There was merchandise to be bought.

We began to bring various articles of merchandise from there and were earning fairly well. My husband also went to the mill and brought flour. People cooked, baked and earned a living. The peasants began to bring their crops from the villages to sell. We would buy their grain, would mill it, and would sell the flour to the Russians who came to us.

We were some twenty miles from the former Russian boundary.

More and more people would come from across to buy flour and other food, even salt, from us. They were all dressed very poorly, wearing the same linen shoes and old garments, almost as a uniform, like soldiers.

They would surround our peasants who would come to the village

with their crops and would buy everything. They would carry these supplies on their shoulders some sixty or seventy miles deeper into Russian.

Others would get together and would rent a wagon to take their provisions to the border, the Zbrucz River. Beyond that point they would have to carry it on foot, because no one could have horses or wagons there. So they bore it scores of miles on their shoulders. Human beings will do everything for a piece of bread.

One Russian woman who used to come to our house from the other side of the frontier was a real business woman. She was dressed in rags but would bring us some golden coins minted in Czarist days in five and ten ruble denominations and exchanged them for food.

She would tell us about "the happy days" of Soviet life. When she heard that we had an opportunity to leave Russia she took me into a corner and told me quietly.

"I love you like my own children and I will also miss you very much. But if you can leave, my advice is, run before it is too late."

The war was still going on. The Soviets demanded that everyone should work. My Yetta also went to work as secretary to a judge.

Earlier we had had a judge who was an anti-semite. When a Jew and a Christian had appeared before him, with the Jew demanding that the Christian return the valuables which he had given him to hide, the judge would rule that these had become the property of the Christian because he had hidden it.

The new judge was a woman. My Yetta explained everything to her, and now she handed down different kind of judgments. She ordered everything returned to the Jewish owners. Many Jewish people were therefore very grateful to my Yetta.

The judge was a young girl of twenty-three. She impressed even experienced lawyers with her brilliance in conducting cases and with the judgments she handed down.

My Henia fixed up a small house with a room in front where she lived with another woman who had remained alone, Sheva Shwager of Milnitza. Together they opened a small store there and earned their living.

Soniale began to go to school. She had gone to school under the Soviet regime a number of years back. Now she grasped her studies very quickly and was admired by all her friends and teachers. She quickly learned songs in praise of Stalin and "The March on Berlin", which made us all laugh. Little Simale used to repeat all her songs.

One evening there was a concert in the theatre and Sonia was asked to recite the song about "The March on Berlin" with much

charm and talent. A general happened to sit in the front row. He asked who the little girl was. When she concluded her number she was carried from the stage and was showered with flowers.

Now she is married to Harold Hochman and is a mother of three; Florence, Linda and Mark, and I am a great grandmother.

My son-in-law Joseph was still somewhere in Siberia.

He sent documents to my Chana for her to come there. She was working in the editorial department of a newspaper and received permission to leave and to go to her husband.

MY LATE HUSBAND SAVES SCROLLS OF THE LAW

A Ukrainian woman who had once served as our maid was now living in a house which had once belonged to Jewish people, not far from a synagogue. My husband had hidden three Scrolls of the Law and many religious books from the synagogue in her home.

Now he took back the Scrolls and the books from her. He distributed the books among a number of Jewish people who had survived the war and took the Scrolls of the Law to Chernowitz to check their condition and to have the necessary repairs made in the writing. He also bought several beautiful cloth coverings ("Robes") there for these scrolls.

The synagogue in our area had been frightfully desecrated. My husband worked at cleansing this House of Worship and got a number of other people to assist him. He also sought out an Ark for the Scrolls of the Law and some benches so that the synagogue was again given the appearance of a holy place.

One day I baked some cakes and cookies and, when most of the Jewish people assembled, we brought the Scrolls of the Law into the synagogue under a canopy. Our joy was indescribable.

We would meet each Saturday morning in the synagogue for services. My husband would recite the Kidush.

WE HEAR FROM THE UKRAINIAN BANDS

Conditions in our area became difficult as the Ukrainian bands terrorized and murdered the Polish inhabitants and particularly the Jews.

The majority of our population were Ukrainians who wanted an independent state. At first they set out to kill the Poles. They would attack them, burn their houses and massacre everybody. They also attacked and killed Russian soldiers when they had an opportunity. They usually stayed hidden in the forests, but when smaller groups of Russian soldiers would appear on the roads and sometimes even larger groups—they opened fire on them from their hiding places and killed very many.

In our town they killed the judge, the prosecutor and many Soviet officers and civilians.

