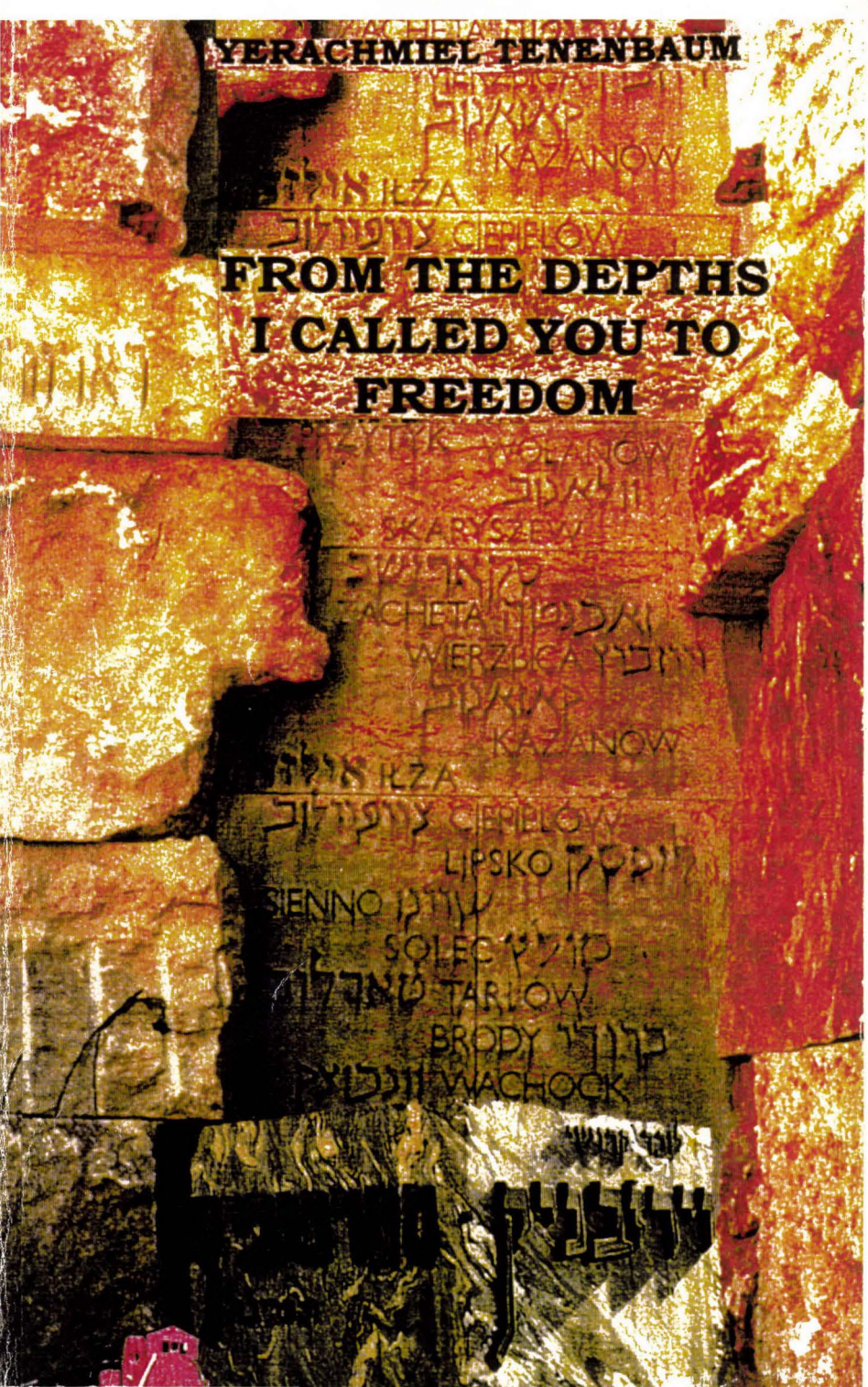

YERACHMIEL TENENBAUM
FROM THE DEPTHS
I CALLED YOU TO
FREEDOM
KAZANOW
ILZA
CIEPLOW
SKARYSZEW
ACHETA
WIERZBICA
KAZANOW
ILZA
CIEPLOW
LIPSKO
SIENNO
SOLEC
TARLOW
BRODY
WACHOCK

# FROM THE DEPTHS I CALLED YOU TO FREEDOM

**BY**

**YERACHMIEL TENENBAUM**

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2025

Front Cover: Monument to the martyrs of Wierzbnik-Starachowice, in Jerusalem. Incorporated on the stone is a memorial to the city in midst of the destroyed communities.

* * *

Special thanks to Rabbi Eliyohu Sufrin for taking on the difficult responsibility of translating the book from the original Hebrew text.

Now, some 50 years later, as I recall the torment and suffering, stepping slowly through unending rivers of Jewish blood, I see them all. All the members of my family who were cremated, whose faces have accompanied me all these years. All my friends and dear ones who have turned to painful memories. The visions of my childhood and youth caught up in the awful cries of the whipping, lashing and the opening up of gunfire. I remember it all as if it were yesterday, today, this very moment.

As I write, my pen fills with tears and picturing those awful scenes my quill breaks from the deep pain.

In my eyes, the vision of those clouds of smoke, the stench, the broken cries and the destruction.

I am using words and expressions well known to all, but their meaning is different to all those who were there. In the midst of the shadow of death and in the barrenness of the howling desert. Bread, water. Bread not only baked from dough, but from life. Water, no drops to be found other than in the climax of the dream.

How do I describe that which cannot be illustrated through words in human terms ?

As the following pages unfold, they tell not only my personal stories and that of my wife Rozie, but those of the entire Jewish People. A nation like a bird of the sand that is tied shaking off the ashes, that spreads out its wings to fly upon the wings of the wind.

The forthcoming pages are a testimonial to my close friends who survived as well as all those who did not. I shall be their mouthpiece. The mouth that speaks, the mouth that relates and the mouth that cries.

May these words pass from generation to generation. From our generation who endured the tremors and most awesome of experiences, to that of our children and grandchildren. Children of freedom and deliverance, who will read these words with our oath that accompanies them until the end of time, NEVER AGAIN!

I wish to thank all my relatives and friends who from the inception of this book until its completion have given me the necessary support and encouragement.

Finally, I give thanks to the A-mighty, Who has given me the strength to survive and the ability to tell.

Yerachmiel Tenenbaum

## Chapter One

## SHORE OF GOOD HOPE

For a long time, even before the breaking of dawn, I had been impatient. I knew, that in a short while the shores of the Promised Land would become visible.

Eretz Yisroel. A name that meant more than the geography of Zionism as it appears on a map. It was the fulfilment of all my hidden dreams that no one imagined possible. Thus, I stood on the ship's deck together with my wife Rozie, her arms cradling our baby son, Avrohom. My eyes trying to pierce the darkness that was slowly lifting and beginning to distinguish the obscured picture of the anticipated shore.

As the sun rose, I saw the shores of the land ahead of me. That moment will never be forgotten. Unable to control my great excitement I was overcome with emotion and the tears streamed endlessly from my eyes.

That was mid December 1948. Our son, just six weeks old, whereas we felt as if we were a thousand years old for all that we had endured.

Eight days earlier, we embarked the inferior Italian freighter "Caserta" at Naples, Italy. The ship was hardly fit to ferry human beings, for it was meant to carry cargo such as merchandise, steel etc. on its deck and in its hold. But, we had no choice. It was something we had learned very quickly for they would have used sardine tins as sailing boats.

The voyage was arduous, the sea rough and the ship was tossed upon the waves as if it were a nutshell. Our quarters were confined and cramped, some three hundred people whose individuality was hidden and unknown. Rozie was uncomfortably quiet as she was unable to nurse our baby who did not stop screaming.

As occasionally happens, at the height of ones distress, a redeeming angel appears. This time it was in the form of a good compassionate woman with a warm Jewish heart, whose motherly instinct immediately understood the reason for our unsettled child. Without

saying a word, she delicately took the baby from my wife and nursed him. Several minutes later, after the baby had calmed down and our speech had returned, we told her how indebted we were to her. During the conversation that ensued, she related that she was emigrating to Eretz Yisroel from Jerba, Tunisia. I thought to myself how the Jewish People were returning home from east to west, north to south and all brothers. It was a most wonderful feeling.

The Hills of Carmel were approaching and we were able to see more clearly as the ship slowly advanced towards the port. Suddenly, in our eyes, this ship was no scrap heap, it had been transformed into a royal cruise ship returning to its home port. Even the long sounds of the horn were suitable and befitting as we all stood excitedly upon the deck. A small boat with strong sailors was navigating our ship towards the quay. "Caserta" approached the quay, the ropes were thrown and she was tied up to the concrete and steel anchors.

Suddenly, the sounds of singing voices reached our ears, young people on the quay had burst forth into loud Hebrew songs of Eretz Yisroel, to welcome those who arrived from across the seas, from across the dark mountains, those who had survived the fear and troubles of the battle front where all hope of life had been despaired.

Our entire earthly possessions consisted of a small sum of money, a twenty kilogram bag of rice and one hundred and twenty half litre tins of condensed milk. The milk tasted unpleasant, nevertheless, my wife drank it with a grimace on her face, only so that she should be able to nurse our baby. We also had an antique radio that had seen better days. This may be difficult to understand at the end of the twentieth century, but these were our only material possessions. So much so, when we passed customs, we were afraid of being stopped and accused of smuggling, the fear being totally groundless.

Walking out of the seaport, in great relief we took deep breaths of fresh air, the first time after so many years with our eyes closed, trying to fill our entire bodies

and souls with new clear and purified air. The air of Eretz Yisroel that would purify us from the defiled air that we had breathed all these years, which strangled an entire nation almost annihilating it.

A pure heart G-d create for me and a sturdy spirit renew within me (Psalms 51:12).

I turned back to look at the Mediterranean Sea that had carried us across its waves to open a new era in our lives. But, my eyes travelled far beyond, to a vision across rivers and seas of the past days and years. I tried to shake off the thoughts that gripped me, but was unable to do so. And so, on the brink of my personal redemption, the visions that floated rising before my very eyes were those of the nightmarish hell I had endured and experienced in all its factions and from which I had escaped.

Looking at Rozie, her glance also stretched far beyond the waves. I was sure she had the same thoughts. Without a word, we fell into each others arms and embraced. Tears streaming down our faces, tears of joy for having miraculously survived mingled with tears of pain and hurt for all those who did not. Family and friends blamelessly murdered with all types of cruel and treacherous deaths who did not merit a Jewish burial; instead, their ashes were spread in all directions fertilising the land of their murderers.

Rozie and I embraced, with our baby, our future, the future of the Jewish People, between us.

Behind us, an awesome darkness which we were unable to cast away and which had been decreed that we carry with us throughout our days.

## Chapter Two

## A CITY AND ITS ENTIRETY

Where do I begin the story. At times it is difficult for me to believe that I deserved to survive in order to tell the events from generation to generation, from father to son, perhaps I will begin with my parents.

My father, Shmuel Dov Tenenbaum, was the son of a well known and distinguished family. He was born in the city of Skarzysko, approximately twenty kilometres from Wierzbnik-Starachowice, Poland, and was recognised for his communal involvement and philanthropy. Father headed the Mizrachi movement of the city of Wierzbnik-Starachowice and was considered amongst the great supporters of the concept of Torah and Zionism. In a thick bag he would keep the many letters from the leaders of the Zionist movement amongst whom were Menachem Osishkin and others. His great dream was to emigrate to Eretz Yisroel and in 1939 he had managed to acquire the necessary documents, but the war destroyed his chances. Father was a person who captured people's hearts with his radiance and pleasant manner, but most of all he was a scholar and learned person. A respectable Jew of Lithuanian appearance with a flowing beard.

Mother, Rivka Alta, was modest and good looking, a woman of valour in the fullest sense of the word, the actual mainstay of the home. She had the responsibility of running the household and educating the children, something which did not deter her from assisting many others. We owned a wine and liquor store both for wholesalers and retail.

There were four children. The eldest was a girl, Rachel (Ruzska), born in 1919, who was beautiful, gifted and very successful in the manner she dealt with people and popular amongst her friends. Next, my brother Chaim Elazar born in 1922. He was a very capable person with a pleasant manner whose name as a scholar became known

far and wide. Third in line was my brother Moshe born in 1925 who was a very pleasant individual who endeared himself to all. I, Yerachmiel (Muniu), the youngest of the



My father, Reb Shmuel of blessed memory

group, was born in 1927. A son born to older parents whom everybody loves to spoil and love which I reciprocated particularly to my family.

As already mentioned, our home was clearly Zionist orientated whose atmosphere totally encompassed the realisation of the Zionist dream, i.e. the founding of a Jewish State in Eretz Yisroel for the Jewish People who were scattered amongst the nations of the world. The ingathering of the exiles and the resurrection of the dead were not mere words or phrases, but were of significance. The dream of living only amongst Jewish People gave us no rest and increased seven fold due to Polish anti-Semitism.

We experienced anti-semitic incidents in our childhood. In the mornings we went to Public School which was attended by both Jewish and Polish students who sat together. The teachers did not conceal their obligatory different and preferential treatment towards the Polish children, nor their shame, mockery and racism towards the Jewish pupils. The Polish children themselves did not waste any opportunity of poking fun, acting cruelly and beating us, hatred for the sake of hatred.

Whilst within the school walls they controlled themselves. However, they unleashed their tongues freely, their hands were very light and the strap completely permissible at the end of class. With the sound of the bell at the end of the last lesson we hurried to gather our belongings and leave school in case we were beaten up by the other children, not to mention the harassment and degradation of our very own classmates!

The afternoons were more pleasant. We learned in Cheder, Hebrew subjects and Judaism. This time only for Jewish children.

Pleasant or not, the morning and afternoon lessons created a great burden. Towards evening, we would rush home to prepare the following day's lessons, for if any of the Jewish pupils had not adequately prepared the teacher would give him his due punishment plus interest.



My mother, Rivka Alta of blessed memory

As for myself, my day did not end here. After Cheder, I hurried to my father's store, where I would stay until late at night. After closing hours, I would assist him in stocktaking, ensuring that he would always have adequate supplies.

Father, although a good businessman, was not totally engrossed in his work, but gave of himself in performing charitable deeds. For, he worked faithfully for the community and gathered donations for the Keren Kayemet L'Yisrael , to purchase and reclaim land in Eretz Yisroel. He had a detailed list of contributors and the sums of how much they had donated in the past. When he approached them the next time, he urged them to increase their donations. Obviously, his name was to be found amongst the businessmen on the list with the amount he gave, first and foremost to set an example for others and also to justify his coming to ask them.

In spiritual matters too, his hands were full. He initiated the setting up of a Yeshiva for advanced students in our city. For this he sought, located and brought a Rosh Yeshiva from another city. He involved himself in its existence and upkeep until the difficult ghetto days arrived, which destroyed all its chances. One of the disciples in that Yeshiva was my brother Chaim, who still regularly quotes Midrashim and verses, having absorbed immense learning from this wellspring of Torah.

If I were asked to characterise my father's house in one sentence, I would say it was a home built on close bond and a deep understanding between parents and children who were saturated in an atmosphere of Orthodox Judaism and Zionism.

A few words about our town, Wierzbnik-Starachowice. The city lies south of central Poland in the district of Kielce, near the banks of the River Kamienna, a tributary of the Wisla, close to the railway line that runs between Skarzysko to Ostrowiec. Wierzbnik was founded in 1624 on the left bank of the River Kamienna. Poland was divided in the years 1772 to 1795, this area was annexed to Czarist Russia. In 1939 the towns of

Wierzbnik and Starachowice became one and received the status of a city.

The first Jews reached the area in the middle of the seventeenth century and settled in Wierzbnik towards the end of the eighteenth century. At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, the Jewish community became an entity in its own right and Rabbi Yaakov Morgenstern of the city of Lokow was appointed the communal Rabbi.

The building of the Bais Hamidrash (House of Study) was completed in 1910. Alongside were built communal offices and a school called "Talmud Torah". At that time a Mikva (ritual bath) was built and a cemetery consecrated to serve the neighbouring Jewish communities. Organised within the Jewish community were a Bais Hamidrash which also served as the main Shul. There were many Chassidic Shtiblach (synagogues) amongst them were Ger, Amshinow, Sokolow, Czmelow, Wonchock and Ozerow. The children studied in Cheder but, in addition to the Cheder there were other educational institutions, Mizrachi School, Bais Yaakov School and a Hebrew School of Culture. Between the two world wars, the Talmud Torah School which was supported by the "Joint", also supplied free school meals, serving the less privileged members of the community.

The Bais Yosef Yeshiva (Institute of Higher Learning) opened in the 1930's and functioned for a few years. At that time, the Polish government annexed the community of Wonchock to Wierzbnik.

The Jewish population integrated within the communal urban life, its representatives participated in municipal matters where they represented their communities. The many forests surrounding the city were a main outlet for timber and with its many departments a source of livelihood for the Jewish People. Factories for veneer and sawn wood were owned by the Jewish families, Heller, Lichtenstein and Kalmanson.

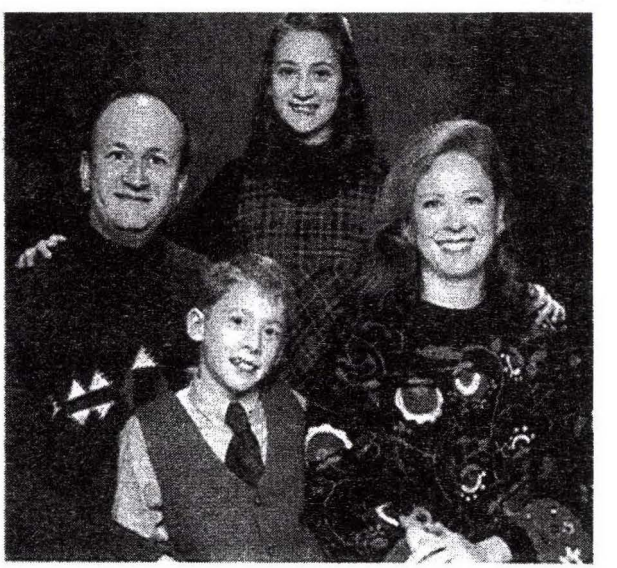
In the mid nineteenth century, the Jewish Rotbard family from Warsaw set up a casting furnace and iron works in the city of Starachowice, whose ground was

rich in ore. Later, this works factory was commandeered and turned into an ammunitions factory. Between 1920 to 1922 twenty thousand people were employed there, but not one Jew.

At that time, the Heller family who were the sole international concessionaires for making wood set up a modern factory for veneers and timber. This work supplied the local population with a living and even



My brother Chaim and his wife Judith with their son Max



Chaim's daughter, Rozeanne with her family

organised support, a union and cultural communal organisations. In addition, they were supported by the local Jewish Population in business serving the nearby towns and villages. Once a week, Thursdays, were known as Market Days. Jews, who came from Russia in the wake of the Bolshevik revolution in 1917 and were absorbed in the city's factory, brought a renewed national and Zionist awakening amongst the Jewish inhabitants of the city. Already, at the beginning of the 1900's a branch of the Zionist organisation was founded, which prepared pioneers to emigrate to Eretz Yisroel. Later on an eastern branch was established, the revisionist movement, Poalei Zion left, WIZO, Gordonya Youth movement, Beitar and Zionist Youth and the sport organisations, Macabbi and Gviazda. All the Chassidim from the Shtiblach belonged to the Agudas Yisroel that was established in the city. The cultural schools attributed to the spreading of speaking Ivrit (modern Hebrew), and served as the centre for cultural and social activities within the city.

Naturally, there were Shuls (synagogues). The large Bais Hamidrash (study hall) was built on a spacious plot on Niska Street. In its early days it had a wooden ceiling. As time went on and its congregation increased it was demolished and a large stone building was erected in its place. From the Bais Hamidrash the sounds of Torah study reverberated throughout all the hours of the day and night. Refined young men who were supported by their in-laws, Yeshiva students, learned gentlemen poured over their Gemoros (volumes of Talmud) whilst teachers held classes for the simple folk. Prayers were conducted thrice daily and many people found the time to frequent the Bais Hamidrash to say prayers and other Daily selections of Bible. There, facing the Holy Ark, everyone was equal. Rich or poor, affluent businessmen and labourers the artisans or the very wealthy, the Bais Hamidrash being the hub of communal life.

There was also a ladies' gallery, which was mainly used on Shabbos by girls and young women who did not have children at home. On Shabbos Mevorchim (blessing of the new month) it was crowded and on

Festivals, particularly the Days of Awe it was nigh impossible to squeeze in.

But the gallery had other functions too. Teachers who lived in cramped quarters which were not suitable for teaching children would use the gallery for their lessons. There wasn't a person who did not find refuge there. Survivors looking for a roof, the poor, those saved from fires, floods or other tragedies.

Between the two world wars, the Bais Hamidrash served in an additional capacity for public assemblies and conventions organised by the many different factions with representatives making fiery speeches and other communal activities.

As already mentioned, there were many Chassidic Shtiblach and Schools. The old Chasidic House of Amshinow, Ger, Sokolow (Rabbi Shmuel Morgenstern, the son of the Admur (Rebbe) of Sokolow, was the son in law of Reb Moishl Tenenbaum), Wonchock and Czmelow-Ozerow. In addition there were many other Houses of Prayer at the Talmud Torah, Bais Yaakov, Mizrachi, the general Zionist movement and the revisionists.

In 1939 there were approximately three thousand two hundred people in Wierzbnik-Starachowice, together with the entire neighbouring communities there totalled some forty thousand people.

## Chapter Three

## BOOK OF PERSONALITIES

At the turn of the twentieth century, Reb Moishl Tenenbaum, my maternal great grandfather, was one of the city's most well known personalities. He was considered amongst the greatest initiators of industry, having founded and opened a stone quarry. His name and fame spread far beyond the borders of the city both amongst Jew and gentile throughout the land.

There is a well known story testifying to the esteem in which he was held even amongst the gentiles. He would travel by train daily from the city's own station. One day, his wagon was delayed and arrived late at the station only to find the train still waiting. The driver refused to continue the journey without Reb Moishl.

Many such stories are told about his philanthropy, astuteness and how he served the community faithfully. His generosity as a supporter of Torah study travelled by word of mouth through the innumerable emissaries of charities and Jewish learning, managers of charitable funds from Yeshivot (institutes of higher learning) throughout the breadth of Poland who would visit his home never being turned away empty handed. His jovial personality, radiant countenance and good heart opened up all doors for him and, as a result, he was able to do much for the benefit of his Jewish brethren.

Many a time, through making large ransom payments from his own personal funds and without any hesitation, he saved Jews from being incarcerated and their lives were saved as a result.

He was also called Moishl Wierzbniker. It is told, that a group of Chassidim planning a trip to visit Reb Moishl in order to collect money towards the upkeep of the Yeshiva and for the support of poor families, were trying to understand the strange name of the city Wierzbnik. They came to the conclusion that it must be because Reb Moishl Wierzbniker lived there.



My grandfather, Reb Mosh'l of blessed memory

However, the city itself was not well known at that time and if anyone had heard of it, it was only due to Reb Moishl Wierzbniker living there.

Another well known side to Reb Moishl Wierzbniker was his outstanding hospitality with which he was graced. Many Rabbis visiting the city were guests in his home. Whoever was looking for Torah wisdom or just a hot meal knew Reb Moishl's address. One day, his wife Fradel (nee Edelman born in Wierzbnik) complained about the abundance of guests that would pass through the house. He replied sweetly, "The Mitzvah (precept) of Hospitality is one of the most important commandments".

Their seven children got married to members of well known, respectable rabbinical families, such as the Rav of Czmelow, the head of the Kotzker Rebbe's household. All their children remained in the city after their marriage and added a fresh new breath of life into the community. One of his sons, Reb Mendel Tenenbaum was a great scholar who served as a practising Rabbi in the city. The renowned Rebbe of Ozerow, who later lived in the United States of America and ended his days in Tel Aviv, Israel, was Reb Moishl's son-in-law.

Another son-in-law was Reb Moshe Bagno, who served as the head of the municipal city of Bnei Brak, Israel, for several years. Reb Moishl had the merit to see over one hundred grand and great grandchildren, most of whom, the majority, died in the holocaust and were cremated. Amongst those who escaped were men of Torah and knowledge, well known experts in their field and of world renown.

Reb Moishl was highly respected by the tens and hundreds of his employees who lived in distant villages. To make things easier, he built living quarters next to the quarry for his workers. At that time there was a Polish saying that not only testified to the concern that Reb Moishl had for his employees and to the esteem in which he was held amongst the Polish industrialists, but also in Polish folklore. If a group of people were making a noise or a tumult, they would say "the noise is like Moshka's quarry".

Soroh Baila, one of Reb Moishl's daughters married Reb Peretz Troper. Their daughter Rivka Alta was my mother. Anyone who passed through Wierzbnik-Starachowice could not help but notice Reb Peretz Troper's Cigarette and Stationery store positioned directly opposite the School. Peretz Troper managed his store for over fifty years, from the time he married Soroh Baila. He was born in 1873 to his parents Rabbi Wolf and and Chaya Miriam Mendelbaum, in the city of Oshka near Darlitz, from a dynasty of Rabbis. He spent his youth studying in various Yeshivot and became known as a Talmudic scholar. Due to his financial obligations after his marriage, he had to spend his time in the store.

But his soul was rooted between the pages of the Talmud. Everyone could see how he was torn between the financial obligations he had to his family and his desire to study Torah and be involved in spiritual matters. So, whenever the opportunity arose, with another family member being in the store, he would silently walk home to his room where a volume of Talmud lay in waiting. In this way, he was able to study several Talmudic topics daily, which he always did with a tuneful melody. This he did daily except Thursdays, being market day, a time when traders from the surrounding towns and villages would visit his store.

As already stated, my mother was the granddaughter of Reb Moishl, and my father Reb Shmuel Dov had the same family name Tenenbaum as there was some family connection.

Zaide (grandfather) Reb Moishl passed away in 1924 at the ripe old age of eighty one, *'full of Mitzvos as a pomegranate'*.

None of us realised the horrors that awaited us around the corner. We lived our lives, our existence, in our children's world and with the city's characters. Wierzbnik-Starachowice had its share of real characters.

My brother Chaim, five years my senior, wrote a book in Portuguese called "A Cry to Heaven" some years ago. In his book he compares the holocaust survivors and their survival to the 'Vision of dry bones (Ezekiel 37)'.

He knew the city's characters and their idiosyncrasies far better than I. Therefore, I shall rely on his words.

There was a Jew by the name of Meniu Haiber. He was one of the city's water carriers, called in Yiddish, "Vasser Treger". He was a solid, well built man with broad shoulders and a large black kipa on his head. He wore a thick, short, threadbare jacket with worn shiny sleeves. Most of the time he was seen with a yoke across his shoulders carrying two filled buckets of water.

The water carrier was always cold. In addition he stuttered badly making it difficult for him to be understood. This did not deter him from performing his work faithfully and honestly.

His contestant was a person by the name of Shaje Bak. The word 'bak' in Yiddish meaning cheek, for he had puffed cheeks. It was said this was due to a severe gum problem. True or not, his appearance earned him this name.

The two of them would meet in the city square which had two wells of water that had to be drawn by hand then poured into a conduit and from there into buckets. On the eve of Shabbos, Festivals and particularly before Pesach (Passover) there were long queues at the wells as everybody came to draw water for their homes. Understandably, the water carriers did not have to queue with everyone else. As this was their trade. Meniu Haiber and Shaje Bak had reached an agreement between them. Each of them would draw water from a different well thereby each having a well named after them.

There was no running water in the houses at that time. The two water carriers made it their business to supply us with water which they would pour into two large wooden vats that stood in the kitchen. There was no need to call them for they knew on which days their service were required to ensure that the water barrels remained full.

Another character was Rivka G-ots, whose name spoke for itself, the Divine baker, who earned a respectable living as a baker. She lived opposite our house and became known for her outstanding bakery

products, whose taste remains with me until today. She had her specialities, such as onion bread, poppy filled pastries, salted beigels each with their individual and delicious flavour.

Her bakery was very successful and had its regular and faithful customers from far and near. The oven was made of clay and on the walls all her baking utensils hung in a most orderly fashion.

Yankel Hoiker (the hunchback) was another one who worked at the local Mikva (ritual bath). He was extremely poor and managed with great difficulty to support his family from his earnings one day a week, Friday, when the men would frequent the Mikva. The rest of the week, the Mikva was not too successful and as a result his bundle had holes in it. One of his sons was known for his uncompromising communist ideals. One night, he hung a red flag on top of a communal building. In the 1930's this was considered a crime and if he were caught, serious punishment awaited him including torture, not only as a communist, but in addition a Jewish communist.

It was obvious that within a short time the authorities would find out who was responsible. Therefore, left with no option, in order to save his life, he was forced to flee from the city making his way to Russia. From the time he disappeared he was ever heard of again.

Thursday, as already mentioned, was Market Day. The market was held in the city square facing our house and wine and liquor store. It was natural for our store to be crowded on market days with traders. The gentiles purchase all types of spirits for their weddings and other occasions. The farmers from neighbouring villages and towns brought their wares consisting of chickens, eggs, potatoes, butter etc. on loaded horse drawn wagons. The Jewish traders brought barrels of water filled with live fish, mainly carp. Another corner was designated as a cattle market where horses and cattle were traded. The Jewish butchers would go to the cattle market to buy their cattle for Kosher ritual slaughter (Shechita). One such person was Leibish the butcher nicknamed

"Leibish Baal Mekadesh (the one who sanctified)". Without doubt, a name earned as a result of a phenomenal story told by word of mouth with great excitement that travelled throughout the city, everybody knowing the story.

The story went as follows. Leibish took a fancy to a girl from a respectable family who lived in the city. He tried to make himself known to her parents to no avail, for he was constantly rejected. They could not imagine themselves having anything to do with the butcher. But Leibish, being in love, did not give up.

One Friday, whilst the girl was queuing up for water at the well, Leibish was standing in front of her, by chance or not. With a determined step he politely and courteously turned to face her. With the bucket in her hand, as if to help her, he took the bucket from her and before she realised was happening, he placed a wedding ring on her finger and loudly declared in front of all those present, "Behold you are sanctified to me with this ring according to the law of Moses and Israel".

The large gathering stood, frozen to the spot, but the marriage had taken place. In the city, and especially amongst the girl's family a great tumult broke out, but Leibish Baal Mekadesh and the girl were now a married couple. They proved to be not just any couple, but an outstanding couple who raised a fine family of children and grandchildren. Literally a marriage made in Heaven. But, the ways of G-d are concealed.

There was also a cinema in our city whose owner was a gentile called Pshigoda, as his father used to stand at the door of the hall and check the tickets. He enjoyed a strong drink and the Jewish youth knew this. Whenever they wanted to see a film, they arranged to meet and buy a bottle a Vodka. At the sight of the Vodka, the door opened wide and they all went in free of charge.

The Jewish pattern of life in our city was embroidered with the pure thread of Belief and Prayer, Torah study and Divine service, Righteousness and Uprightness, Fear of Heaven and Love of Fellow Creatures. On Shabbos and festivals the city streets echoed

with the sound of people flowing to Shul and from the Bais Hamidrash the sweet sounds of singing and praying that were pleasing to the ear. During the week, sounds of labour and work penetrated the air. The business deals of the store owners and traders, craftsmen and manufacturers, artisans and labourers, the porters and the coachmen. Such was daily life yearning for tomorrow.

No one realised how bitter or how quickly that tomorrow would come mindful of the disgrace to the world.

## Chapter Four

## ORPHANED FROM A MOTHER

With the outbreak of the second world war, 1st September 1939, about two weeks before Rosh Hashana 5699, the Germans invaded Poland in a violent rage. They emptied their arsenal in large quantities with whatever came to hand, aeroplanes, tanks, guns and any other destructive weaponry which were in working order. Poland's return fire to the Germans was poor, for all their former weapons were old and of poor quality. Their cavalry was good for fighting in an earlier age. In the blitz the Germans conquered Poland with ease, and quickly reached the borders of Russia. For the Germans this was more like an excursion than a war.

My brother-in-law, Shaul Herzog of Ostrowiec, my sister Rochel's (Ruzska) husband, was in the Polish army. He fought and fell on the battlefront defending Warsaw, leaving a pregnant widow. She gave birth to a daughter Feigeh Sheindel (Luzi) in 1941. On the day war broke out, the Germans bombed our city. All our family as did most of the Jews in the city, fled to surrounding villages until the fury subsided, or so we thought. Several days later we returned to find the city in terrible confusion. The Jewish men of the community raised a storm of protest against the intentions of the Germans in our city. In Wierzbnik-Starachowice there was a large ammunitions factory which employed some thirty-three thousand Polish gentiles. Jews were not permitted to work in the factory nor close to the perimeter fence in case they pass on their hidden secrets to the enemy. Therefore, the Jews of the city thought the Germans would bomb the factories first destroying their secrets in order to still the potential of the Polish army.

However, the total opposite occurred. The German planes bombed our city taking care not to hit the ammunition factory, for immediately after the conquest of our city the factory continued, but this time producing



My father, Reb Shmuel of blessed memory

ammunition for the Germans. In addition, the Germans drafted forced labour, Jews, to work around the clock, twenty four hours a day at a defined fervent pace. When we returned to the city it became clear to us as to all the Jewish people of the city, with our disappearance, the Poles had looted our homes and businesses. They robbed and took all that they could lay their hands on. Our home had been broken into as had our store which was attached to it. It was our good fortune that they did not have enough time to empty the store as it had been overflowing with merchandise. Although they took what they did, sufficient still remained.

Having returned to the city and uncovered the pillaging, it became clear to us why our neighbours did not take everything. At the time of their breaking in, empty boxes, cartons and packing cases fell to the floor covering the door to the cellar where most of the wine and spirits were stored.

In truth we were amazed. Firstly, we knew our neighbours and secondly we knew what fate awaited our store when the Germans would come into town. We had no doubt that once they reached our city they would look for a source of alcoholic drink in order to satiate their thirst, get drunk until they were paralytic. We not only imagined this, but we had already seen this in practise. In a short while, we removed part of the expensive merchandise to a concealed place in order that there should be sustenance for the difficult days when there would be no income.

Our city Wierzbnik-Starachowice was conquered five days after the outbreak of the war on 5th September 1939. As soon as the German army entered the city, they looted the stores, searching desperately for spirits. They found our store and broke in with great joy.

Today, as I recall the events, I do not believe what happened. When the soldiers of the Wehrmacht entered the store, I stood by and I asked them to pay for their drinks. Most of them never gave me a second glance and helped themselves without taking any notice of me at all, but some of them put their hands into their pockets

and threw their money at me. I, as a child, did not understand how they could take spirits without payment.

Whilst this was going on, I spotted a senior officer, who wore the rank of field-marshal on his shoulders.

I thought he would come to my assistance and I approached him saying, "Officer, sir, the soldiers don't wish to pay for their drinks!"

One of the soldiers heard my complaint, turned towards the officer and said scornfully, "Pay them! All they are is Jews!"

But, the officer replied with correctness, something I shall never forget, "So what? Even if they are Jews, you have to pay!"

The soldier looked down and paid. I have no doubt, even if I needed any confirmation of this, I received it over the forthcoming days, months and years ahead, this episode was definitely something out of the ordinary.

On Motzoei Yom Kippur (the night following Yom Kippur), the large Bais Hamidrash in the city was set alight and all the Sifrei Torah (Scrolls of the Law) with all its holy articles were burned. The fire also destroyed the community offices and the Talmud Torah School. One of the city's inhabitants, in his innocence, attempted to extinguish the fire and save the Sifrei Torah as he thought it was an accident. The laughing voices of the Germans made it clear to him, that our miniature Temple had purposely been set alight.

After the Germans had completed conquering the city, they began to arrange life in a precise order, typically German with exactness in every detail. At first, they invited the secretary of the Jewish Community to them. A Jew by the name of Liss, demanding that he supply them in a matter of hours with a list of the city's Jewish dignitaries. My father's name was amongst them. He was forty three at the time. When Liss approached my father advising him that he was on the list, that testified to the establishment of the famous Judenrat at the behest of the Germans, my father understood its consequences and begged to be removed from it.

My father knew well exactly what the duties of those betrayed was, to serve the Germans by means of the Judenrat, to force the Jews to pay tax for the sake of the Germans and to establish enemies from both sides. Therefore, he decided the best way to get out of this was to flee from his home and from his city.

"Tell them", he said to Liss, "you did not find me at home."

They both knew the extreme dangers involved, therefore they agreed between them that my father would leave the city immediately, so that it would be a false cover up. There and then, my father ordered a horse and wagon, the prevalent and accepted means of transport at that time and travelled to the nearby city of Wonchock, where his brother-in-law, my mother's brother Chaim Trooper lived.

Several days later, when the list had been completed and the Judenrat had been formed, father returned to the city to find our store was almost empty except for what was on the walls. Other than that almost everything had been looted and robbed by the Germans and no merchandise was left. The little remaining had been assigned to the travelling German soldiers on their way to the Russian border. They bothered us continually, day and night, requesting that we supply them with their "taste of life" - Schnapps. Often they would not hesitate to draw their revolver and hold it to my father's head so that he should find them "petroleum" from underground. Others set frightening dogs on us, their jaws running with saliva, with razor sharp teeth. Father did all he could, as long as we lived we would be able to profit, for if not the Germans would not hesitate to shoot us without the blink of an eye.