The woman who had taken Shulim in after we were discovered in the first cave was Polish. Her home was attacked and the entire family was slaughtered. I was very deeply hurt by their tragedy.

The Soviets taught everyone who was working for them how to defend himself under attack and how to use firearms. They even taught the women how to shoot.

When the bandits became very active, the Soviets actively set to clean them out. But this was no simple matter. The bands were hidden deeply in the forests where they had well camouflaged bunkers.

They also used to hide out in the villages. Daytime they carried on like all other residents, but nights they would go out to make their attacks.

When things would quiet down a little the authorities would send political agitators into the towns to explain matters to the local inhabitants and to warn them against supporting the Ukrainian gangs. Among other measures, they carried through a registration of the residents.

Most of the Ukrainian bandits were former collaborators of the Nazis. As it happened, the Jews were caught between the two fires. The Ukrainians and the Poles killed each other and both were busy killing the few remaining Jewish people.

For the Jews all this constituted a new terror. Now a visit to a village and even to a Ukrainian home became a very dangerous matter.

Occasionally Yetta needed to travel to nearby towns with the Judge. I went to her superior and begged her, with tears in my eyes, not to take Yetta to the towns. I told her that my daughter was still frightened from the days of the Nazis and had never had a peaceful night of sleep. When the authorities told the judge to send Yetta to the villages and towns the young woman reported that the entire proceedings of the court rested on Yetta and that she could not be spared.

We also had to make sure that the boys were not sent out and we were successful in this as well.

One day this judge and a friend went to a village to deliver a political lecture at the city hall there. Suddenly a band of Ukrainians arrived and surrounded the city hall. The judge and her friend hid in a cellar. The bandits threw a hand grenade there and both were killed. Then they set fire to the city hall. Both bodies were so burned and were unrecognizable. Again we grieved deeply for she had proven a true friend and a very fine person.

The Poles living in the villages began to flee from their homes into the cities. You could see them dragging their way over the roads with their household possessions and with their cattle. When they reached the cities they would rent homes and would be afraid to leave their rooms even to purchase supplies.

We were not very sorry for their plight; we were somewhat glad to see them tasting some of the experiences they had imposed on us.

Time was passing. We did a little business. We didn't dare travel to Chernowitz but would send some peasant there to buy things for us. We used to purchase flour from mills, directly or through some peasants, and earned a fair living. The peasants would make vodka which we would buy and sell to our customers. Henia, too, did quite well.

We procured several German military overcoats. Since we had a sewing machine, I asked a tailor to come into our house to make them over to our size. The tailor was a Ukrainian but he had worked for a Jewish tailor, a neighbour of ours, for many years, and had learned to speak Yiddish as if he were himself a Jew.

Once I asked him what he knew about Dr. Teibels. He told me that he was certain Dr. Teibels was alive, but he didn't wish to tell me where he was living. He was afraid that we might inform the authorities and that they would get after him.

On the other hand we were afraid for ourselves. I believe that Dr. Teibels had been kidnapped by the gang known as the Banderovtzi. They kept him as long as they needed him and then they killed him

so that he, too, should not be a witness to their murders and of other terrors they had committed.

The dangerous state of affairs in our region continued. Polish families were fleeing their farms in greater numbers. The city was becoming overcrowded by these Polish refugees.

The building next to ours had been a large synagogue. Now it was used as a storehouse for American food and clothing. When the Russian military would pass through there they would take all sorts of precious supplies from that warehouse: canned meats, blankets, boots, etc. The Allied governments, and particularly United States, had sent this to enable the Soviet Government to become as strong as it is now.

But the Russian civilian population, especially the inhabitants of the collective settlements, were always in great misery. They used to come to us to buy food, particularly flour to bake bread and the cookies which they called liepiashkes.

The rationed bread was much cheaper than that purchased on the open market but it was necessary to wait hours in line to get the very low quotas which barely sufficed for one meal. It was the peasants, the workers who were employed by the government, and the poor Jews who could not afford to buy their bread on the open market who waited all these hours in line.

My Chana, who had gone to her husband in Russia, kept writing us continuously. Sometimes she would write that it was now possible to buy various articles there, for by this time the Russians had already entered German territory. There they had seized many valuables from the Germans and would send them back home. The soldiers were allowed to send packages to their families. Naturally, most of the contents of these packages were sold on the open market.

But the problem of food in the Urals, where my son-in-law Fishel was stationed, was very bad. There was a famine there as in all Russia. My late son-in-law wrote Henia that he was negotiating for a permit to come to our region to procure supplies for those working with him. His superiors promised to arrange this and my son-in-law was hoping to come and visit us soon.

THE WEEPING AT OUR MEMORIAL SERVICES

The Days of Awe were approaching. We had our services on New Year's Day in our synagogue and no one disturbed us.

This was our first community service since the Germans had come to our town.

During the years of the occupation we had been afraid to meet at the synagogue because it was particularly during our holy days that they would perpetrate their ugliest crimes against us. Now we could meet and pray, but it was heart rending to realize how few had remained of all the thousands of Jews who had lived here, the fatal catastrophe that had befallen entire communities.

One of the young people in our town had studied the Kosher procedure of slaughtering chickens. Before Yom Kipur he killed the hens which are needed for the ritual that precedes our Day of Atonement. My husband himself went to have him kill our hens. For the first time since the liberation we tasted fowl.

On the Yom Kipur we again assembled at the synagogue for the entire day of prayers.

When we reached the memorial services an indescribable weeping swept the House of Worship. Most of those present had lost their entire families and all their dear friends.

We were particularly heart broken about those who had lost their lives after the liberation. Among those who had died so ironically beyond all understanding were Pepcia and Yosel Dodek. There were also Israel Waltzer and his wife Taube (née Sandberg), Leiche Dodek, who was the wife of Hersh, and a boy, Israel, son of Mordecai Yosl Spitzer. They had gone through the seven Nazi circles of hell; it was after the liberation that they were killed by the Ukrainian bandits. There was no end to our weeping and to our bloodletting.

After the festival season things quieted a bit in the city. The authorities became very severe. They closely watched the houses where the Banderovtzi came and arrested many. In some cases their parents were deported. When the Soviets wanted to be very strict they certainly knew how to do so and how to establish order!

At about this time we bought another horse which we needed for our trading.

My husband was very nervous and he never permitted any of our

children to travel. We had a peasant working for us who used to go to the mill to bring us the flour. The miller would come to us for different supplies which he needed in exchange for flour. We earned quite well, so that, all in all, we did not lack for any of the necessities of life.

I want to record the story of Nissen's wife, Pepe.

Back in the days when it was still possible to travel to Chernowitz, my husband decided to pass some time there. On the road he saw several young girls with packs who were looking for a lift. My husband always made a point of helping such people, so he stopped the horses and asked the girls who they were and where they were planning to go.

One of them, it soon appeared, was a grandchild of his sister Taube Metzker who lived in Tluste. Her father's name was Mendel.

You can imagine how happy my husband must have been to hear that at least one of his sister's grandchildren had remained alive. He had last seen her several years earlier when she was still a little girl. Now she was tall, beautiful and grown up, and he had not recognized her.

Naturally, he brought her to our home and we were all very happy to have her with us. About a year later she married my son Nissen.

Within a few weeks a Jewish man from Tluste came to our town and brought us another grandchild of my husband's sister, young Nusia, the daughter of Rivche Hessing. She, too, remained with us until we left Poland. She then went to a kibbutz in Poland and left with the Exodus for Israel.

MY GRIEVOUS LOSS

Our peace did not last long. We had come to believe that conditions in our area had become stabilized and we took greater risks than we should have. We paid a terrible price for this.

One day we were visited by a peasant who had an orchard with very good winter pears. My husband decided to go there because he was afraid that the man who was working for us would not be able to find the place.

I felt very strongly about it and practically forbade him to go. I argued that if the peasant wanted to sell us the pears he would find a way of bringing them to us, even though he did not have horses of his own; if he could find no way of doing this we would get along without the pears.

But my husband wasn't listening to me. He wanted the pears and also to get some flour on the way. He proposed to lie hidden in the wagon while the peasant would drive. He also planned to avoid the short road which passed near a forest but to go by a safer, if longer, road. I told him that even if he were not driving, his horses were known to the people in the area and that they would guess that he was in the wagon.

I could not understand why he wanted to take the risk. He had always been very prudent. But now fear seemed to have left him and he felt strongly about the trip.

I left the house for a few moments and when I returned he had already gone. I became panicky immediately. He had never gone off without saying good-bye, and here he was gone without a word. My daughter Henia also saw him leave and tried to dissuade him. But for some reason he was not listening to anyone at this time. Now he was gone.

In the evening the man who was driving returned weeping. My husband had been shot.

We were even afraid to go to bring back his body so we asked a friendly peasant to go on this mission.

We laid him to rest in Borszczow according to the Jewish rites and later put a tombstone on his grave.

Again we were in despair.

We honoured his memory in the Jewish manner. We sat the seven

days of mourning. Our sons said Kaddish three times a day for eleven months, and we treasure his memory while we bear our loss.