These threats on our lives left their harsh impression on my mother. She was unable to summon up strength and was plagued with a constant severe depression which left us with no option but to leave the city. Our lives became unbearable. However, we left the house, leaving behind the store, placed a few articles that we were able to place on the wagon and moved to the

nearby city of Skarzysko, where my paternal grandparents lived. My sister Rachel, who was heavily pregnant, also came with us.

If we had hoped that by moving to Skarzysko, mother's situation would improve, our hopes quickly vanished as she continued to deteriorate. Eventually, we were left with no choice but to move mother to Cracow to visit a clinic where there were experts in the treatment of such severe cases.

Mother's strength continued to wane. After a short while, in 1941, at the age of forty, she returned her pure soul to her Creator. We were now orphaned from a mother and our future was veiled in a blanket of thick cloud.

After much thought, father decided to return to our city Wierzbnik-Starachowice. Perhaps he would be able to reconstruct the ruins of our unfortunate home, a home without a mother. A short while after our return, on 9th January 1940, my sister Rachel gave birth to a daughter Feigeh Sheindel, known today in Israel as Luzi.

In the interim, during the period that we had been away from the city, the Germans had organised an amazing governing body of order and precision. They set up an administrator who governed all the city's departments in an efficient manner. In order to finance the various activities, heavy taxes were placed on the Jews, which they claimed via the Judenrat.

The economical situation of the Jews was hopeless, the tax demands were impossible, many people were unable to stand up to the financial burden and Jews were regularly taken into custody and locked up, as they were unable to pay the heavy taxes. If that wasn't enough, the pressure grew stronger and the situation became even more severe.

As already mentioned, anyone not paying their taxes was forcibly taken to jail and a large ransom demanded for their release. My brother was one of those who sat in jail for several days until we were successful in freeing him.

The Germans did not consider easing the awful burden imposed upon us. From time to time they declared harsh new decrees. They ordered all Jews of the city to wear a yellow patch and to hand over all their jewellery, gold and silver coins. They restricted their movements in public places as well as their links with the Polish people and food was sold in rations. Jews were pulled off the streets for forced labour and the community was occasionally asked for fictitious sums for ransom. In the ammunitions factory, they worked day and night without a break in order to supply ammunition to the German forces who were sweeping across Europe. To exit from the Jewish quarter for any reason, required a special permit from the German Governor. It was understood that travelling from city to city was absolutely forbidden and anyone attempting to do so for one reason or another was taking their life into their own hands. These harsh decrees - even for us before the ghetto was established, for we knew the full meaning of the word - prevented us from travelling to Cracow to erect a tombstone on mother's grave. Life in the city grew more difficult by the day. The economic situation was very severe and the lack of basic foods such as potatoes etc. was felt. The ban on leaving the town's boundary and being cut off from having any contact with Polish traders resulted in a lethal shortage of food and necessities. Virulent lack, that many Jews died as a result of even basic food. The Germans divided the bread according to each persons coupon very meagrely, something that brought many people to the brink of starvation.

We benefited, somehow from a greater supply of bread, for opposite our home there was a Polish bread baker. He sold the bread, understandably, according to the food coupons that he received. The owner of the bakery, an elderly person, had been our neighbour for a number of years and the acquaintance helped somewhat. He did not make himself known to us and wasn't suspected of selling us more than the permitted quota. But, the journey to the bakery was fraught, literally, with mortal risk.

One of the officers stationed in the city was a nazi, sadistic with a ravenous and murderous passion. One of his greatest pleasures was, standing at the corner of the street hiding behind the trees with his vicious dog. He would ambush his prey in the evening and at night, during curfew, between the hours of 10 pm and 6 am. His greatest pleasure was to catch an unfortunate Jew who attempted to get hold of a loaf of bread or a potato in order to feed his family's constant hunger. He would then set his dog on them, straining through his teeth, "Rex! (name of the dog) Jump and bite the Jew!" The dog would pounce on the unfortunate Jew, throw him to the ground and bite him until blood flowed. Nobody could help the wounded man who was wrestling with the fierce, ugly animal. After the dog had fastened his teeth into the flesh of the Jew and blood was flowing from all his limbs, the German picked him up roughly and pushed him with the butt of his rifle to the prison. He spent the night in the cell on a stone cold floor. In the morning, he was brought tied in chains through the length and breadth of the streets of the Jews so that they may see and be frightened. After that, he was taken to the other side of the cemetery, all his pleading did not help. The two shots that pierced his brain told everyone that he had been murdered. His body was cast like excrement in the field and left as food for the birds of the skies and the beasts of the earth.

This nazi and his blood chilling actions were well known to me. Nevertheless, hunger pushed me to take the risk and try to cross silently from our house to the bakery, in order to return with a loaf of life saving bread. Between 2 am and 3 am, I stealthily and quietly stole along the lengths of the walls. My eyes constantly checking all around. My main mission was to dart across the road to the bakery which was literally on the other side of the road, opposite our house. My heart skipped a beat when I decided that the moment to dash across had arrived. I made it and to my good fortune he did not notice. Who knows, perhaps he napped for a moment. My heart was beating at a very fast rate, the fear of death gripped me. I knew that I had been successful in

completing half the journey, the problem was the ability to complete the mission.

G-d was my salvation and I successfully darted back across the road without being noticed by anyone. Under my clothes were two loaves of bread, a wholesome treasure. The bread was divided amongst all the household, amongst whom that benefited were, naturally, my sister Rachel.

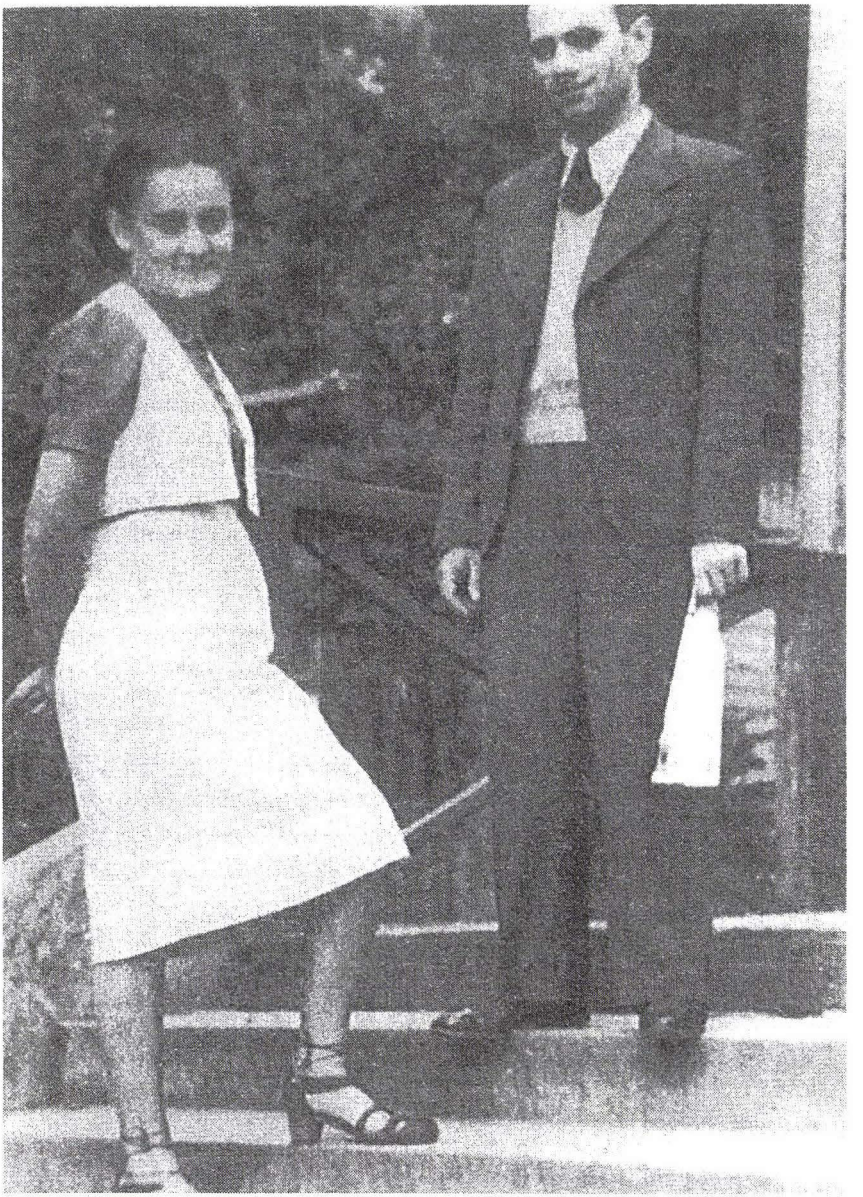
## Chapter Five

## THE FOREST CHILD

Rachel found herself in a very serious predicament. She had been widowed shortly after her marriage with a baby who was an orphan that would never see the face of her father nor did her father ever see the face of his only daughter.

Several months after my sister gave birth, she endeavoured to fill her husband's role in the bicycle store, whose back yard was used for repairs. The work in the shop essentially required a mans hand, but my sister quickly mastered the trade and ran it courageously. Her natural talent and hidden ability enabled her to master things quickly or out of sheer necessity, perhaps a combination of the two. In fact the work was constant and successful, and even flourished in spite of all the difficulties.

An additional complication was that the store was mainly frequented by men who did not hide their admiration of my sister's good looks. She found that harder to cope with than the actual work. My brother Chaim was her saviour. Talented and intelligent with gifted hands, he would attend to the store in her place for long hours. As a result, she was able to breathe easily and on occasion leave the store without having to worry that she was abandoning her work. She knew that he was reliable and with a tranquil heart she would rush home to her beloved baby who was at that time being looked after by strange hands. The main pressure of work began after 3 pm, when the Polish workers from the ammunition factory left work at the change of their shift. For then, most people came to the store to buy. Each person wanting something, each one mentioning in detail what was missing on their bicycle. It must be said, that bicycles were a far more popular form of transport than they are today. Today, they are mainly used for sport, while at that time, they were almost everyone's means of transport.



Luzi's parents. My sister Rachel (Rozka)
with her husband Shaul Herzog o,b.m.

When they all flocked into the store at once, it created a severe pressure, of stealing. My brother Moshe was drafted for this reason and whose responsibility it was to keep an eye open on what was happening in the store ensuring no should shoplifting occur. Any thoughts of stealing were quickly abandoned seeing that they were being watched.

This store did not do badly. Firstly, it was the only one in the town centre and its profits were good. So much so, that the income enabled my sister to materialise her aims and special projects that were dear to her and which she planned with great precision. However, the store kept her mind occupied through the long daylight hours leaving her little time to ponder over her ill fortune and personal burden. In addition, the shop provided her with the possibility to save some money for a rainy day. Not for her, but for her daughter. My sister quietly structured a programme in her heart how to save her daughter from the purgatory that was continually closing in on us. In May 1940, refugees from Lodz and Plotzk came to our city. The overcrowding in the streets increased and caused an outbreak of disease. The community established a soup kitchen for the needy. In May 1940, the Ghetto was established. However, it was not closed and it was possible to obtain food, but in the course of time, trade went silent and the ghetto was closed. The number of those turning to the soup kitchen grew daily. Those able to work served in the ammunitions factory called "Herman Goerings Werke", that supplied the German army. News of the mass destruction began to reach the ghetto and the Jews endeavoured to obtain work permits for vital work. Such was the foundation of life's existence.

When Luzi, my niece, was two years old, her mother decided to carry out the detailed strategy she had planned over the long months. In order to complete them, she enlisted the help of a Polish policeman.

In general, the Polish police worked in partnership with the Germans. They had continued serving as police officers and took pleasure in finding

Jews who violated their laws. In this framework, they watched and were very particular, that traders did not display any merchandise outside their stores. This edict proved difficult for my sister as her store was very small and the extra space created by the outdoor display was required.

Fortunately, my sister was able to make the acquaintance of one of the Polish officers responsible for the area in which the store stood and more important he turned a blind eye to her breaking the law, which enabled her to place the bicycles on the pavement without incurring heavy fines. How was she successful in winning over his heart? Bribery. Money was the key to everything. She gave him a regular monthly stipend.

In a short while, mutual respect existed between them, until my brave sister thought of enlisting him into fulfilling her plans, that of saving her young child. For this she increased his respectable sums of money and in exchange it was decided that his wife should take part to help materialise the plans. After examining all the necessary details, the scheme went ahead. Baby Luzi was about two years old. For a while previously we were concerned that she should not appear Jewish, neither in her speech nor way of life. She had a Polish nanny who bestowed upon her the Polish heritage and even at home we were careful to speak to her only in Polish.

On the designated day, my brother Chaim took Luzi, for she trusted him. He ordered a horse and wagon and went out into the forest that was near the city. They went into the depths of the forest, Luzi probably thought this was a special morning trip, and stopped the wagon. Clutching the child and lifting her out of the wagon, he turned to her and said, "Here we are. There's mother, run to her!" Luzi broke out in a run with her small feet and instead of falling into her mother's arms, waiting for her was the police officer's wife. When Chaim saw the child had reached the woman, he rushed back to the wagon and quickly left the place without turning his head. He just could not bear the severe pain, although he knew there was no option.

As agreed, the woman took Luzi to a Christian orphanage. Handing her over she said that she was found wandering in the forest. As the child's Polish sounded natural, there was no suspicion of her being Jewish.

When they asked her name, she replied, "Luzina". She was unable to say her family name, Herzog.

The administrators of the orphanage decided to give her a family name 'Liesniewska' alluding to where she had come from -'Lesie in Polish means forest-. Luzina daughter of the forest.

The following day, the police officer's wife informed us that the mission had been successfully accomplished and Luzi was in a safe haven..

My sister, although prepared for everything, was unable to overcome her sorrow. Who understands the heart of a mother? Cold logic told her that the place where baby Luzi was, would be far safer from all the future that awaited her with the growing German oppression. There, in the orphanage, my sister knew that the child had some future. Here, in the ghetto! But, her senses as a mother, the intense love that she felt without anyone to share all those deep seated feelings of pain in her heart. My sister was deeply torn by her hidden strong contradictory feelings - joy that her child had been saved and a heavy depression with the breaking of the tie between them. A tie that was unlikely to be renewed ever again. In the depths of her heart she was afraid that the chances of seeing her daughter ever again were very slim.

A short time after her daughter's deliverance, my sister began preparing for her recovery. She liquidated her profitable business, paid huge sums of money to whoever needed and successfully obtained Aryan documents which described her as Polish gentile. . A short while before she embarked on her journey towards Russia , we bid each other farewell amidst crying and tears. We did not know when of if we would ever meet again. We hoped to see her in the near or distant future, but our hopes were in vain.

We never did see her again nor ever found out what happened to her. This question still gnaws at my

heart after all these years. Is she still alive? Did she pay with her life for the deep hatred towards the Jew, a hatred that would not melt? Did she fall as a perfect burned offering to the anti-semitic enemy? Nevertheless, I had to come to the conclusion, at least in a negative way that Rachel disappeared, that neither her or her representative would ever return to the orphanage in order to take her only daughter. As for Luzi, her story does not end here, it had merely begun, but I will return to that later.

## Chapter Six

## CLOSED HEAVENS

News hovered in the air that it would not be long before the Germans were going to enclose us within ghetto walls. Not merely within a boundary fence, but in a securely locked ghetto. An indication that this was imminent was seeing the many Jews from neighbouring vicinities dispatched to our city. Good luck was on the side of the young people of working age, for they were employed in the ammunitions factory. Each morning they went out to work, with special permits, and returned each evening. During the course of the day they were fortunate in obtaining a meal with a glass of milk in the confines of the factory. However, many of them did not drink their milk, but brought it home in order to feed and vitalise the souls of those left behind.

Many of those who did not go out to work were absconded by the Germans whilst they were walking in the streets or by brutally breaking into their homes. They disappeared without leaving a trace. That is how our city changed in just a short time from being a place in which it was possible and even a pleasure to live to a city from which the sounds of crying and wailing rose from all directions. The depressing atmosphere was prevalent, an air saturated with fear, worry, helplessness and of shattering. Families broken up, women and children left without a husband or a father. The tragedies were unbearable.

Where do we go to pour our hearts out? The Shul, obviously. But not for long. For just several days later the city Shul, erected opposite my sister's bicycle store, was engulfed in flames. People tore at the heavens with their cries pleading that He put an end to their pain and misery and that life should return to normal. But, it appears their cries were not heeded.

Many of those who were unable to withstand the burden took their own lives. They could not stand the



Standing from the right: Uncles Yerachmiel and Chaim, my father, Moshe and Aunt Belza. Sitting: Dovid Refoel, Great grandparents, grandmother Czerna and grandfather Yehuda. Bottom row: Uncles Avigdor and Binim with my sister Rozka in the middle.

humiliation, the cruelty, the beatings and the persecution. The nazis never tired of their tyranny and continued to humiliate us, to show us and everybody, mainly themselves, how the Jews were beyond salvation. They compared us to worthless animals and did not desist from any step they could take to strike and assault us be it physically or mentally. For example, proclamations were displayed in the city streets upon which venomous characters were drawn with the well known quotes of the Sturmer, forms of people that aroused abhorrence and revulsion. Satanic faces, with long noses, short and dwarflike. One notice, which as a child aroused a feeling of instinctive repulsion, was a Jew baking bread for gentiles into which he put mice and the mixture was then finely ground.

Whereas the warped sick mind of the Germans had no limits, the Poles, however, did not raise any objection or surprise against the open instigation either, for they themselves were anti-Semites. They accepted in good spirit the hated expressions and shame towards the Jews for no crime of their own doing. The Polish empathy against the Germans was so great that on more than one occasion the impression created was that they were amongst those who were on the side of the Jews. One would have thought that the reaction of the Poles would have been different, for their main enemy were the Germans who conquered them and ruled with a high and mighty hand on their land and not the Jews who had lived amongst them all the time. If the Germans had any doubt that the enmity was towards them and not the Jews, these would have been falsified for their benefit. Smite a Jew and save the homeland - this was the stupid Polish slogan and the ancient absorbed feeling of hatred towards the Jews. If there is a person in the world who doubts the Polish intentions of assisting the nazis in destroying the Jewish nation, let it be known that all the large and most cruel extermination camps, the gas chambers and crematoria, the giant chimneys were all built on Polish soil. The Germans planned it carefully, no Pole would stand up and protest, there would be no utterance of

opposition, on the contrary, not only would they not hinder, but would even participate in the action of the nazis in the most criminal event ever in the history of mankind.

Many Jews refused to believe that their neighbours, amongst whom they lived side by side for so many years, would behave in such a barbaric manner. Therefore, when they saw the evil about to consume them, they handed over all their wealth - gold silver, valuables and personal treasures of sentimental value that had been passed on from one generation to another - to an acquaintance or neighbouring gentile in order that they should give them a hiding place until the fury had passed. The Poles with friendly faces, took their money and hurried to report the Jews in hiding to the Germans. The nazi soldiers responded immediately and the Jews were murdered on the spot or they received a short time of grace and were killed in the extermination camps together with their wives and children.