Our bereavement was constantly with us, the more anguished because it had been such an unnecessary tragedy. Some force seems to have been pulling him to his death, something irresistible.

But it is I who am, of course, struck down most fearfully.

My sister was also living with her children in Borszczow. From time to time she would return to Bilcze-Zlote for some food. My husband used to be very angry at her for travelling at such a great risk. At that time he still used to travel to Chernowitz. He would give her merchandise to trade so that she might be able to earn a living and not need to go to Bilcze-Zlote. But he had himself taken the greatest of risks. He had listened to no one and had gone on that unnecessary trip.

How can we make sense out of our lives and of our deaths?

It was all unbearable. Here we had suffered so much under the Nazis and had somehow managed to survive. Now, just when life was beginning to normalize and we were beginning to enjoy our children, he left this life.

It is now seventeen years that we are without him. The Yahrzeit of his death is the seventh day of Kislev, a date which our family will always remember and memorialize.

But the living must follow the stream of life and do what is essential to maintain themselves. My sons returned to their jobs and also did what they could to earn something by trading.

During this very dark period of our life, we were relieved by the joy which my daughters' children gave us. The happiness of children and their laughter affects even those who are in deep troubles.

The older Sonia was already ten and the younger Sima was five. They were among the most beautiful of children and stood out from among their companions. Very few such young children survived the German atrocities, a counted few and Sonia was outstanding among all the youngsters. She led her class in school and after these study hours she was actually a business woman. She knew all the prices in the store and handled the scales well. Everybody admired her talents and her beauty; she was almost a wonderchild. Little Sima also would be stopped by passersby and her friends loved to hear her recite. Now Simale is married to David Blitzer and they have two daughters Etale and Bonnie.

My son-in-law wrote us several times about his proposed visit to us.

One day, some time after New Year's, a Soviet officer arrived in

our city and told my daughter that her husband was on his way home. He had already crossed the border. They had both been travelling on the train together and he had an opportunity to come home earlier. Those travelling by train would arrive in Borszczow within several days.

He suggested that she should rent a wagon and go to meet him because he had packages with him, things which he had bought for the family. There were other Christians from our area travelling with him.

My daughter rented a wagon and sent it off with a peasant to the station. Our joy was indescribable. We were telling everyone of our expectations; all our friends were happy for us. The Ukrainians in the area whose near ones were travelling with my son-in-law had also become very friendly with us.

The peasant who was driving the wagon returned the following day; he had not been able to find my son-in-law. One of the peasant women whose husband was also coming with my son-in-law asked us whether we had heard from him, because—who knows?—they might have been killed somewhere on the road.

In the meantime, my son went into town and there he saw this Ukrainian man who was supposed to accompany my son-in-law. He was walking about freely, very well dressed.

My son quickly realized that a great catastrophe had befallen us again.

When he came home and told Henia what he had seen, an anguished wailing seized our household. We ran to the N.K.V.D. and asked them to detain this man and to question him as to what had happened to Fishel. The man was in fact, taken to the N.K.V.D. quarters but by the time Henia had come there he had been already released.

Henia rushed into the place and unburdened her embittered soul to them. But the man had claimed that Fishel had left the group and that he knew nothing about what had happened to him.

But what could we do? If it had concerned one of their people, that man would not have been released so easily. But the life of a Jew was of relatively minor importance.

To this day we do not know who had killed him, or where. His body had never been laid to decent rest. We were afraid to go out to look for him because of the bands of gangsters who were roaming around in the area. We knew that if he were alive he would come to us; since he was not with us we were certain that he was not among the living. So, in the months after the liberation, we paid in blood for

the privilege of living.

For days and nights, Henia and her children, like all of us, were beyond themselves with weeping and mourning. Even when I left the house I could hear their cries. Within five weeks we had lost two of our dearest men.

When my son-in-law was due to report back to his post in the Urals inquiries began to come in about him. They thought that, being unwilling to return, he was hiding out with us. It was quite an epilogue to our tragedy.

The winter passed in frightful fears. We were constantly hearing about the bandits. For a time it was quiet, but suddenly it would flare up again. They would again ambush people and kill them. We were afraid that they might attack the city. Even the military were on constant alert.

One day, my Yetta needed to go to Chortkow to submit a report there on her work. She was travelling with another girl and they were being driven by a Ukrainian. As they were passing along a forest two men came out from the woods with their coats thrown over their shoulders. They certainly had weapons under their coats.

Our Ukrainian driver approached them and asked them for a light. For a time he walked along with them. When the two men disappeared he turned to the girls.

"You know, these were Bunderovtzi. If they would have known that one of you is Jewish and that the other is Polish it would have been very bad for both of you."

Such were our experiences practically every day. We were constantly hearing of fresh murders by the gangs. They killed Poles, Russians and, of course, Jews. In Borszczow there had been an entire cemetery set aside for the Russians whom the Bunderovtzi had murdered.

These Bunderovtzi believed that the Russians had seized their land, but what did they have against the Jewish people? What harm had we done to them?

But so it was. The Jew was always the victim, particularly after the lessons which Hitler had taught to so many peoples—so many devilish lessons.

VICTORY OVER THE NAZIS

We were always hearing encouraging news from the fronts. The Soviets and the allied armies were winning victory after victory. The Germans were retreating with great losses.

The day came when the Soviets were at Berlin and soon they entered the central nest of the blood-soaked Hitler.

So the world realized the song which Soniale had been reciting, "To Berlin."

May 9, 1945 will always be known to all humanity as the day of salvation when the Germans lost the war and surrendered unconditionally. We were overjoyed beyond words that the beast that was Hitler and his Third Reich, which had boasted that they would last a thousand black years, had been crushed for ever.

The Russian soldiers were returning with victorious music and military parade. Their horses were decorated with coloured ribbons. Placards hung on every building with inscriptions about the memorable victory over Germany.

Simale saw one such beautiful horse covered with coloured ribbons. She turned to me and said,

"Grandmother, this must be a girl horse."

We were able to laugh even though bitterness still permeated our souls, for our dear ones had not managed to sustain their life to that very near and dear day of victory. All the streets were scenes of dancing and jubilation for those who were alive and freed.

Soldiers began to return to their homes. Military and political victory was translated into personal and family rejoicing as fathers and husbands returned.

For our people the jubilation was mixed and slowed. As long as the war was on there was still hope that those who were missing might return. But now we knew that there was nothing and nobody to wait for.

A son of my cousin Moishe Hershkowitz had survived the war in a bunker. After the liberation he was mobilized into the Red Army and never returned, leaving a wife and child.

There were any number of tragedies after victory, in the very midst of universal joy. All humanity should always pray that such days may never return again.

The gangsters did not stop their terror. From time to time they would attack. Here it was after our victory and after the defeat of Hitler. Yet we were still living in fear!

As if all this were not enough, new troubles came.

When the parades and the rejoicing which marked the victory were over, the Soviets began to establish order in the town.

They first visited me. One day Yetta came home from lunch and noticed an N.K.V.D. man watching our house. In great fear she ran to tell us.

We went through the back door into the cellar where a number of customers were buying their needs. We told them all to run quickly and to carry with them whatever they could.

In the meantime, the N.K.V.D. man came into the house and said that he had information that there was black marketeering going on here, contrary to Soviet law. He began to search the house and found some things in our cupboard—several coats which had been sewn out of the German military overcoats, and several dresses which my daughters had bought from the peasant women at the market, which had probably belonged to Jewish women in the first place.

Looking over these dresses he turned them over and commented, "Look at how much clothing you have here. I have been with the Soviet authorities for twenty-five years and all I have is the shirt I am wearing!"

He ran around searching all over our house. In the cellar he found sacks of flour. He would accept no explanation for the presence of this flour and took Nissen to the N.K.V.D. quarters.

You can scarcely imagine the fright all this caused us.

Nissen talked to the chief of the N.K.V.D. privately for a few minutes and promised to bring him a gift; I do not remember what it was. Within a few hours, Nissen was back home.

Those arrested for black marketeering in Russia would be sentenced to as much as seven years imprisonment. We used to joke that of the 180 million people in Russia, 60 million had already sat in prison, 60 million are sitting and 60 million will sit . . .

After these events, we had to be much more careful in our trading.

The soldiers were continuously coming through our area. Many were stationed here for a while and we got to know them. There were also Jewish people among them who used to identify themselves to us in whispers. They all liked to deal with my sons.

On June the 15th, 1945, my son Nissen was married, a happy occasion. His late father had loved the bride so much and had wished that they would marry. But, tragically, he didn't live to witness the wedding day.

WE REPATRIATE TO POLAND

After the war the Russian Government permitted all Poles and Jews to resettle in Poland.

We, too, registered for return to Poland because we had been Polish citizens. But it was no simple matter to obtain the documents for repatriation.