It would be an historical injustice not to mention the handful of Polish people, who after the war were recognised as Righteous Gentiles. Those few who were not swept in the turbid wheel and provided refuge for the Jews they knew, that turned to them pleading. Lofts, store houses or other hiding places were the homes for those in hiding. These Polish land owners risked their lives, for one never knew where the observers came from, perhaps a neighbour who had an old score to settle, or an anti-Semite who could not contain his feelings and ran to tell his neighbours, or a person who wished to find favour in the eyes of the nazis in exchange for one pleasure or another. Amongst the righteous gentiles there were many that paid with their lives for having treated the Jews as human beings and not as animals like the majority did.

## Chapter Seven

## THE GREAT EXPULSION

News reached us at the beginning of July 1942 that the Germans had begun to expel masses of Jews from the cities and villages around us.

There was no shadow of a doubt that the expulsion was heading towards us. We knew that every moment we were still in our city was on borrowed time. The elderly and senior members of the community had no power. What could they do? In contrast, the younger ones were sure of what lay ahead and were prepared to run into the forests to join up with the forces of the Partisans fighting against the Germans. The trouble was, something they did not realise, in many instances the partisans hatred towards the Jews was even greater towards them than against the Germans, as amongst them were Poles whose anti-Semitism was deeply rooted since childhood and flowed through their veins. They called themselves A.K. (The People's Army) and without the blink of an eye shot any Jew who wished to join them and fight in their ranks. At that time, the young ones who prepared themselves to run into the forest were unaware of this. Their main concern was the timing of their departure, taking into consideration various sources and fragments of information. One day the German ordered via the Judenrat, ten army uniforms for officers and ten pairs of boots. We were given a fortnight to complete the order. At that time the Germans would usually order various clothing outfits from the Jews, whilst they were particular that the tailors had their orders ready on time. The Jews worked day and night ensuring the order would be ready on time, for an evil fate awaited anyone who was unable to do so.

The young ones, knowing that they had two weeks to complete their order, thought the expulsion would not take place beforehand, therefore delayed their departure and decided to remain at home for another week

together with their families. The Germans, who generally knew by experience or obvious conjecture that many Jews planned to escape to the forests to fight them from there, craftily decided on an exercise, catching everyone in the palm of their hand.

Five days after giving the order the expulsion began.

Father was very careful and planned his journeys step by step with great precision paying attention to every detail. He knew this was a matter of life and death and therefore was particular in every step of the plan. As mentioned, many Jews worked in the ammunitions factory that provided vast amounts of warfare equipment to the Germans. The work in the factory was divided into three shifts, day and night without a break, without a moment of rest. Father checked the news that reached him, that the operation of expulsion was to begin in the early hours of the morning whilst people were asleep or not yet fully awake. That way it would be easier to implement their plan. Therefore, he did everything in his power to work in the nightshift ensuring he would not be at home during those hours. With a large sum of money, he bribed one of the foremen who adjusted his working hours accordingly.

At that time, news flew from mouth to ear that the Germans set up on the hills around the city (Majufka in Polish) a concentration camp surrounded by an electric fence, which contained long wooden huts. There were those who knew that the young people of working age would be sent there, and they were right. The expulsion in our city began at 4:00 am.

A heavy darkness prevailed. Men, women and children, perfect Jews, fast asleep, the sleep of the righteous, who had no idea what awaited them from one moment to the next, how their lives would drastically change from one extreme to another and the hell they had experienced until then was only to get worse. The Germans assigned the job to the Lithuanian soldiers who were no less dedicated to this shameful task than the nazis themselves. They endeavoured to clearly show their enthusiasm in fulfilling their mission.. They pounced on

the Jewish homes shouting, "Raus! Raus! Verfluchte Juden! Raus!" (Get out! Get out! Cursed Jews! Get out!).

They broke down doors with their rifle butts, kicked anyone who got in their way and threatened to kill anyone who appeared to dress too slowly. Shouts of "Schnell!" (Quickly!) were heard from all sides. We had just enough time to throw on our clothes. Anyone who had a moment took a small parcel containing life giving essentials with them which they had prepared earlier in case of this eventuality. The weak, mainly the old and sick, who were unable to run and could not keep up with the pace of the order of the wild oppressors were shot and killed on the spot. Amongst them was my father's ninety six year old grandmother, Soroh'l, who could not naturally stand up to the demand of the murderers. The confusion was awesome, soaked in fright and fear. Trembling mothers tightly holding their infants close to their hearts. The elderly and sick were pushed , they jumped and tried with every last ounce of strength to run without knowing where and why. The men of the SS hit them cruelly, insulting them and talking obscenely without interruption. Against whom? What had we done to them? Had we stolen anything? Had we killed anyone? The cries rose heavenwards, but the shouts were in vain.

After all the Jews were forcibly removed from their homes, the nazis gathered us in the city square, opposite our house. Everyone stood in rows. Then the well known Selekzia (selection) began. The young ones who appeared fit for work were separated to one side, all the rest, the majority of whom were women and babies, elderly and young children were lead to the train station, where a long train awaited them. Closed cattle trucks with only small slats on the side and grids above. These wagons were meant to carry seven horses or a maximum of thirty four people. They squeezed one hundred people in each. The compactness was awful, the pressure unbearable, especially as the majority of these unfortunate people carried packages in their hands, amidst the false hope that they would need it during their journey. However their destination had no outlet - Treblinka!

Until the harsh decree was to be implemented, the people in the wagon had to endure a long journey, extremely cramped, without air, water or food like the most contemptible of animals. A mere day earlier these were people with families, traditions, honourable and now - they are creatures with little human semblance, who were being transported to their death in humiliation. Many of them were spared the suffering of Treblinka, for their souls left them during the journey, in the cattle trucks. From time to time, the train stopped and the bodies that had begun to smell badly were cast to the side of the railway like excrement on the fields. The Lithuanians under the orders of the German SS were in charge of the expulsion. The Lithuanians needed no encouragement in fulfilling their action, in fact they rejoiced with it as if they had found a lot of booty. Their hatred towards the Jews was pathological, and they took pleasure in finding any sadistic opportunity to participate in their extermination. During the course of time, these wild Lithuanians seeing that they had been given a free hand, specialised in catching and hunting Jews. The Ukrainians, all of whom were no less filth of humanity than the Lithuanians guarded the Jews in the work camps and accompanied them to work in the factory and on their return. They also used every opportunity, to murder mercilessly and to ill-treat them beyond recognition.

At the time of the expulsion I was fourteen years old. I had to make myself appear older, for otherwise my sentence would be directed to be sent to the train, from which there was no turn. Therefore, at the time of the Selekzia in the city square, the three of us, my two brothers Chaim and Moshe, and I stood together. As the nazis were separating those who had been destined to live, or perhaps postpone their death and those that were judged to die, we saw from the corner of our eyes how our Polish neighbours were emptying all the vacant Jewish homes and were carrying that came into their hands, furniture, valuables, jewellery, cushions and blankets. The zenith of Polish arrogance displayed.

We did not have much time to ponder, for the moment of our Selekzia was getting closer. When my turn arrived, I stood on tiptoes in order to look older.

The nazi thrust his piercing glance at me and shot the question, "How old are you?" "Sixteen years old!" I replied, without a flicker of an eye, as my heart twitched within me.

He thought about me at length, and I almost passed out in fright. He then signalled with a short hasty movement that I should run to the side of the group of young ones, who were to be sent to the work camp.

Life was my booty. I wasn't sure for how long, for at that place and at that time nobody could make any long term plans.

## Chapter Eight

### LIFE IN A NIGHTMARE

We were taken to the Majufka work camp which was situated on a hill at a distance of several kilometres from our city. Upon our arrival, we were ordered to undress and hand over any items of value we had. There were those, understandably, who had articles of silver and gold.

"Anyone found possessing items of value that has not been willingly handed over, will be immediately wiped out!" The nazis warned us.

Short bursts of gunfire were heard after that, which made it clear to us all that their warnings were to be taken seriously. The body was quickly removed.

There was no choice but to quickly acclimatise oneself to the new life. It was as if we had turned over a new page in our lives. Que sera sera - What has been, has been and now a new period began. My home, my mother of blessed memory and all our lives in the not too distant past had all changed to becoming an amazing story that was difficult to believe ever existed. The work camp - the punishment we endured for being Jewish - had suddenly become a reality. Anyone disagreeing with it, sooner or later paid with their lives.

After the degrading search of valuables, our guards pushed us with the butts of their rifles into the long huts. Strangers, from different places and of different ages, but with one combined and bitter fate. The wooden bunks which were three high, served us for everything. For cramped sleeping quarters, for the poor basic food that was given in small measures. The hygiene was worse than anything we had known, impossible to clean, shower or change clothes. The sanitary conditions were well below the minimum requirements of human dignity. Essentially, what need did we have for human dignity? They did not consider us as human beings at all.

It was not long before we were totally covered in lice as they hid in every corner of our body. We lamented, took out eggs, split them, conducted a whole new cycle of life mainly in our hair and we were unable to stop scratching throughout the day. This was a hell of substance. Even without this we felt inferior and as if that was not sufficient, life in this wash-pail, with additional Jews we did not know, from other cities and different walks of life brought with them constant arguments and later on thefts. The unfortunate robbed the unfortunate of what little they had left to steal, mainly a piece of mouldy bread, which was a guarantee of life for a short time.

In spite of all the suffering and the situation in which we found ourselves and all that we had endured we had not lost the semblance of man, nor the inner human respect. On our return from work we tried to wash our clothes with filthy water, and remove the lice. Thinking about it as an outsider it appeared the natural thing to do, unless it was a nazi, for he would have certainly taken great pleasure at this sight.

We were very worried about our father, as we did not know his whereabouts. We knew that he had been sent to the side of those selected to go to the work camp. One night when our father finished work at the factory he arrived at our work camp. We met. Our joy split the heavens. We were fortunate. Yes, even in this place one could be fortunate. Father brought with him a loaf of bread, that he had kept from his daily work and even some milk. The mere fact that there were the four of us, three brothers and a father, made it increasingly easier for us. We were able to support one another, and during the difficult times - which there was no shortage of - to give encouragement. We even arranged a rota to guard the few humble possessions we brought from home that in such a fearful place items of value were not weighed in gold, for these things aroused the jealousy of those who did not have as much and in order that they should succumb to the test of enticement.

Going out to work from camp was extremely well organised. The factory was at a distance of a few kilometres which we walked daily, in the centre of the road, herded as horses or cattle going out to pasture or to the market. The Ukrainian officers with their rifles over their shoulders, and blood thirsty dogs waiting for the slightest order from their masters allowing them to attack a Jew who slackened on the journey and to tear them to pieces, accompanied us. We had one other guard, a Jew, who was armed with these too.

There were Jewish officers in the camp too. They served the Germans with all they requested and at times with things they did not. Most of the Jewish officers had no conscience and lacked Jewish ethics. Amongst them were those that without losing an extra heart beat were prepared to slander their Jewish brothers as long as they found favour in the eyes of the Germans. Their main job was to organise us and prepare us to go to work on time together. But, as mentioned, they did not detest the additional work, which didn't exactly add honour to the Jewish people, but increased their merits in the eyes of the Germans, or so they believed.

One of the Jewish officers, called Maniek, had a terrible stammer. Whenever he got angry, it would get worse. One morning I woke up late. I quickly jumped off the bunk and I saw that my friend Pinie was also in the hut. I woke him immediately and as we were preparing to go out, we heard our names being called very loudly. It was Maniek's voice, who had not found us in line. I heard him call my name with a stammer "M....Muniu! M....Muniu!" He added several well known juicy Polish curses.

We suddenly saw him breaking into a run towards our hut. We knew that if he caught us inside our fate would be a bitter end. Therefore we slipped out of the hut before he had time to reach it and hurried to take our place in line as if we had been standing there earlier on. When he didn't find us in the hut, he returned and suddenly saw us standing in line with an innocent look on our faces. This did not please him at all. He approached

us, and beat us several times in order to teach us a lesson for next time.

To add to the irony, we took no notice of the beating we endured for it was a rare pleasure to see a smile spread over the faces of all our friends who were suffering. As a result, Maniek, who was seething in anger distorted our names by stammering in such a hilarious manner, that it aroused a general outburst.

That morning we left camp making our way to the factory with a smile. It is no small thing when the wretchedness of life makes you smile!

Today, as I write and recall in detail all the demeaning conditions that existed in the camp, I find it hard to understand how we were able to continue living and existing. On one hand we were weak of body and soul, emotional, afflicted with various ailments and on the other hand, being at such a difficult, distressing time in an impossible situation, yet we survived. Today, it appears to me, that there are situations in which a person demonstrates the capacity unknown to himself, successful in overcoming humiliation and strengthens himself, firmly withstanding any troubles.

The nazis and their assistants treated us cruelly trying to make us feel that our lives were as worthless as garlic skin. Despite all this, we remained lucky and we were alive. Many others had been transformed into floating dust that came out of the crematoria of Treblinka.

I never imagined how great is the dignity with which a man is graced and in particular his desire for life. In essence, what else did our lives consist of other than hope? We nursed a hidden dream within us, a sweet dream, that the day would come and perhaps a heavenly miracle would occur and somehow we would pass through this difficult period, the war would end and we would survive and stay alive. No rational person could believe that such a dream would ever become a reality. But, even during the very difficult times and perhaps especially then, it was impossible not to imprison the hope and to take oneself off to great heights that were more exalted than the height of the fencing, of the guard

towers that surrounded us like a sealed ring. We were depressed, in despair, miserable, but they could not take the dream from us. Neither the dream nor the right to dream. Our entire weak strength enthused us with but one thing alone, the will to live. We waited for the miracle to come. We knew it would arrive, but were unsure whether we would still be in this world to witness it. We hoped we would.

There were additional things that perhaps could also be considered miraculous. For example, before the war, father suffered from various ailments, he had stones in the kidneys. He was a rather portly man as was the usual amongst the wealthy, which did not give him much pleasure. Every year he would travel to a health resort in Truskaviec and was particular to drink water from the healing wells which had a shocking taste and smelled of petroleum. These health resorts were very expensive, but father's financial situation allowed him this luxury without having to worry about the future.

However, in the work camp, all the treasures were reversed. The portliness disappeared and with it all his ailments. In no way am I advocating the work camp as a form of healing! Oh no! But it certainly taught us that which we had not previously known, how harmful overeating is, blowing up the stomach and bringing in its wake various ailments.

In this pressure cooker of the work camp, with a shared life imposed upon us, we learned to recognise the character of the people whose fate brought us together. There were strangers who were gathered from distant villages, cities and places we had barely heard of as well as people from different walks of life. We appeared the same in their eyes. Yet, we were placed to live together. This was no easy test. We learned the hard way, who was graced with human decency and remained, in spite of all the difficulties, a man. But, to our sorrow, also revealed to us were those who did not hold back from using force and lose any human dignity. So much so, that in exchange for a piece of bread they did not care if another person would lose their life as a result.

The scheming Germans were successful in this respect too, for apart from the physical destruction, they attempted to break and shatter our morale and spirit through the medium of humiliation and crushing work and at the same time create arguments and rivalry between the people in the camp. Amongst "those people". Sadly, on several occasions they were very successful.

On this framework they formed the Jewish police. Any Jew who honoured himself endeavoured to avoid this position. For many times, the Jewish officer was forced to make a decision between fulfilling the will of the Germans and between his sense of Jewish brotherhood. When should he be concerned for his own skin and when not. He sacrificed his brotherhood for the benefit of the nazis' wishes.

That is exactly what happened in our city to a Jew by the name of Wilczyk. He was appointed as an officer and after some time climbed the ladder becoming the commanding officer of the Jewish police. Hurriedly, he appointed his son as an officer too. Their main frustration was acting against the Jews. They slandered and informed on the various activities, all in order to find favour in the eyes of the Germans. They, understandably, did not do this because of ideological reasons, but for the material benefits. Good food, clothes and other similar benefits which were considered the world in the work camps.

We were afraid of Wilczyk, particularly father, and there was an historical reason behind it. Wilczyk was a contemptible character in the city. Before the war, he earned his livelihood from a public house and a house of ill repute that he owned. The gentiles would visit him regularly, consume intoxicating liquor, get drunk and play around with the girls that worked for him. He was a character who aroused ones disgust and it was considered disrespectful to be close to him. Anyone not needing to talk to him or to have contact with him, avoided him voluntarily.

Father had no choice and he dealt with him, for we had a wholesale and retail liquor store where Wilczyk

came to purchase drinks for his public house. I don't ever remember a time when he did not cause a problem when it came to payment. Not only did he get a large discount, he would only pay for half the goods and the outstanding balance he would postpone payment of for many months. Those were the conditions he imposed upon my father for his custom.

Father decided to put an end to this on his next visit and demanded the full balance of payment if he wished to continue being a customer. Father explained that we had to purchase and pay for the goods and nobody gives us anything for nothing or even for half price. Wilczyk was not pleased and left the store very angry. From thereon he never crossed threshold of our store nor did he settle the outstanding debt. Truthfully, father was not particularly upset and was prepared to consider this as a lost debt as long as Wilczyk no longer visited our store. But, from that time father acquired an enemy. Wilczyk became an enemy in vain i.e. he remained liable and also played on the insult and hurt. In the blink of an eye he forgot the continuous generous credit he received and became an aggressor. In truth, this wasn't such a disaster, were it not for the occurrence of the tremor, finding ourselves in a blazing hearth and the nazis not recognising him immediately, for Wilczyk was precisely the type of person they were looking for, and giving him a job, enabling him to rule over people's lives, the wretched soul would have slandered us.

Wilczyk just waited for this opportunity and lay in waiting for my father to simply kill him.

It was not only his character that aroused an abhorrence, but his appearance too. He was short, fat and bandy legged, his whole appearance was revolting. The police also considered him to of having a tragic picture. Our luck we were not forced to see him too often, for every morning we went to walk in the factory. Only in the evening, where we finished our day's work, did we have o face him. Father was very worried about this and whenever we saw him at a distance father would hide

from him, for every meeting with him would only invite trouble.

One day a fresh group of fifty youngsters were brought from various cities, and were to replace fifty older workers. The sentence for them would immediately be extermination at the time of the Selection, Wilczyk's eyes were looking for father. He was looking for him to send to the crematoria. To our good fortune, father was in the factory at the time, thus he was prevented from any evil.

Wilczyk performed the selection, who should live and who should die. In the evening , when father returned from work at the factory and as all the older people who had been sentenced for extermination were making their last journey from the camp, Wilczyk happened to meet father.

"Where were you at the time of the selection" Wilczyk shouted at father, his neck red with anger, "I was looking for you! Never mind, next time you won't slip out of my hands! You claim that I am in debt to you? Wait, I will yet settle the outstanding account!"