My daughter Henia who had kept up the small store was ordered to pay heavy taxes. The authorities began to control every one of her movements and sales. I would keep much of her merchandise in my home and would bring it to her as needed. We saw that conditions were becoming continuously worse, and we were anxious to leave.

Farmers were allowed to take horses with them, as well as grain and their household possessions. The papers which we had from our city hall indicated that we were farmers and thus we were also entitled to take our possessions with us. But there was a very heavy tax imposed on this as well.

Our train of refugees, the échelon, was composed of some thirty cars. One of these was filled with Jewish people, including my family and my sister's family.

It was a freight car in which we were able to bring sacks of flour, containers of whiskey, honey, dried fruit and garlic. We had been told that these articles were in demand in Poland. In addition we had two horses and several cows with us which had been registered as belonging to different persons so as to enable us to take them out of the country. Our impression was that all these were very valuable in Poland and that we would be able to sell them for a good price.

The trip in these freight cars lasted some two weeks of great terror because we could not trust the Poles.

Sonia had studied in the Soviet school in 1940-41 where she had learned Russian and some Polish. She still remembered a Polish song that she had learned there. Little Simale, who was five at the time, would hear Sonia recite it and had learned it herself. She was always learning songs by heart in the cave and we used to enjoy listening to her.

The Polish song which she had learned concluded with the words, "I'm a Pole." As the child pronounced the words it sounded "Zempo-Lakem", which used to make us laugh a great deal. Now the phrase

had become a password among us to indicate that a stranger was approaching our freight car. At that point we would be very careful and not speak Yiddish but confined ourselves to Polish.

When we crossed the San River we were in Polish territory. The Poles unloosened their tongues and began to demonstrate their hatred to us very freely. We again began to tremble for our lives in their company.

After weeks of this kind of rail travel we reached Upper Silesia. It had been settled earlier by Germans who were now expelled, and by repatriated natives of Poland who were being brought back here from Russia.

We had met some Jewish people on the way and they told us that quite a number of Jews had concentrated in the city of Bytom. Our transport was scheduled to roll several days beyond Bytom but we wanted to get off at that station.

We gave the train master a present so that he might let us get off there. But it didn't turn out well.

When the train stopped in Katowice we began to unload our things. Most of us were women and unaccustomed to carrying the very heavy cases. A Polish man who approached us and wanted to help us was driven off by the other Poles who didn't want him to assist the "dirty Jews".

We did take some of our things off, but the train began to move and kept on going. As a result, we unloaded our possessions at four stations. It happened to be a very cold night and each of us remained at a different station, shivering in the cold. The following day we rented horses and wagons and went to each of the stations to collect our possessions.

On the train we also had a chicken coop, a wagon we had taken apart, beds, cupboards and bookcases. But we had not been able to unload these and had lost them, probably to our Polish travel companions.

In Bytom we were shown a large hall where we could rest and where we could keep our things. It might have been a theatre or a synagogue in earlier times. A number of other repatriated Jews from Russia were there too. The poorer ones among them were very envious of us because they considered us rich. There was a bit of a kitchen in the place and we made some soup and enjoyed our first meal in the New Poland.

We could not stay long in this repatriation point, as they called it, so we began to look for a dwelling place.

As we walked the streets of Bytom we saw many bombed-out

houses which had become mounds of dust and rubble. There was some satisfaction in knowing that the Germans, too, had paid some little price for the infinity of their murders.

After a few days' search we found a home. We paid a thousand Polish zloti for a large house which stood at the edge of the city. It had belonged to a Nazi who had fled with the Germans.

We prepared again to pack and to move into our new home. We had a large case of clothing in which we also kept the three Scrolls of the Law. I had put them on the table on the ground floor and began to pack parcels which we would carry up to the fourth floor where our apartment was located.

When we returned for the Scrolls of the Law, after arranging the packs, they had disappeared. We looked everywhere, but they had disappeared like rocks thrown into the water. Any number of people had been around so that we would never learn who had taken them away. It was a matter of very great concern to me not only because of their substantial value but also because they were a sacred talisman and memorial of my very dear husband.

We sold our horses and cattle well and began to look around to see what we could do now.

We observed that there was a considerable trade going on in the city with foreign exchange. Zloti were being changed for German marks. There was a street in Bytom by the name of Grundwaldska Place where many Jewish business people concentrated, most of them engaged in trading in the black market.

There were many Poles in Bytom who were known as Autochtonen. These were Poles who had been living in Germany since the partition a hundred and fifty years earlier and had become very Germanized. Now they chose to be counted as Poles and remained in Bytom.