He turned on his heels burning with anger. As father left he was trembling from head to foot.

Wilczyk was not the only Jewish adversary, there was another called "Langleiben" meaning long life. But, he shortened many people's lives and his life also ended in an unnatural way. He was corrupt and would slander and malign Jews. He was by nature a sadist who enjoyed defaming no less than the nazis. A short time passed, when news reached us that the Germans were closing the work camp, for the Germans had begun to retreat from the Russian Army who had been successful in advancing on several fronts. The Germans were afraid of taking the spoil out of their mouths and decided to close the camp and transfer all it's inhabitants to the extermination camps. Several youngsters, who were in the work camp, amongst whom was my brother Moshe, decided to escape from the camp at night running towards the forest and join the partisans. They were successful in breaking the fences and to open into a quick run towards the forest.

The watch towers around the camp opened up and a few of them were killed. My brother successfully fled, hid in the forest and joined up with the partisans. Only after the war did we find out, that when the Russian army advanced, a group of fighting partisans burst out of the forest, riding horses. My brother Moshe was amongst them, who went to an observation post on the German retreat. It appears, that when the Germans uncovered them, and they were caught in the cross fire. My brother was injured and killed and his burial place will never be known.

The time of the closure of the camp was getting closer. On the day of the expulsion, we stood for a while in rows waiting at the train station on the way to Auschwitz death camp. The Jew Langleiben stood before the SS officer and said with sweet words, "It is I, officer Langleiben, they won't send me together with those Jews!"

The German burst out in a sarcastic laugh replying, "Don't worry, you are not like all of them. You will be the last one to enter the wagon!"

The signal was given. They hurried us towards the cattle trucks, squeezing us into them. The last ones in were Langleiben and Wilczyk. The doors were slammed shut and the train began to move. In our wagon there were fifty youngsters whom the Germans had brought from different towns and villages in order to exchange them for the older ones who were sent to their death. They, the youngsters knew the plans of Wilczyk and Langleiben. Thus, as soon as the train began to move they pounced upon Wilczyk and Langleiben killing them. But, this was too light a punishment for these two disgraceful Jews, may their memories be an everlasting disgrace, for with their assistance, they took many good lives.

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## Chapter Nine

# LIVE TESTIMONY FROM THE HEART OF THE INFERNO

The long journey to Auschwitz-Birkenau was arduous and tedious. Under normal circumstances the journey is not too long, but times and conditions and life in the world at large had changed. The truth is, we did not know what was better, continue the awesome journey or to reach our final destination. There, only one individual awaited our arrival - the Master of Death.

Upon reaching Auschwitz-Birkenau, we once again heard the familiar sounds of the continuous steely shouting by the Germans. This time we did not stand in a selection as we had come from a work camp having already been through the process.

We were ordered to remove our clothes and be cleansed from lice. They shaved us from head to toe. Women had their heads shaved too, something that embarrassed and demeaned them even further. Without hair, they all looked alike.

There is no bad without good, for at least the lice were destroyed, besides they also provided us with preventative treatment - smearing our bodies in paraffin, something which scalded and burned the skin, but totally removed the lice and would perhaps prevent them from returning in the future.

After the cleansing, we were put together in the shower rooms. In contrast to other occasions, with which others who were no longer alive were tested, this time water came out of the shower heads, not gas. Following the shower, we were thrown clothes with blue and white stripes that were of various sizes and which did not fit anyone. We all looked at one another and if we had had the strength to laugh, we would certainly have done so looking at such a grotesque sight. But, it had been some time since a laugh had creased our faces. Beforehand, the accepted procedure in Auschwitz was, as soon as the train

stopped at the ramp, the doors of the cattle trucks were opened and its passengers, broken and crushed to the core of their bones were taken off accompanied by the harsh shouts of the nazis. Anyone whose strength waned and waited a moment received a hard beating and pushing from the cruel barbaric people. Groups of Jewish prisoners, nicknamed "Canada", wearing striped clothes, advised the Jews to leave their light bundles in the trucks or on the platform. What did those bundles contain? A few pieces of bread or perhaps some other food. Those morsels of food were the elixir of life or life itself.

After the last Jews had been pushed and shoved from the platform, the "Canada" men emptied all the packages and piled them up in one place. The nazis wanted to reveal the "treasures" that were hidden in them, the stacks of diamonds and gold, the pearls and precious stones. All they found were morsels of bread!

The notorious selection awaited new arrivals at Auschwitz in the name of one of the greatest nazi murderers, Mengele. Most of those arriving in the transport to Auschwitz, some ninety five percent of them were sent to be exterminated in the gas chambers and their bodies burned to ashes in the crematoria. Stage by stage they neared their frightening death. After the selection, as Mengele's finger turned towards those who had been destined to die, they were brought and dragged towards the structures that served as death machines. A machine designated to frighten and terrify, equipped to technical perfection that the mind is unable to grasp. Even in their last moments they deceived them by telling them they were going to take a shower and giving them towels to reinforce the deception. They passed through a corridor that led them, so to speak, to the showers. Next to the door of the gas chambers they asked them to leave their towels and without any prior warning pushed them in a barbarous, forceful manner inside. Men, women and children were squeezed in until there was no further room. All standing. Anyone not having the strength to stand, stumbled and fell whilst the others trampled over them. Their cries pierced the air, but the nazis immediately

slammed the heavy doors behind those sentenced to death, locking them securely. Above their heads were openings through which the poisonous canisters of gas, cyclone B, would enter. The nazis, by means of the quick action from outside, began pouring the poison inside into the sealed room. People climbed upon one another to get an additional breath of life, but it was all over in seven minutes, no one was left with a breath of life. Babies in their mothers arms, children in their father's embrace, lifeless and distorted. Stacks upon stacks of people, of imaginations, of dreams, of hidden desires of success, of knowledge, of faith, of Judaism. Yes, of Judaism, they were killed because of that. No one will ever know what they were thinking of in the last moments of their lives or what they cried. The sealed walls absorbed the cries. Through a small window, the eyes of the most wicked gentiles of all generations, from the day man was placed on this earth, watched the agony of the dying people, each one's finger was ten times more valuable than the entire world of these despicable murderers.

Having glanced through the window and after they were certain that no one was, they opened up the heavy doors. Groups of Jews, called the "Zonder Commando" removed the bodies one by one and took them to the crematorium where they were burned. But not before the nazis had dissected the bodies to search their intestines for items of value they may have swallowed in order to hide them. Only afterwards, did they throw the corpses into the burning furnaces.

The nazi efficiency was spine chilling. A network of water pipes went from the ovens to the section where the nazis lived, which were heated by the burning bodies. The degenerates showered with water heated by the bodies of the sacrifices! The blood thirsty cruelty of these sub human creatures appeared to be limitless. The cannibals in the depths of the African jungle may be considered righteous in comparison. This is the nation of Beethoven and Mozart!

At the time of removing the bodies there was more than one shocking episode as men from the "Zonder

Commando" recognised their parents or even their children amongst the dead. In these instances, they were unable to restrain themselves and threw themselves into the furnaces together with their dear ones and went heavenward in the flames. What just a short while earlier was a man, a living and breathing human creation was now a handful of ashes. In addition, the nazis had installed drainage in the furnaces for the fats of the cremated bodies to flow into, from which they made soap with the letters R.J.S. - Reine Juden Seife (Pure Jewish Soap) embossed upon it. This soap was allocated to us, camp inmates, and to the immense insult, we soaped our bodies with those who may have been our acquaintances, not to speak of relatives or close friends. Fortunately, this soap was divided into small quantities, so we did not use it frequently, if any solace may be found in that. A short while later, the smoke rose from the furnaces. The dreadful smell of burning bodies filled the air, hovering over the huts, lingering in the treetops, passing above the houses of the nearby cities and villages - yet not one resident uttered a word of complaint. As years passed, they had the audacity to say that they had no idea what was going on behind the barbed wire fences.

Miraculously, I was saved and arrived in Italy. One day whilst I was standing in the office of the Joint in Rome, an organisation which assisted in the rehabilitation of refugees saved from the holocaust, waiting to receive lunch coupons, there stood a young lad in front of me. He attracted everyone's attention because of the unusual colour of his hair, deep white. The camp number was tattooed on his arm, which bore witness that he had been in the hell of Auschwitz.

We asked him to explain. He then proceeded to tell us the most unbelievable event I have ever heard in my life, in a quiet and thoughtful tone of voice. A genuine witness from the heart of hell. He did not fabricate this story and there was to be no glory from it. And so, we all stood still as we listened to what he had to say.

"When they took me, together with all the people into the gas chamber, I was holding my younger brother on my shoulder. The nazis did not pay attention or so it appeared, or perhaps they had no time to bother with the fact that my brother's underpants were not removed. Suddenly, the gas began to spread in the compact chamber and my small brother urinated from great fear or despair. As I felt the gas entering me, I hid my head in the wet underpants of my brother who had already died, holding it tightly to my face until the end of the process, seven whole minutes. The hair of my head, that was not hidden by the wet pants was damaged by the cloud of poisonous gas losing its colour and turned white as snow. When the doors of the gas chamber were opened by the "Zonder Commando", I hid amongst the bodies. They quickly and efficiently removed the bodies when they suddenly reached me. I opened my eyes and blinked. They were gripped in terror. They had never seen a live person amongst the pile of bodies. Fortunately, they did not lose their composure and strengthened themselves not saying a word. The men of the "Zonder Commando" successfully hid me from the eyes of the nazis, gave me clothes and brought me to a group of youngsters who had already passed the selection and were ready to go out to the work camp. I joined them. After that I was saved several more times from death and remained alive - perhaps to bring live testimony from the heart of hell!"

Our group, as mentioned, arrived from the Majuvka camp. After my heart digested the early events, we fully understood that all there remained for us to do was count the days more or less until our journey to heaven and we marched past the huts with which we were familiar. Prior to that, we stood in a straight line as each one of us in turn drew near, stretching out their left hand to deserve being stamped with a personal number that would accompany him all his life - short or long, depending on his lot. The numbers were allocated in an orderly manner. At the beginning of each number there was a letter of the German alphabet to signify the order. To complete tattooing the number, required no less than

forty painful stabs with a needle that contained ink. But, as we soon found out, those pains were heavenly in comparison to that which was awaiting us.

The numbers that were engraved for generations on the arms of innumerable people, turned out to be their personal identity. As of now, we were no longer people with names but numbers. With the many parades in the camp during the days that followed, when the nazis were looking for people, they called numbers not names. For a person with a name is an entity in this world, but a person with a number is an amorphous image that is to be made extinct from upon the face of the earth in a matter of weeks, days or hours. We were like that. Parades were held twice a day, in the morning prior to going to work and in the evening on our return. Additional parades were arranged whenever the guards imagined one of our numbers was absent, missing or had tried to escape.

These numbers have remained engraved on the arms of the survivors, of the few amongst the hundreds and thousands of Jews that were there on another planet and survived to rebuild their lives from scratch and to relate to future generations what happened, something very difficult to believe.

We recognised the construction of the huts, three levels of wooden planks in a room three metres wide and within this narrow area place for seven people. As for mattresses, understandably that is unmentionable. The confined space made it very difficult for us, for if one person wished to turn on their side all the others had to do likewise. When seven people turn from side to side several times during the course of the night and the following day back breaking work awaited them, it is self evident how they must have felt.

In the corner of the hut was a cavity, recognised by all as fulfilling the needs of a toilet as well as sinks with taps to wash. It was difficult to get there as there were so many people. Even if each person was only to use it for three moments daily, their remaining free time would have to be spent going back to the beginning of the line.

Birkenau, the closest camp to us, was only for gypsies. They called it "The Gypsy Camp". The night we arrived, we heard sudden broken cries and awesome shrieks from the direction of the gypsy camp. In the morning it all became clear. That night the nazis had exterminated all the gypsies without exception, using the same principle that they chose to murder the Jews.

By morning, not a living soul was left in the gypsy camp and a short while later a cloud of smoke rose from the crematorium.

However, the camp did not remain empty for long for soon the nazis piled the huts with thousands of new sacrifices. The efficient German machine was working at full production.

## Chapter Ten

## THE DESPERATE STRUGGLE FOR LIFE

A personal number on the arm, a place to squeeze into the hut and we were already residents in the new camp on the path of life's afflictions. The following morning, they awoke us with blood curdling shouts, and we, as automated machines, went out to the morning parade. Thank G-d the inspection passed without incident and the nazis divided us into groups for various types of work. The largest group was ours which totalled approximately thirteen people.

We went out to work, marching in procession surrounded on all sides by the murderous SS accompanied by their fearsome dogs and the Kapo. The Kapo were Jews whom the Germans had appointed as guards to oversee the arrangements. They wore an arm band with the word "KAPO" in large letters. The majority of the Kapos were not distinguishable as being good hearted and sympathetic to their afflicted brothers - perhaps they believed their fate would be different to ours - whom they oppressed and pursued in order to find favour in the Germans' eyes in exchange for some small benefits which at that time spelled life. For a piece of bread or the equivalent was considered to be the elixir of life.

The two Kapo officers responsible for our group were, Ytze from Lodz and Ignatz from Warsaw. In their praise it may be said, to our good fortune, they treated us fairly and like everything that was given to them, under the searching eyes of the nazis they nevertheless gave assistance to the weak and frail too. From time to time, they raised their voices, shouting, but mainly to satisfy the Germans' prying eyes and listening ears demonstrating that they were fulfilling their duties faithfully.

On the way out to work, we passed through the electrified fence, whose strong current was sufficient to kill a giant ox in a second. People whose strength had been sapped ran towards it to end their lives quickly. The

camp was divided into many locked sections that were also fenced off with an electrified fence. One being for women who could go out to work. At the camp gate, over which was written a banner "Arbeit macht frei" (Work makes free), sat a choir made up of inmates wearing striped clothing. They sang rhythmic marches and we had to march in time to the tempo. Looking at it from the outside, being a nazi, must surely have been a "grotesque sight, skeletons walking in rhythm to the sound of other skeletons.

Our work entailed cutting and separating scrap iron. The men of our group worked in a large building site, where the Germans brought in a constant flow of damaged aircraft, old exchanged parts and different types of scrap metal. We were divided into groups each assigned a different task. One group cut all the aluminium parts into specific sizes for the smelting furnaces, another group removed the mechanical parts, work that required physical strength and great effort and was therefore allocated to the young and healthy. Yet another group was assigned to remove screws from different parts, catalogue and store them. This was the lightest work and we were successful in getting father to do the latter with the assistance of the relationship we were fortunate in making between the supervisors and ourselves.

The supervisors were men of the "Luftwaffe" (German Air Force). To their merit it may be said, they were more humane than the SS and to such an extent that the Jews began trading with them mainly using money or valuables in exchange for food.

There were many amongst us, in spite of all the selections and searches, who successfully hid silver, gold and even diamonds here and there including literally within our bodies. This was their guarantee to life. Amongst them were my cousins, Hershel Tenenbaum and his brother Mendel. They were successful in creating a secret link with one of the pilots and began bartering silver and gold in exchange for, salami, cigarettes and even strong drink that was required to warm their chilled



I, Yerachmiel at the age of 18

bodies from the awful cold. The main buyers of their necessities came from the "Zonder Commando", who received additional privileges from the nazis, and were granted the freedom of walking around the camp. There is no making mistakes, the nazis did not suddenly become merciful or good hearted towards the "Zonder Commando". It was obvious, they gave them a little air to breathe before they finished them off, for it was a sure thing that they would not remain alive to testify to the horrendous atrocities committed. They were all living on borrowed time. Another month or two and it would be their turn to be sent to the crematoria. But, until then they had to perform their appalling work and therefore deserved to receive preferential treatment.

The men of the "Zonder Commando" had silver, gold and diamonds that they had secretly taken from the clothes of the unfortunate sacrifices, who were undressed before entering the "showers". However, the nazis wanted the treasures for themselves, but the "Zonder Commando" were successful in concealing several valuable items which they used as a basis for the little bit of trading they conducted under the noses of the SS, some of which they were aware of but chose to ignore. There were times when the nazis sat and socialised with the "Zonder Commando", eating and drinking anything they obtained. The business dealings of my cousin Hershel began to decline until it reached a stage when it was no longer possible to transfer the possessions from the other camp even without the help of his brother Mendel. In addition, it was very dangerous to pass things from inside for the Germans continued to implement the stringent searches.

But there was no choice. It was necessary to take the risk despite the danger, for the trading was not in order to become wealthy but in order to live and help others too. The difference between life and death in the Valley of Tears depended on a piece of bread. Therefore, Hershel assigned me to take part in passing over the necessities to the camps. Every trip was fraught with danger and when the mission had been successfully

accomplished, I benefited too by receiving a gift from Hershel.

There were those who were unlucky too as they were caught during the parade and the thorough search at the camp gate for which they received twenty five lashes on the spot. To my good fortune, I was able to improvise and had some good ideas. But, there was a time when I was almost caught. It was a day when I happened to be carrying two large salamis that I hid in the back of my socks that were covered with my large trousers that I was wearing at the time. Upon returning to camp, the German at the gate stopped me and began a search. My heart thumped wildly as he continued his search placing his hands on my chest, going down the contours of my body. This time I was afraid that I would be caught and be punished for all the times that I had been successful. He then ran his hands between my legs checking down both sides, I was sure that my heart beat had given me away, but fortunately he did not search any further, thus not finding what was hidden behind my legs and I was saved.

My cousin Hershel who was standing behind me was terrified as to what may happen and he too breathed a sigh of relief that I had not been caught. Later on he paid me double in exchange for what I had been through.

Yet we lived day by day, in fear. A constant battle for each moment. Valuables did not have the ingredient to conceal fear, but when it came, it was surely useful.

With this money, I opened up a "personal business". I began conducting my own bartering with a German soldier. I bought different essentials for which I had paid generously. From the moment I began to trade there was no food shortage. As a result, we were successful in arranging additional employment for my father, cooking potato soup in a large pot. Understandably our small family, father, brother my cousins and I all benefited.

To add a footnote, perhaps there are those that will find it a touch humorous, Jewish humour no less. After the war when I told my wife about our contrived

business, she said in thoughtful sadness, "You know, at that time I was also In Auschwitz-Birkenau. Its a shame I didn't know you, for I was suffering from the most awful hunger.....".

We were fortunate. My father was fortunate too. He was saved twice, both at the last moment from the selection, which had meant only one thing - extermination.

The first time it happened by the gate, on his way out to work, the Germans decided on a selection. My father was in the group behind us. My brother and I passed the selection safely and upon reaching our place of work realised that father had not arrived. We were petrified, we were afraid that the Germans had separated him from the rows of those going to work directing him to the side, to the path from where there is no return. We thought that perhaps father's talents which were very astute would hopefully save him. He had been saved as a result on more than one occasion. That day, when father was nearing the gate he noticed from the corner of his eye that the Germans were performing a selection. He had no shadow of a doubt that this time he would not make it through safely. His brain worked very quickly, his eyes looked around, from where would his help come. To the right of the gate was the kitchen and father realised that in the courtyard, outside the kitchen, the young Hungarian Jews worked cleaning the large vats in which the food for the camp inmates was brought. As he had nothing to lose, he never thought twice and swift as a young lad without the Germans realising, as they were busy with the selection, hid himself amongst the young group. The difference of a second existed between him and the crematoria. Had a German officer looked up for a second, father would have been caught.