These Autochtonen had German marks which they wanted changed to zloti because that was the accepted Polish currency. But those who were on their way to Germany needed marks because the Germans didn't accept zloti. So we began buying marks and selling them to those who were planning to move there. There was reasonable profit in this dealing.

Even Soniale, who was only eleven at the time, dealt with this exchange. She would take some zloti and would buy German marks from people she would meet on the street.

At this time my daughter Chana and her husband Joseph returned to us from Siberia. She was in the final months of her pregnancy and had a very difficult journey from Siberia to Bytom.

I had two sisters in America, Henye and Miriam. Miriam had gone to America in 1911 as a young girl; Henye had gone in the 1930's.

During the years of war we didn't hear from them. It was only after we came to Poland that we were able to renew our correspondence. You can imagine how happy we were to hear from each other.

WANDERERS AGAIN

When we left Russia we didn't know whether it would be possible to go to other countries from Poland. We took very many of our things with us and had intended to settle there for good.

But conditions changed. The Polish authorities began to clamp down on illegal trading and people began to leave Poland every way they could.

We began to consider our further migration plans. But it was no easy matter to leave the country. We had to procure documents under conditions of increasing danger.

There were pogroms against Jews in Kielce and Cracow in which many people were killed. A Jewish man from our town was killed in Glivitz and a Jewish watchmaker was killed in Bytom. Again we were under threat of murder. When Nissen would return home after dark he would tell us how dangerous it was to walk in the streets and that a Jew had to be prepared for attack every instant.

We had heard that there was a man in Cracow who had exit documents to sell. Nissen travelled there and bought these papers. But we were also told that those who had left several days ago had all their possessions seized. The Polish customs men entered the train at the Polish-Czech border and stripped all passengers practically naked. We didn't want to lose all our possessions, so we decided not to travel together.

Nissen, his wife and Shulim with his bride Czarna left first. They reached Austria where they settled in an American camp for displaced persons. But Shulim took the first transport back to take out the remaining members of the family from Poland.

At this time Shlomo had an opportunity to go on a Russian truck direct to Vienna where he joined the family.

In the meantime, our documents had expired and now we needed others. We met a man who claimed to belong to UNRRA. He sold us new documents for good cash.

When we came to the railway station there were freight cars on the line. We went in, no one asked us for tickets, and we took it for granted that everything was in order. Shulim insisted that as long as we were in Bytom we could not feel secure.

Indeed, when we arrived just beyond Prague the documents which we had bought turned out to be the work of a forger and we were taken back.

We decided we would all get off at the next railway stop. But the train began to move.

My son-in-law Joseph Richter pulled the emergency cord and the train remained standing. The conductors ran to see who had pulled the alarm cord, but by this time we had all descended and were already at the railway station.

It was already late in December, cold and snowy, and here we were with little children, one of them three-months old, with no place to go.

We spent the night outdoors.

In the morning we went into the town of Moravska-Ostrava. We looked for the Jewish community there and asked them for help. But they told us there was nothing they could do for us.

In the morning the Czech police came. They had known who we were and decided to return us to Poland.

We began to cry and insisted that we would not return even if we were to be shot.

When they saw our despair and our determination they took us into town into a large building which was some sort of Jewish institution. A guard was set at the door. Some of our men went to the kitchen of the Red Cross who provided us with a kettle of food.

There were several hundred people in the building. The crowding was dangerous. There was scarcely a place to set foot. People were lying on the tables, under the tables. In the morning, it was impossible to get up because there was no place to move. It was arranged that everyone arise at the same time.

Shulim and several others managed to evade the guards and went to Prague to see about a permit to enter the capital. But no such documents were available.

The condition became intolerable. A woman who had been with us in our second cave (her name was Mamil Reibel) suffered a heart-attack. She was taken to the hospital and died there. You can imagine our suffering and the plight of her children.

I became greatly discouraged and wasn't even able to eat the soup that was brought to us. There was no question about purchasing provisions.

We lived in this lazaret for three months until Nissen came back and took some of us out. Simale had become sick and Henia could scarcely walk, so Joseph and Chana remained with them.

In town, Nissen met several Jewish people who helped us so wonderfully we will always remain grateful to them. They went to the railway station, bought tickets for us, pushed our things into the railway car, then came out and gave us the tickets.

It was so that Nissen, Yetta, Sonia and I arrived in Prague.

In this metropolis there was the "Bricha". We were given documents that would enable us to go to Germany. We stayed several days in barracks and when a sufficiently large group of people had assembled they decided to transport us there.

We crossed the border at night illegally, but before we left the country we were very carefully searched by the Czech police. The law forbade a Jew to own anything, and many were deprived of all their possessions. We were a little more fortunate because we had hidden our valuables and they found none of these.