The young Jewish lads immediately realised what father was doing amongst them and considered him a part of the group thereby hiding him. But the story does not end there. Father knew that the Germans would look for him and enquire why he never went to work. Therefore, in order to lessen the danger he hurried to the

clinic that was situated at the edge of the camp. He approached the manager complaining of feeling ill and requested a sickness certificate explaining his absence at work. The manager was not convinced. Father took out some money concealed in his pocket, at that time each of us carried a sum of money in case of any eventuality, upon seeing it was convinced and gave him the required certificate, a Certificate of Life. Father returned to his hut with the document where he remained in hiding until the group returned from work.

We, at work, were unaware of any of this and feared greatly for father's fate. We stole fearful glances towards the crematoria. Thick smoke rose from them. Was father also burned there? The fear was awful. On the spot we decided to ransom father if he was still alive and if it was before he had been sent to the crematoria. We approached one of the Kapo whom we knew had good connections with one German in particular, to see whether he could help us slip father away from the group that was destined to be sent to the gas chambers. We offered him $200 to save father. He did not agree, this amount was too small. In essence why should it bother him to make a deal on account of our father's life? My cousin added a further $100, in order to effect father's salvation. In the we found out that father had successfully saved himself through his own efforts.

At the end of this nerve-shattering day, upon returning to the hut not knowing where father was, alive or dead, we found him lying there. We understood what had transpired and hardly recognised him, for such a transformation had come over him since that morning. We left him looking like a young man and on our return he appeared an old man. The constant fear and dread left its signs making an impression on his soul and body that would never be removed, but, he was alive.

The second incident happened a while later. Another selection had been arranged at the camp, but this time father was unable to avoid it. He was taken out of the lines and placed together with all those sentenced to die into a special hut designated for those to be driven to

the crematoria. In this hut, as with the additional huts the nazis held them until the evening and only then transferred them for extermination. Towards evening, as my brother and I returned from work, we knew that the bitterness of death had turned and that my father was in the notoriously known hut, together with all the others and like them waiting to be sent to the gas chambers.

An inexplicable feeling, literally Divine intervention guided our steps. My brother and I, without being able to notify father, went to the back of the hut. The exit door had been locked and bolted with additional bars and locks. We examined it closely and had no idea where father would be, but we had nothing to lose. Approaching the hut, we began calling, "Father! Father!"

"Children, I am here!" came the bewildered and stifled reply. He was probably standing right by the door. Later on he told us, that he had hoped in the depths of his heart that his children would come to this side of the hut and therefore, stood and simply waited for us. We did not know what to do. We were lost for ideas. Looking at one another, we awaited Heavenly guidance, knowing every second counted, for any moment the nazis were likely to take these people to their deaths. In our hearts we prayed to A-mighty G-d for strength, counsel and wisdom to be able to save father.

Our prayers were answered. We looked around and noticed a steel pole laying nearby. We crept towards it and with strength that was not ours we broke a wooden beam from the door. Placing the pole inside the door we levered the lower part of the door creating a narrow gap between the bottom of the door and the floor. Through this opening father came out trembling and was saved. Being so slim, all skin and bone, he was able to get through the door. At the same time, a number of others were fortunate in being able to escape too and their booty was their lives. At this point we followed our well known rule and hurried to the clinic and in exchange for dollars the manager issued the required document that father could present the following day explaining his absence from work.

One day, I was taken to work in another place, next to the renowned platform to which Jews from the breadth of Europe arrived at the last station of their lives. I was sent with a group of twenty workers, the majority being Turkish Jews, to lay railway tracks for the goods carriages. The foreman was a cruel Pole and in exchange for money it was possible to make deals with him. This time I paid him and he agreed to allow me to work next to the railway tracks of the trains bringing the Jews to the platform. At first, I bought a change of striped clothing in order to appear as one of the Canadian group, whose job entailed dealing with the packages of the Jews left on the floor of the train. I worked, or so it appeared, on the packages, but actually opened them emptying them of loaves of bread that the Jews had prepared in case of an emergency. However, they were unable to take them at this time. I slipped out the bread and hid it beneath my clothes.

On the other side of the track was the edge of my camp and the beginning of the women's camp. I crossed the track towards the fence of the women's camp. Many youngsters stretched out their hands begging a Jew for bread. I told them that I would give them bread on condition that they find a young girl by the name of Manya Tauman from the city of Kielce, who was my cousin (Today she lives in Israel, her husband Yechiel Rosenkranz passed away in the Summer of 1996 and they have a married son).

The young girls ran quickly towards the huts to find Manya. A short while later they found her and she hurried to the fence. Our meeting was emotional. I passed her the precious bread and also gave some to her incarcerated friends. I was able to do this on several occasions whenever I was able to work on the platform. I passed the bread over to Manya and to the other women in the camp who stretched out their skeletal hands over the fence to receive the bread which would save their lives.

There was another way in which bread could be passed to the women who had no help. Each day as we returned from work a group of women who were returning

to their camp passed us by. At a particular point the groups crossed each other, each group then continuing on their way. Amongst the women was Soroh, the daughter of the shochet for our city, whom we knew well. I also managed to pass her a loaf of bread as quick as a wink of an eye. (Today, she lives in Bnei Brak, Israel. Her family name is Postavsky and she is a mother of five children).

There is no logical explanation for having taken such great risks and placing myself in danger. I just did it, my life was suspended in front of me. It only needed one swift glance by a German, just one careless moment and a bullet would have pierced by brain. Today, with the passing of time it remains inexplicable from where such inner strength and determination are derived. Possibly, the thought process was different at that time or perhaps being at the front line of reality with the Angel of Death, there was a feeling that one could buy life with the help of a loaf of bread. If this were possible nothing is too difficult and we have to try.

Incidentally, at one of our meetings arranged for survivors of our city, in Tel Aviv, Israel, Soroh Postavsky related her severe difficulties in the camps. "I know that I am the only member of my family in this camp," she said, "and do not have anyone one in the world to worry about me or who would bring me anything to eat. It was then I remembered that a few of the Tenenbaum family were in the camp and they were good friends of ours in our hometown. The piecing of events were amazing. Literally on that same day, we met on our return from work and Yerachmiel sneaked a loaf of bread towards me, that I needed so much, which helped me to remain alive."

## Chapter Eleven

## THE JOURNEY OF THE SKELETONS

January 1945.

The Russians were advancing, the Germans began closing the death camps at Auschwitz and even the "New Order" of the superior race was coming to an end. The dreams conjured up in the warped minds of these prophets were crumbling one by one. Throughout snowbound Russia with the non-stop bombing of the allied forces and on the desert sands of the western front, they were being defeated. Although the nazis understood, including the most fanatical amongst them, that the dream of a "Thousand Year Reich" had disappeared, they did not wish to ignore the Jewish slaves, the remainder of the millions that were exterminated in the death factory they had established.

The camp veterans, those who were in Auschwitz, Maidanek, Bergen Belsen, Buchenwald, and Zaksenhausen were moved from place to place and from camp to camp in the days of the Reich's disintegration. Their guards, bloodthirsty SS men, dragged them mostly on foot, through the ruined streets of Germany to find an area where they could be protected from the allied forces and to save the very cheap workforce until the end.

So we had to march towards Slezia and Germany. The "Death March" whose name is self explanatory. A march which the Angel of Death accompanied us. A very long convoy of tired, broken, crushed and humiliated people still carrying all the horrors of Auschwitz, were now on the move once again.

The order came close to midnight, "March in unison! Forward march!" Thousands of times I had heard that order, whilst in that cursed camp of Auschwitz. Thousands of times the SS officers shouted towards the consenting skeletons as if they were soldiers of a unique famous and smart military unit.

The entire time I was in the camp, I dreamt of the moment that I would be able to walk out of the

entrance without having to return in the evening under the watchful eyes of the SS. "Forward march!" our officer screamed and we began to march towards the gate. Although this would be for the last time, but not as free men. We were still prisoners under the supervision of the SS.

That night, between of 17th and 18th January 1945, seventy thousand people, the last survivors of Auschwitz, began the march towards the centre of the Reich.

It was a cold clear night. We marched along the snow covered streets of upper Slezia and we also knew, as already mentioned, that the Angel of Death was with us. We saw him. He was marching with us all the time and even now jumping and skipping between the rows with a human scythe in his black hand. We knew that many of us would not complete the march. We knew that many of us would not receive a Jewish burial. We were aware of it from the outset, the screams of the guards, the demands made of us, the hardship of walking on ice and the increasing sounds of the rifle shots that continued as we were advancing.

On both sides of the street we noticed stretched out figures on the ground and realised this was the result of the rifle shots that we had heard. This was the fate of the prisoners who were unable to keep up with the required orders. Several days prior to the evacuation, we suspected that something important was about to take place. The older ones amongst us realised that the Germans were preparing to desert the area. The question was, what would they do with us. Would they bomb the camp with its inmates or perhaps include us in their plans, using us for the German workforce? The second possibility seemed more realistic for we knew that the trains and the tracks that had not yet been destroyed were vital to the Germans for a more important purpose than carrying Jewish prisoners. But, it was probable, it was specifically the Jewish prisoners who were given priority by the Germans and they decided to mobilise them on foot from Poland to Germany.

No one knew what awaited us, where we were being taken and how, if at all, we would reach our goal, any of us. The mere retreat from the area, we understood to mean, was Hitler's end was very close and that Germany was dying. We hoped, that if we survived the hell of the extermination camp we would survive the counted days until the conquest of Germany. We had no way of knowing that Germany was collapsing, but refused to surrender and this refusal caused thousands more Jews to be murdered. Germany refused to surrender. Its leaders believed that they were still able to capitulate the allied forces with the assistance of their missiles.

We did not know any of this as we began to move down the streets of Slezia, what the future would bring, but we did know that the future would be gloomy and cruel. During the first kilometres of the march we realised that it would be more difficult for us to survive in the short time left for the Germans than the long months spent in Auschwitz. The more we advanced so the number of shots from the rifles increased as did the number of corpses lying on the roadside. Often, when one of group collapsed and was unable to continue, we tried many times ineffectively to drag him along with us, but the Germans finished him off immediately and preventing us from helping, brutally beating those that tried to save them.

"Schneller! Schneller!" (Faster! Faster!) they screamed. We were able to increase the pace. A person, so it became clear to us, can successfully expose superhuman strength which enables him to overcome his very difficult affliction. Not every person, of course. As the march progressed the number of older prisoners diminished. Those that survived Auschwitz were shot and fell in the early days of the march.

We only marched at night in case we would be spotted by the airforce of the allied forces who would think we were German soldiers and blow us up. Upon leaving Auschwitz, each one of us was given two loaves of bread, but no water, to satisfy our thirst. We ate, and drank the snow that was piled on the side of the road.

Amongst the seventy thousand Jews there were three specific relatives, father, my brother and I.

At the beginning of the long journey we had shoes with wooden soles. The snow stuck to these soles, layer upon layer of ice making the walking extremely difficult. Our legs were literally breaking and at times was like work for which we did not have the strength. As mentioned, those wishing to boost their strength, to take a break and rest for a moment received a bullet in the back of their head. The firing of rifles did not cease the entire journey. One shot - another Jew murdered. Another shot - a corpse rolls in the snow. A further shot - another persons story ends up on the bloodstained roads of darkened Europe.

At one point, my brother Chaim's strength waned and he wished to rest for a few minutes. We knew, that this rest would have only one meaning - eternal rest. Therefore, father and I held him up under his arms and with our little strength, we supported and encouraged to be strong and continue.

Father encouraged him saying, "Be strong, Chaim, you see that their end is very close. Please G-d we will merit to be freed very soon and go out to freedom."

As mentioned, seventy thousand people left Auschwitz and only twenty thousand arrived. All the others fell on the roadside of Slezia and Germany or choked and froze on the wagons. In two nights we marched a distance of one hundred kilometres. During daylight hours we slept and rested in village barns along the way. At the end of the journey we reached the German concentration camp called Gros Rosen.

Upon arriving there, I remembered father's words that had accompanied me the entire length of the difficult journey and which I never tired of repeating and stressing, "For the sake of G-d, do not lose the bread in your hands. Hold it tight, it will save our lives". After hearing those words I protected the bread under my clothes and in addition collected the pieces bread that were thrown on the roadside. These were the loaves of the many Jews who did not have the strength to continue, they

threw them away in despair and those that left as a result also cast their lives away before them. On reaching the concentration camp, the loaves of bread that were with us were crumbs, but they were our main meal and they saved our lives. Father was absolutely right.

The hunger at the Gros Rosen camp was very severe. All that our captors granted us was one portion of foul soup per day. We only stayed at this camp for a week, after which we were transferred to Dachau extermination camp in Germany, by train. The train journey was a punishment in itself. They squeezed one hundred and twenty people into each wagon meant for a maximum of forty people. Our wagon was particularly small, therefore, "only" one hundred people were squeezed in. The journey was terrifying. A journey of death, literally. For five days and nights we were tossed about in these sardine cans. The crush was indescribable. There was not even enough place to stand on your two feet, not to mention sitting. To enable a little standing room, we would push those standing around us and with each one pushing the other, in a short time the wagon became an arena for wrestling and close combat in which everyone was fighting with the other. The sole prayer of each individual was not to stumble or fall, for the majority of those that fell never stood up again. They were too weak and frail to lift themselves up and were slowly but surely trampled to death under the feet of those wrestling for their lives.

We lost all sense of time and place. From time to time, we stopped for a short while, not knowing how long we had been travelling and we certainly had no idea how many hours or days of this nightmarish journey lay ahead of us. The stops did not signify the end of the journey, but were designated only to enable the removal of the bodies of those who had expired during the course of the journey and to pile them onto another wagon. The method was simple. The SS officers opened the doors ordering those standing closest to the doors to disembark and the others to throw down the corpses from the wagon. Those who

had got down were ordered to drag the corpses to another empty wagon.

We used this opportunity to scoop up some snow which we immediately stuffed into our mouths. It was at least two days since we had eaten our last morsel of bread. Sometimes we made the trip between two wagons, with one hand dragging a body and with the other hand scoop snow into our mouths, At the end of the task we returned to our wagon which we found filled again with prisoners, who were brought from the wagons that had been emptied for the corpses. Once again the wrestling for standing place began with the same consequences. The stronger ones survived, others stumbled, fell, were trampled and strangled. Again the train stopped and the task was repeated. Remove the bodies, dragging them and scooping up snow.

At one station the doors were opened and the Germans began distributing tea, or liquid that appeared like it, but it was hot. The thirst was so harsh and the need to drink something so desperate that everybody began behaving like wild animals. One climbed on top of another and pushing one another, we lost our human image. Cries, screams and shouts could be heard, a war of life and death. After days without air, food or drink, it is hard to control oneself and not lose ones mind, letting go of all ones inhibitions and behaving like beasts over tea. But, the tumult was so great that the cursed Germans tipped the tea out onto the platform, pushed us back into the wagons and locked the doors behind us.

It is superfluous to mention that we were not permitted to fulfil our bodily functions outside the wagon. Therefore, where we stood, breathed, passed out and died, there too we fulfilled our bodily functions. It is hard to imagine what the wagon looked like and the stench that emanated from it. In order to complete the ugly picture one had to see the depth of the mire which was pleasant as looking at sleep walking skeletons. It appears, that our sins must have been particularly severe to deserve such punishment.

Finally, there were two people who decided to take matters into their own hands. They were two strong Jews who began to make an order. Firstly, they sat some people down on the floor whilst others stood, later on they reversed the order. They also had two metal army pots with them. One they set aside for physiological requirements and for this purpose we drilled a hole in the floor of the wagon to empty its contents and the other was used for shovelling up snow. Between the grill of the wagon window was a piece of wire which we snapped off and tied to the second pot. Whilst travelling along we lowered the pot through the window filling it with snow which was distributed evenly, each person receiving two handfuls.

The train continued on its journey. Another day, another night. How long one no knew or cared. The feeling generated was that this cursed train had no specific destination and its sole purpose was to wear out and cause the death of the last of the Auschwitz survivors. A train of skeletons. The trains stopped several more times on its infinite journey As time went on the crush in the wagon diminished and we were able to safely sit without being trampled upon. However, we were not sitting on the floor, but on the corpses that we had covered with several blankets. In most wagons less than half of those that began the journey survived. Thanks to the reorganisation of our wagon only a third did not reach their destination. One day, father, who was with us throughout, took ill. With great difficulty he was able to stand and were afraid that he would not have the strength to survive the journey. We possessed an expensive treasure, a worn blanket and asked the orderlies for permission to place father in a hammock so that he may rest during this harsh journey. They agreed. Tying the two edges of the blanket to two beams we placed father inside thus being able to rest the remainder of the journey.

Father rewarded us with a broad smile which meant the world to us. Father by nature, was a pleasant and optimistic person and was amongst the few in spite of all that we had been through, what was awaiting us,

despite all awful suffering and subhuman treatment, believed we would live through it. We would become normal liberated people once again.

Father's faith was so strong, that when we heard the Germans were losing the war, the question we asked was whether we would be lucky enough to see the great day when the cursed nazis would be eliminated . Also, considering our spiritual, physical and emotional state, crushed and broken, skin and bone, would we merit, if only for a short while, to reach that moment to witness the dream of which we would never dare speak.

In the interim, we were still on a never ending journey. Five long days and nights seemed like forever, ending at Dachau concentration camp. The train stopped, the wagon doors opened and the bloodthirsty cries welcomed us. The nazis ordered us to hastily disembark. We could barely move, it was cold outside and mounds of snow surrounded us . Snow and skeletons. Not one of us weighed over thirty five kilograms. With great difficulty we sauntered from the platform to the camp where we were immediately directed to the showers. Freezing cold water came out of the rusty pipes, but at least it was water and not gas.

Until this very day I fail to understand how we never became ill or caught pneumonia. Following the shower they shaved all our hair and coated our bodies in paraffin, the skin burned and irritated, but the lice were destroyed. We received a fresh set of clothes, one size for all and a new identification number. However strange it may seem, even in the depths of the abyss we had reason to feel good, clean clothes and no lice.

They took us to the infamous wooden huts that were divided into cubicles with which we were well acquainted. The only difference being, three or four people shared a cubicle in contrast to seven at Auschwitz. Not that the nazis had become merciful, in any way, but for far more practical reasons, there were fewer people alive now than there were at the beginning of the war. We had no idea that the number spoken about was six million. I was speaking in terms of tens that we knew,

hundreds we had seen, thousands that we knew about, a hundred thousand that we imagined, even one million, but six million!

Obviously an additional reason was that the end of the war was imminent and the Germans were in the midst of a mass retreat. There was no transport. But, life in the camp was no bed of roses. The dividing line between life and death was a mere hairbreadth. The famine was constant and suffering was our lot here too. We gathered tens and hundreds of corpses daily, piling them in heaps on wooden carts that were taken to be burned. If these men or women could have held on to their strength just a little bit longer they would have seen the redemption, but, Heaven had decided otherwise.

Emotions at that time were very complex. Great hope lingered in our hearts. We could already see the flicker of light at the end of the tunnel. We knew if we held on, very soon the sun rays of life would shine and we would witness the end of this cruel war that had claimed the highest price of Jewish blood in history. On the other hand, death continued to devour us without mercy day by day, hour by hour. In the interim the journey towards the light continued.

The nazis carefully chose volunteers for work, by their healthy appearance, for there was no one who did, but whoever looked less degenerate than his neighbour, and I was chosen. We began to work and it was not easy. Suddenly, something happened that seemed to easy the burden, I had struck something hard whilst shovelling the snow. I carefully cleared away the snow revealing a piece of bread which I hastily hid beneath my shirt ensuring it was not seen by anyone or they would have attacked me like a pack of hungry wolves.

Upon returning to the camp, I hurried to my father and brother and secretly showed them the piece of bread I had found. Their faces shone. The stale piece was divided between the three of us, which was life itself. I doubt whether there is anyone who was not there that could understand this. This bite of bread brought us back to the world of the living, be it wretched, harsh and

formidable, but still ten times better than the face of death that everyone knew was awaiting him between the path of the camp and anyone who wished could bring their meeting with the reaper holding his scythe, nearer.

The next day, a selection was held to take the young and fit to a work camp. Father very much wanted to be amongst those who went to work as he knew that with it came the opportunity of obtaining food. We were concerned that he would not pass the selection which meant that our paths would part, possibly forever. Being together we worried, looked after, strengthened, encouraged and supported one another in times of crisis. Separation, we knew, would bring a chasm of anguish that which we doubted could ever be resolved. At this crucial moment, at the brink of the end of the war, when hope was a reality and not just a dream, we yearned to remain together for we knew this was the secret of our existence.

The selection arrived. We stood in rows. Suddenly, at the last moment my brother Chaim acted with unbelievable haste and ingenuity, he rubbed snow into fathers face and with a broken knife blade shaved him. It was a very primitive means of shaving, but sufficient to improve father's looks and make him look younger. The three of us, arms linked with father in the centre, approached the nazis officer who was organising the selection. He looked sharply at father face, raised his finger and asked, "How old are you?" This was the rung between the hope of life and the bitterness of death. I plucked up courage and replied, "Officer, sir, this is our father. We are two brothers and we have been together in the camp for four years. The three of us have worked at different tasks and the results have always been pleasing."

There was a harsh silence. It was possible to cut the atmosphere with a knife. The officer looked at me in amazement, it was possible to feel the thoughts running through his mind. Should he reveal a spark of humanity, even if it be for merely a fleeting moment and conceal his animalistic traits. "Forward!" he told the three of us.

We breathed a sigh of relief. Another miracle, an open miracle. Father was saved.

They sent us to the forest camp near Mildorf, Germany. The camp, Waldlager, as its name suggests, was in the forest. The huts were built in such a way that they were half dug into the ground with the top protruding. They were lower and smaller than the huts in the other camp.

We began to work the following day. We had to dig up potatoes, separating the bad ones from the good ones that were to be transported. With all our previous experience it was easy to sneak some potatoes from time to time into the camp. There was an oven in the hut whose chimney extended through the roof. At night, when the oven was lit to warm us from the freezing cold, we put the potatoes into the chimney and roasted them.

We did this by threading a piece of wire like a spit through the potato, going up to the roof and lowering the potato into the chimney. The taste and smell of these potatoes literally resembled Gan Eden (Paradise). It took a long time to roast and with the night cold being unbearable we occasionally went inside to warm up our bones from the bitter cold. However, no sooner had we done that, there were those who were so unbelievably quick that grabbed our potatoes. Thereafter, Chaim and I would take turns watching the potatoes as they were cooking and the thefts stopped. Being organised, was also part of the war for survival.

Several days later, the potato festival ended and a group of young men were chosen for hard labour. I was amongst them. We had to work on a building site of giant proportions that the Germans had set up for repairing aeroplanes. We had to carry heavy sacks of cement on our shoulders taking them up to a building area twenty metres high. This entailed walking up a wooden plank with rungs something like steps which was very demanding physically not only for someone with a body like ours, but also for one who was half a muscle man. Many youngsters unable to carry the load fell beneath its weight. I felt my strength waning and unless I found a solution quickly my fate would have been the same. Therefore, I did something bold which proved successful. At a specific

time, I turned as if to go to the toilet which was in the tall entangled vegetation, somewhat distant from the building site. On reaching there, I hid myself well amongst the branches and the leaves so that no one would be able to find me even if they looked carefully. I lay between the bushes until I heard the bell ringing announcing the end of the days work. I left the bushes, got up and joined the group that had finished work. This went on for a number of days.

Hard labour ended for me one day when they took a group from the work camp to the railway station at Mildorf. I joined this group as I knew that whatever type of work it may be, would not be as hard as at the building site.

The station had been heavily bombed by the aeroplanes of the allied air force and several carriages carrying sacks of sugar were hit. Wherever we looked sugar was strewn. We were ordered to remove the complete sacks from the wagons and carry them to other wagons that had not been hit in order to be transported to their destination.

The first thing we obviously did was to fill our mouths with sugar, handful after handful we gathered from the ground between the tracks, with immediate disastrous results. We were all struck with severe uncontrollable diarrhoea. After this, we tried to hide the sugar in our trousers in an ingenious manner by tying the bottom of our trouser legs and sneaking it into the camp. This was a valuable commodity which could be exchanged for potatoes. In general there were no inspections on entering the camp but on the occasions that there were, we hastily untied our trouser legs and all the sugar spilled out onto the snow which then dissolved.

At the end of April 1945, we were being transported on a train once again to an unknown destination. Only after some time had elapsed did we find out that we were being taken to the Tirol mountains to be exterminated. However, we never reached our destination. For on route, we were spotted by the aeroplanes of the allied air force who thought it was a

transport of German soldiers and began shooting. Many people were wounded, some mortally, and others lightly by this action, amongst them people who had survived all the camps and the suffering of the journey. The cries of the wounded could be heard all around.

Fortunately, we jumped from the train just in time and so were spared the gunfire. We found a hiding place behind piles of wooden beams, that were laid out on the platform at the station on the way to the train. The aeroplanes did not leave but kept firing from all directions shattering it to pieces. The bullets were literally flying over our heads. We hoped and prayed that our friends would not be wounded by the gunfire on the brink of out redemption both bodily and spiritually. After a while the aeroplanes flew away and never returned. The train never went out of service and continued on its journey. The armed guards travelling on the train were Hungarian-German or as they were known "Volks Deutsche". It is worthwhile mentioning that towards the end of the war, the Germans no longer guarded us, they were on the run and began to hide to get out of uniform in order to avoid recognition and not be tried for their vicious and cruel treatment. The task of guarding the prisoners was left to the stupid HUngerians who continued to fulfil their mission as if the glorious German army continued with its lightning chain of victories and were not fleeing, beaten and wretched with their tail between their legs.

## Chapter Twelve

## RETURN FROM ANOTHER PLANET

On the night of the 29th April, 1945, the train stopped at Zeishaupt, a small German town. The wagon doors were closed. As the morning dawned of 30th April, 1945, we tried to open the doors. To our amazement, they opened. We looked right and left waiting for the shrieks of the guards accompanied by the sounds of their rifles, but a strange silence surrounded us, no one was there. The guards had simply disappeared. We pinched ourselves to ensure we were not hallucinating. Very slowly and dubiously at first, then with greater confidence, those able to stand on their feet burst out of the wagons on to the platform. The joy pierced the heavens. For years we awaited this moment, to stand free from the fear of the cursed nazis and their despicable henchmen. At that moment we knew we had reached the end. The end of suffering and sorrow, humiliation and persecution, the end of the respect for humanity being downtrodden like an insect and the end to an atrocity.

And the beginning of all our dreams.

We breathed the air, it tasted of freedom. We looked up to the heavens, they had an infinite look of liberty. We embraced one another crying on each others shoulder.

Father, Chaim and myself stood embracing each other as one with incessant tears rolling down our cheeks like waterfalls. Tears of joy that it was all over, tears of sadness and sorrow for all our dear ones that died through suffering and did not merit to live to see this special moment.

Thus we stood, amazed, excited, overwhelmed, difficult to believe it was all behind us. Suddenly we heard the rumble of a car engine. Across the winding road was an American Jeep with four American soldiers inside.

We fell upon them embracing and kissing them and danced with them. They emptied everything out of their bags. Bread, chocolate, cigarettes and more which they gave us wholeheartedly. We hung around them, but they went away returning a short while later with a truck filled with provisions from the United States Army.

We tried to eat in a controlled manner so as not to harm ourselves. This was not easy, but if we wished to live, which we did, there was no other option. Unfortunately, there were those who were unable to control their ravenous hunger and indulged. Their shrunken stomachs could not digest the food properly and they died in severe pain.

After having realised that things had changed, we wandered through the German town. Anyone was able to walk into a German home and find hot food. Wherever we went there were boiled potatoes in their skins, called "Pal Kartofel". For several days we were sustained by these potatoes until our strength slowly returned. However, we were far removed from a normal situation, but an improvement in our condition was noticeable.

It was then father said to us, "Now, after you have been liberated, when there is no longer any danger to life, be careful not to eat non Kosher. We may not eat meat or touch anything that is not Kosher."

Amongst the survivors were Russian prisoners. They, unlike the Jews knew exactly how to avenge the Germans and what to do to the German girls and women. Their revenge knew no limits. Whatever they could avenge, they did. They took the cows and the pigs out of their pens killed them all, cooked them and gorged themselves endlessly.

The American soldiers understanding our predicament, for three days after the liberation allowed us to take anything we wanted out of the Germans homes and do whatever we pleased. But we did not touch anything. We saw German money, but thought it would be worthless, therefore did not take it. In general, we did not avenge the Germans. Integrity is definitely a Jewish

characteristic. Whilst the Russians were looting, we were searching for food and for a means to survive.

The Americans tried to help to the best of their ability. At a certain point they brought the inhabitants of the town Zeishaupt, standing them in a line opposite the trains that were still bringing in the wounded, crushed, lame, weak and broken. They wanted to show the Germans what their brothers, perhaps their children or they themselves had done and how they changed human forms to skeletons and walking bones.

I watched how they looked at them and I knew that they had not witnessed any of the sea of terror. For anyone that was not there can never know or understand what occurred even in their wildest imagination or worst nightmares. Only one who was there knows it was another planet.

Several days after the liberation, a Jewish American Officer approached us. In that place he had gathered a group of survivors, amongst them father, Chaim and I, and sent us to Innsbruck, Austria. We arrived at a beautiful scenic place where we were taken to Hotel Wilderman. The transformation of life from the concentration camp and from the opening of the shadow of death to the hotel at Innsbruck was very extreme. We began to feel encouraged, to feel like people once again. There was a Rabbi of the American army there too, who arranged a kosher kitchen for the Jewish refugees, survivors of the holocaust. We began to return to civilisation. The dining room at the hotel on that first Shabbos with people, looking like human beings once again was phenomenal. Free and alive after a long, vicious and difficult war of pounding and hunger, of indescribable and unimaginable suffering, for words do not suffice. We stood there, in the hotel dining room, refugees, torn families, fragmented people, snatched from the burning fires, one from a village another from a town, everyone from another place, from another concentration camp, from under another window, all bowing under their memories, fears and fright. Jewry, beautiful and its entirety transformed to a shadow of mankind. Everyone

with their own story and no one believing this day would arrive when he would sit in the Hotel at Innsbruck waiting to hear Kiddush recited over a cup of wine.

Each of us stood there with our crushed world, with an infinite number of images passing through our mind, memories that would remain with us until our dying day, until we took our last breath. This was altogether a glorious and awesome situation. We stood there as representatives, purveyors of Jewish History. I felt, as did probably many others, that we were not alone waiting for the Shabbos Kiddush. For there in the room were the souls of every relative who was exterminated, murdered, burned alive and slaughtered hovering silently above like heavenly angels, filling the air to be with us, telling us to continue living. To live and to tell. Not to be silent but to relate, not to keep quiet but to narrate, not to be secretive but to recount until the last generation. To make it known throughout the whole wide world even in the most remote of places what happened to our nation. The irreversible horrors and the cup of poison we had to drink - until the end.

Suddenly, we were all gripped in awe, an inexplicable feeling that could be grasped. It seemed as if everyone felt exactly the same thing. As if from under the Heavenly throne, the Shabbos Queen hovered over her beloved children with all the angels around her, the ministering angels and angels of peace, angels from upon high and they came on a mission of the King of Kings the Holy One Blessed be He.

We all stood in holy awe, not believing that this was really happening, and to us. Is this possible? Live Jews standing at Kiddush and Kabbolas Shabbos (inauguration of Shabbos), without guards, dogs, persecution, beatings, shouting, guns, hunger, sickness, lice, cold, electrified fences, the stench, the smell of gas, rising smoke! Is this real! Are we here or was this a dream?

As we were standing waiting for Kiddush, a group of eleven girls from Hungary, all saved from the holocaust, came into the dining room, each one carrying a

heavy burden of sorrow, depressed and sighing. They lived on the floor above us and they came down to see the unforgettable scene, the strange, unique, one off experience. Seeing us, they burst into tears and we all cried with them. We all felt that we were one large imprisoned family. We all stood there, but in spirit were in our own city, street and home in all its glory which had been razed to the ground and become but flying particles dust.

The girls, so they told us after they had calmed down, felt sure there were no more Jews in the world as the nazis had exterminated them all. Yet, how surprised they were to see a group of Jews around the Shabbos lights and a Jew proudly about to recite Kiddush, a Kiddush filled with tears and emotion reliving the days bygone. They, together with everyone else, began to sing quietly, "Sholom Aleichem Malachei Hasholom .... (Peace be upon you angels of peace, angels of upon high...) Guard us angels, guard us that no more.....!

Then, father standing on his feet, holding in his trembling hand a cup of wine with a penetrating voice as of long ago, over the past hills of time and darkness, began reciting Kiddush, "Vayechulu Hashomayim v'ho'oretz ... (And the heavens and the earth and all the hosts were completed...)"

Until this very day, each Friday evening when I recite Kiddush over a cup of wine, I hear the echo of father's voice rising above the limits of time and space and the tune of the first Kiddush he recited in the dining room with all the people, a vision of the dry bones, "Vayechulu Hashomayim ... (And the heavens and the earth and all the hosts were completed...)"

It wasn't only I who felt that way, for everyone at that moment saw their home that had been crushed, their family that had turned to ashes. Everyone saw themselves standing there as family representatives.

This was a Kiddush the likes of which have never been seen in the world. A Kiddush by those who had returned to life.

Seventeen year old Rozie (Tsharne) Sobowicz was amongst the girls. All the trouble and the horrors of the life that she endured failed to dull her beauty.

At first glance a fire of love sparked up between us. That situation, that Kiddush fixed our lot, our fate, that we should deserve one another and continue together on the path of life. This is my wife Rozie, the mother of our children with whom we established a Jewish home amongst the Jewish People.

From the time we met that evening at Kiddush and got to know each other, ate lunch together in the hotel's kosher kitchen, we have been together - until 120, L-rd willing.

En passant, whilst we were still at the hotel we were concerned with our lack of clothes. We wanted to look like people from the town and to leave behind the degenerate look of the camps. I received an army uniform from an American soldier and with the help of this it was possible to get anything one wanted. I went to the shops and asked for clothes for father, Chaim and myself. I also brought clothes for the Hungarian girls, one of whom was still wearing her striped clothes from the death camp. When they went to town it was always in a group of ten girls, one of them always wearing this "range of clothes" which they wore in rote.

When it became known how I got the clothes, I became the knight in shining armour. True success. Naturally, I could not abandon them and therefore I brought clothes for each of them. It was then that I learned the meaning , "Clothes make a man". Everyone of us both men and women as soon as we had changed into our new clothes, already looked different and no less important, felt different and began feeling as a normal human being.

Truthfully, everything was normal, or so it seemed. On the surface we looked like residents of the town, however inwardly there was anguish and concealed large red rivers, endless rivers of Jewish blood which will continue to accompany us until the end of all days.

# PART 2

## ROZIE'S STORY

Up to this point I have told my life story and episodes of the dreadful holocaust.
In the forthcoming pages, will be related the story of that girl I met at the unforgettable Kiddush at Innsbruck, after G-d's salvation, the story of my wife, Rozie.

## Chapter One

## THE WORLD THAT SUNK

My full name is Tcharne Rochel. I was born in the city of Nogyeced, Hungary near Satmar on the Rumanian border. Our house was very religious and my father Avrohom Shloime Sobowits was a Wiznitzer Chosid. My mother Baila, was a woman of worth (Eshet Chayil) in the fullest sense of the word - even greater than in the way it is depicted in the Friday evening song. My parents raised four children, two sons and two daughters. I was a daughter of older parents.

One of my most pleasant memories which constantly remains with me was my oldest sister, Malka's wedding (the eldest daughter of the family) in 1932. I was five years old at the time and the first wedding at which I had participated. I not only took part in the joy, but was involved in all the preparations at home. The variety of food was abundant with all kinds of goodies, the goodwill demonstrated by all the relatives and neighbours and the wholehearted help they offered. Some helped in a practical way while others gave advice and it was an outstanding event.

Malka was beautiful, flowing with life and vigour, not only going to the wedding but in every aspect of her life. The wedding lasted for hours and many of the invited guests did not go home until dawn. Also something I will never forget was the custom of shaving off the bride's hair on the day following the wedding. Malka had long black hair, flowing, shining and beautiful. However, although I knew the law and customs, must admit that it was very difficult for me, to put it mildly, seeing my beautiful sister without hair on the day following the wedding.

The wedding and the week of Sheva Brochos (seven days of rejoicing following the wedding) disturbed our daily routine.

Father would get up at approximately 4.00 a.m. each day, whilst it was still dark outside, light a paraffin primus stove and heat up water for a cup of tea. My two brothers, Yechezkel, the eldest, and Yitzchok Hersh, woke up soon after. At 5.00 a.m. father would accompany them to Cheder. Father used a hand held paraffin lamp to light up the path, whose beam of light danced along the road and over the potholes. Outside the wet snow was coming down, it was very cold and my brothers went to study Torah at Cheder before they began their daily studies at school. Arriving at their destinations, father would to go the Beit Hamidrash (House of Study) where he studied Torah, recited Tehillim (Psalms) until dawn and he was able to daven Shacharis (morning prayers). On returning home, he would eat breakfast and at 7.30 a.m. go to work in the granary.