For an entire night we walked by side roads towards the border. We were led by members of the Israeli-organized Breichah (flight) Organization which rescued a large number of survivors and brought them at great danger and with endless hardship to camps in Germany and in Austria. It was raining and snowing, and the roads were very muddy. It was an appropriate conclusion to all the sufferings which we had passed.

Eventually we crossed the border and found ourselves in Germany.

Here there were Jewish institutions which concerned themselves with us. We went through disinfection, received food and were readied for our journey to Munich. My sister was already in Fernwald and we were anxious to get there.

The train was so crowded that it was impossible to enter, and we didn't even have standing room. Nissen pushed us in through a window and crawled in and lay down on the upper shelves where the suitcases and packs were lying. The people in the car called him "the upper man".

Those who remained in Czechoslovakia suffered the entire winter. They were taken into barracks outside the city and were continuously being promised that they would soon be able to leave the country legally. They were always afraid of being robbed because the Czechs came to know where to look for the possessions of these people.

In the course of time all were given exit documents, but they were searched so thoroughly that they left the country deprived of the minimum.

By March they arrived safely to Fernwald. After several years in D. P. Camps we finally crossed the Atlantic at the end of 1949 and settled in the United States and in Canada.



Esther's Family 2005

Epilogue

In 1990, the three Stermer brothers were finally able to return to their ancestral town. They had hoped to remove the remains of their murdered father Shabsy from the ancient Jewish cemetery in the city of Borszczow where he lay and bring him to Israel. To their great dismay, they found no cemetery when they returned. The city had chosen to raze the Jewish cemetery in favour of a soccer field. The empty field across the road seemingly would not do.

They were also disappointed to find that Semen Sawkie, a peasant friend of Nissen's who had procured grain for the family while they lived in the caves, had passed away. Their friend Munke, the Polish forester who had helped them find Popova Yame and had been their contact with the outside world in those dark days, had disappeared after the liberation..

The brothers were surprised to find a large pipe in the ground in the area of the cave. This turned out to be the new entrance put in by a group that had been exploring the cave since 1960. A local geologist and cave explorer by the name of Joseph Zimmels thought he was seeing ghosts when they appeared before him in 1990 and identified themselves as the family that had discovered the cave and occupied it during the war. They learnt only then that the cave was 77 miles long. They were even more surprised when they were contacted years later by an American caver named Chris Nicola who told them that Priest's Grotto was the 9th longest cave in the world and that the women and children in the cave probably held the world record for living underground. This meeting led to their story being told in the June/July 2004 issue of the National Geographic Adventure Magazine.

While many others have attempted through various means, to retell this amazing story, in the end, Esther Stermer, a woman of extraordinary intelligence, wisdom and courage, who put her firsthand recollections into a memoir for us, will always have the final say. And that is how it should be.

To this end, her grandchildren have decided to reprint Esther's memoir and to donate copies of it to the various universities which have Holocaust studies programs, as well as to other relevant and interested organizations and persons.

Yasher koach, Bubbie Esther!

Born in 1888 to David Shlomo and Chaya Sternschuss in the village of Bilce Zlote, in Galicia, which was then a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Esther was the oldest of six sisters and a brother. They were a distinguished and respected family. Esther was fluent in Yiddish, German, Polish and Ukrainian and recited poetry in all these languages until her last days.

She married Shabsy Stermer in 1910 and settled with him in his home town of Korolowka. They had six children, all of whom attributed their survival of the Nazi genocide to Esther. Time and again, her considerable intelligence, integrity, courage and will came to the family's aid in escaping the cruel fate that was to take the lives of nearly every Jew in Europe. She had a kind of near prophetic wisdom which allowed her to see through the Nazi charades by which Jewish people were lured into registering and gathering and organizing in such a way as to facilitate the Nazi's ultimate plan of extermination.

In 1960, at a time when no one wanted to hear about the Holocaust, Esther sat down to write this memoir expressly for her grandchildren and great grandchildren.

Esther died in 1983, just days short of reaching the age of ninety-six. To her great satisfaction, her memoir had been translated from the Yiddish and published in English and all her grandchildren had read it. It drew the attention of Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin who, after reading it, sought out a meeting with Esther and stated that he considered her book to be an important historical document.



Korolowka 1936 — Our family photograph. (L to R) Standing: Nissen, Chaim, Shlomo, Shulim my son-in-law Fishel, and Yetta. Sitting: myself, my husband Shaboy, Hertis and Sashale.

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