I left home at about that time to go to the neighbourhood government school which was attended by Jews and gentiles. I met my brothers Yechezkel and Yitzchok Hersh who would go there after leaving the Cheder in the morning.

The school was saturated in anti-Semitism. The boys who grew peyos (side curls) tried to hide them behind their ears so the gentiles would not pull them, a game they enjoyed. But, this did not save the Jewish children from being beaten up as they made their way home at the end of the school day. Even we girls were also bruised by stones, snow balls or anything they could lay their hands on to throw at us. It wasn't long before it became clear that all this was their training for the future.

Days came and went. Yechezkel became barmitzvah, was called up to the Torah, received his beautiful Tephillin and sent away to study Torah. He informed us that he no longer wished to continue studying at the government school and therefore was sent to a Yeshivah (College of advanced Jewish learning) in Kwestir. Life there was not at all easy, not mentioning the food or finance. Conditions were difficult and the poverty was great. Boys survived mainly on the gratitude of the "Eating Days" i.e. each boy would eat one

occasional mid-day meal at one generous person or another but often went to sleep on a grumbling empty stomach.

Additional childhood memories that remain with me are those before I reached the age of ten. It was a bright cold day and mother was preparing food for my brother in Yeshivah which she would send by post. Every so often mother would send "Mishloach Manot" (food parcels) in the middle of the year to my brother for she knew that there is nothing like mother's cooking and nothing tastes like home and nothing like the small things a child likes. I helped mother to pack these parcels each weighing ten kilograms. Yechezkel would always remember, on returning home, which wasn't too often, for his holidays were only twice a year at Pesach and Rosh Hashanah, to thank mother. The rest of the year the boys were too far from home, too deeply immersed in their world of Torah and their world which was being developed, guided, shaped and crystallised.

These Yeshivot, aside being a place to acquire Torah knowledge, was also the place for finding the best Shidduchim (matches). My brother, Yechezkel, was offered a shidduch whilst living in Yeshivah. He sent a telegram home with details of the bride and her family. My parents consulted with our uncle and a short while later, as was accepted in Chassidic circles, the parents met, made the necessary arrangements and fixed the date of the wedding in a good and auspicious time with Mazal Tov.

This was in 1938. The wedding took place in the city of Nagy-Bocko, Czechoslovakia at that time. The journey was difficult and arduous travelling for a whole day on a train through the colourful scenery of the countryside. Mother, as usual prepared good food, specifically for the long journey which we eagerly waited to eat, but something went wrong.

At one of the stations, where the train stopped for a few minutes, police boarded with an offender chained by his hands and feet. The train was crowded with passengers, the only space being in our compartment, they

sat down opposite us. The offender cast frightening looks at us during the entire journey that no only did we lose our appetite, we didn't even have the inclination to think about the wonderful food. Fortunately, after several hours, the police with their criminal disembarked at one of the station and our appetite returned once again

The train continued its journey and a short while later we dismounted with all our baggage and boarded a bus travelling towards the mountains, to the city where the wedding was to be held. The wedding was not a short affair, but a really substantial one. It began on Friday (Erev Shabbos) and lasted until Sunday. We stayed with the Mechutanim (in-laws) for a further two weeks. In reality, we would have liked to stay a few more days, but a border war broke out between Hungary and Rumania, and therefore, we decided to return home quickly. This wasn't easy. It is not easy to travel from city to city during wartime. The trains were needed for transporting soldiers and those drafted to the army and left with no choice, parts of the journey had to be made on foot.

The journey was very difficult for mother. She became very weak. It was then that I first realised how frail and weak mother was. Nevertheless, we continued, and reached a small town by the name of Hodes where my brother Yitzchok Hersh was a teacher for young boys at Cheder. He welcomed us into his humble abode, ensuring we could rest and provided us with some good suggestions how to continue our journey home.

However, our luck improved and we were fortunate in getting a train which took us home. The journey left its mark on mother. Her health continued to deteriorate. Seeing this, I decided to taken on the responsibility of running the house, although I was only eleven years old.

Once I had made up my mind, nothing could stop me. I awoke early each morning, cleaned the house, cooked, washed, organised the clothes, ensured that there was drinking water from the well which came from the city centre and water for general use from the well in the

courtyard. I looked after mother, kneaded the dough for the bread and for the plaited Shabbos challos.

These were just a few of the many household chores and during all that time, I continued studying diligently at school in order to achieve good results. Occasionally, mother needed to spend a few days in hospital after which she would return home, although she wasn't in the best of health. I, being the youngest, never complained. I accepted the yoke of responsibility with devotion for I understood that was the way it was supposed to be.

At that time, my brother Yechezkel and his wife came to us. Their home was on the Czech border, but they decided to move to us because of the fear of him being drafted into the army. Travelling was difficult, riding for many days in wagons, walking and hitching the occasional ride. My sister-in-law found the journey extremely difficult for she was in the ninth month of her pregnancy. They managed to reach our house and a few days later Leah gave birth to a baby girl. They remained with us for two months after which they returned home. During that time, mother's condition continued to deteriorate. Neither prayer nor medication helped. Mother passed away at the end of 1941 at the age of fifty five. We cried for her alot and still cry for her today, for a young beautiful mother that left our world so early. However, who knows, perhaps G-d took her for He had pity on her, saving her from the horrors we endured in the days to come.

The general situation continued to become more severe. The situation for Jews in Hungary was very bad. The fascist Police looked for ways to make life difficult for the Jews. Its men recorded everything in detail. There wasn't an area of our lives where we did not see signs of bitter hatred to the Jews because they were Jews. Jewish children were not allowed to study at the public school. I was thirteen at the time and left with no choice, I had to stop studying and concentrate on the responsibility placed on me - a child being the mainstay of the house. I had the whole responsibility of the never ending household chores

and to whom the complaints came when things were not done properly. If that wasn't enough, the snake of anti-Semitism and of the Fascist movement reared its ugly head. The food situation got worse until it was decided to ration the food and coupons were distributed.

The number of coupons allocated was meagre, the hunger was great and there was no choice but to break the law. My brother Yitzchok Hersh returned home from the city where he worked and began to forge food coupons. The work was done at night, behind closed windows and curtains ensuring the light should not be seen outside. We knew, if we were caught we would face the death penalty. But, the hunger was greater than the fear. The forged coupons were mainly used for obtaining sugar. One night as we were working on the forgeries, we never realised that a crack of light shone out of the window. Suddenly, a loud knock was heard on the door. Our hearts sank. Before opening the door we hurriedly hid the equipment so no-one should find out what we were doing. We then carefully went to open the door. On our way we heard the Hungarian Gendarmes shouting at us to put out the light. The darkness served as a means of defence against attacks from the air.

We breathed a sigh of relief. The Hungarian police did not even come into the house and were able to resume the forgeries once again.

We did not use these coupons for ourselves, but to trade with in order to earn some money that we may live better and gather together some money for bribery should it ever be needed.

My brother sold the forged coupons at a set place in the nearby city of Cruals for which he received a decent sum and the other person made a reasonable profit from it too. But, it wasn't only the manufacturing that was fraught with danger, but passing them on too. My brother had to pass the coupons out of the reach of prying eyes, I would therefore open up the seam of his coat, place the coupons inside and restitch it as if nothing had happened. When my brother reached his destination, he undid the stitching and so it repeated itself. Truthfully,

every trip to Croatia tore a part of our lives from us from great fear. The heart beat like a drum orchestra, the nerves were stretched to their limit, for just a small error and our lives were in danger.

At that time, father gave up the grain business and began to deal in alcohol. This was also an illegal business, but Jewish hatred was also illegal according to any measure of humanity. These two businesses, coupon forgeries and selling illegal drink, provided us with the capacity to survive. Father would purchase the necessary goods, bring them home and as result we would be spared the pangs of hunger.

We didn't know that in a short time the shadow of hunger would accompany us wherever we went. The Second World War was at its height and the warfront was at full force. In 1944, close to the festival of Pesach, after the Germans occupied Hungary rumours began to spread that the Jews would soon be expelled from our city. It is difficult to explain, but apart from the rumours, an atmosphere prevailed too, suggesting that this was due to happen.

Then events began rapidly. One Thursday evening, Erev Pesach (eve of Passover), my nephew came to us, he was six years old, travelling alone by train from home, a distance of about forty kilometres. He had to change twice in order to get to our town which was no easy task for a child of that age, but he considered it a great honour, in order to save my father, his grandfather.

We were most astonished to see him and asked him worriedly, "What's happened? How did you get here? Why have you come?" The child, as he had been told, filling his mouth with water only asked, "Where's Zaide (grandfather)?" "At Shul" , we replied, "he will be home soon". "I shall wait for him", he said, "they told me only to tell him."

After a short while, father returned home from Ma'ariv (evening service). He too was most surprised to see his grandson at our house and was worried when he heard how he got there. "Zaide, I want to tell you something", the child said. My father bent his head to

listen and the child related, "this morning Hungarian Police officers came to us and began questioning mother, one of them being, what do you do, Zaide, how do you support your family. Mother said, from this she understood they were intending to come to your house and she sent me to warn you so that you may do all that is necessary to avoid any problems".

Zaide kissed his head and gave the signal. We immediately began to work hastily and remove anything which aroused suspicion from the house. We knew that when the Hungarian Police arrived, nothing would be allowed to be removed from the house until they found something with which to incriminate us. Therefore, we transferred all our valuables to a gentile neighbour to look after until the threat had passed. We thought we could trust her, for she always received favours from us, be it money, clothes or food, and she worked for us for Shabbos. It goes without saying that these valuables were never returned to us.

The police, as we suspected, came to the house, not only to investigate father's business, but also to identify the whereabouts of my brother, Yitzchok. It was sometime since my brother had been called up to serve in the war and avoided it. But there was an additional reason for their request.

As a result of an informer, the Hungarian Police had successfully caught a young Jewish girl who was in partnership with my brother in the food coupon forgeries. The police interrogated her cruelly, torturing her until she broke and gave the name of my brother, Yitzchok Hersh. We had already been advised about her arrest and interrogation before the police had managed to squeeze the information out of her. We knew it was only a matter of time before they would come after him and therefore my brother decided to run away quickly and to find refuge at my sister Malka's house in the nearby city.

Sure enough, what we anticipated happened, during Chol Hamoed Pesach (the intermittent days of Passover) Festival of Liberation. What a festival of liberation! The police arrived at our house looking for my

brother and to arrest him. They never found him and we made out as if we had no idea what they were talking about. Whilst they were still searching the house I went out with two girlfriends, the sisters Vera and Elizabeth Stern, to Malka's house. In spite of walking quickly, it still took us a full three hours. We arrived tired and worn out, and found Yitzchok Hersh there. We told him about the police visit and warned him to run away for they were on his heels and determined to catch him.

We stayed with Malka overnight and the next day, the seventh day of Pesach, we began walking back so that we could get back to the Shul in time to say Yizkor (remembrance prayer) for mother.

As soon as Yom Tov was over, father travelled with a horse and cart to my sister's house to bring my brother back home. He found him in the loft and sat together with him, thinking that the Hungarian Police would not return as he was not found in the house.

The day after Pesach, when father returned from Shul, he told us in great fright, that notices were posted over all the city streets that forbade Jews to leave their homes and gentiles were forbidden to enter Jewish homes.

This was a signal that we were about to be expelled from the city.

## Chapter Two

## THE SIGHT AND THE STENCH

My brother decided that he was not waiting to be expelled nor to go the work camps. One thing was definite. The moment he would be found out, the forgeries would stop for he would be severely punished. Therefore, the following morning I went to the Shochet (ritual slaughterer) to slaughter the few turkeys we had in our yard roasting one for my brother so that he should have food for the unknown journey he was about to make.

Whilst my father went to bid my brother farewell and bless him, that G-d should make his journey successful, kissing him one more time in the hope it would not be the last time they saw each other, I managed to clean all the Pesach utensils and pack them into cartons for storage. I then took the heavy cartons up to the loft and I was only fifteen years old at the time.

I then brought down the Chametz utensils and put them in place so everything should be back to normal. After a short time, I realised how naive I had been. Two days before the expulsion, I worked day and night working to organise the Pesach utensils neatly in the loft, a job that needed two strong men and not a young girl like myself, but I did it. I cleaned the house as if we were going on a normal vacation, to visit relatives or the like and on our return would be pleased to find the house neat and tidy. We had no inkling what awaited us.

Then the expulsion order came. The Nazis and their subordinate Hungarian officers curtly ordered us, "Only take what you can carry in your hands and get out of your homes!"

I didn't even have enough time to cook the other turkeys we had slaughtered. In the coming days when the hunger persisted, I thought about them with a feeling of regret.

We left our homes with a small bundle in our hands, not knowing where we were going, what fate had

in store for us, how we would live, how long we would be there and whether we would return, if at all. Events moved so quickly that one's mind could not grasp all that was happening, exactly the Germans' intention - not giving people time to think, but simply to follow, obey orders and act just like robots.

Before I had time to see where I was and what was happening to me, they had us all roughly loaded, pushing and shouting, on wagons attached to horses, towards Mateszalka ghetto. Some of us looked back and saw our gentile neighbours watching the expulsion with great pleasure and satisfaction. Even before the wagons were all on their way, neighbours were already looting our forlorn homes.

Father and I arrived at Mateszalka Ghetto meeting up with my sister Malka and her children, three sons aged six, four and two years and an eight month old daughter, two days later. They put forty of us in one small room. It was tight, crushed with no room to move. Sardines in a can felt more comfortable than we felt in this room. One touching the other. No privacy, like chickens in a coup. After some days we were fortunate in meeting up with my sister-in-law Leah, my brother Yechezkel's wife and her two and a half year old daughter. Yechezkel was not with her as he had been sent to the work camp. We began looking for my brother Yitzchok Hersh who left the city on the night before the expulsion. Nobody knew where he was, had heard of him or saw him. A fortnight later we received news that he had been imprisoned together with other Jews on suspicion or criminals, by the rulers. We enquired where the prison was and found out where it was in the ghetto. We managed to get close to the place looking over the high wall and saw him. We called out to him and he came closer and managed to exchange a few words before the guards moved him away from the fence.

After that meeting we never saw him again whilst we were in the ghetto. It soon became very clear to us that we were the only ones who thought we were members of the human race, for our cruel captors were of

another opinion. They together with their accomplices, the Hungarian police, being eager to find silver, gold and precious stones on us, did not hesitate subjecting us to brutal and degrading searches. We had two bodily searches, whilst we were totally naked, men, women and children together making us feel worse than animals. They attempted to erase our human dignity. Leading us like cattle, they tried to undermine any elementary feeling of humanity we possessed, all because we were Jews.

The pain and shame were unbelievable. But until my last day I will remember one of the painful sights I ever endured. Throughout my life I saw father as a respectable Jew with a long beard. However, when I saw him shaved, without a beard, my heart broke inside me and I couldn't bear to see him looking like that. Was this my father? The shock was terrible. I lost my identity and only with great effort did my spirit return. My sister went into a deep depression. One day she showed me a large room next to the ghetto office. Glancing through a crack in the wall, we saw the room was stacked with iron chains and shackles. At the sight of this room and its propensity, my sister began to tremble in fright and cried uncontrollably. She was convinced that they were meant for us and we would shortly put in these heavy chains. However, it is impossible to justify to a confused woman and I didn't think otherwise either. The truth is we had no idea what else the warped Nazi minds would find to degrade us. And this was nothing in comparison to what awaited us.

We endured seven difficult weeks were in the ghetto. Hardship? When we were driven from there to Auschwitz, we understood that life in the ghetto was like Gan Eden (Paradise) in contrast to the death camps.

The day of the expulsion to Auschwitz arrived. Crushed, pushed and squeezed into the cattle cars, one hundred and twenty people were squeezed in, one on top of another. Without water or air. The children cried endlessly and the adults were helpless. The children did not understand what was happening. They pleaded for a

drop of water and our hearts broke. There were no minimal hygienic standards in the wagons. Our cries went up to heaven. The train stopped every few hours, and whoever had the guts to complain about the inhumane travel conditions, was shot and killed on the spot. Withstanding the discomfort silently was the German objective, to break our willpower and antagonism thus enabling them to fulfil anything they fancied without distraction.

The endless journey lasted four days ending when the train stopped at the platform of Auschwitz-Birkenau. The doors of the cars opened and facing us, we beheld a confusing sight, for we had no idea whether this was real or perhaps had reached the world to come. Groups of young Jewish men dressed in blue and white striped shirts with a large striped hat on the heads with a white patch and number marked on it. After some moments, we noticed the same number on their chest which was the personal number of each "Katzenik" as those wearing the numbers were called. Their faces were sad to look at. They asked us meekly to get off the wagons and helped us too. The Germans stood next to them, the arterial vein in their necks protruding to bursting point, shouting endlessly like robots, "Raus shnell" (Out quickly).

Most of the people took their small worthless bundle with them. They separated the men and women ordering us to stand in perfectly straight lines - five women in each row.

From that separation, I never saw my father again (may Hashem avenge his blood). In that split second, lots were cast, families torn apart forever, children torn from their mother's arms, husbands separated from their wives and entire patterns of life uprooted. There wasn't even enough time to think, for everything was done so quickly and efficiently. Shouting, orders, gunfire and then we were told to leave our bundles on the platform and take one step forward.

My sister stood next to me. I was holding her baby daughter and with the other hand, tightly holding on

to one of her children. She held onto her two other children. When we were ordered to march forward, we did so together. We looked to the right and left and we were afraid. A sight that made your hair stand on end. We saw mountains of men, women and children's shoes, a tall pyramid of glasses, combs, wallets and suitcases. Our hearts suddenly began thumping. We went over to a mountain of human hair, blonde with black, piles of plaits. We were afraid to ask what happened to the women that had their hair shaved, were they still alive? Where were the men with the beauty of their heads cast away like a despicable creature? Where were the children whose curly peyos (sidelocks) were rolling in the heap?

There was no time to think. Once again we were roughly led and brought to a huge iron gate over which was written, "Arbeit Macht Frei" (Work makes free). We marched across the gate and saw a Nazi officer, nicely dressed wearing a white coat with white gloves with a leather strap under his arm. He signalled with his hand to go right or left.

This was Mengele.

After some time, I found out that this adversary would decide the fate of men, women and children who should live and who should die.

My sister, the children and I stood in one row drawing nearer to him.

He turned to us and asked "How old are you?"

"Sixteen", I replied.

The Nazi, with his evil glance directed towards me asked quietly and in ominous tones, "This baby yours? "No", I replied in fear, "It is my sister's baby". "Give her to me!" he ordered.

He pointed with his finger. Right - left. One right, one left. I here, my sister and children there. At that time I did not know this was the difference between life and death. All I knew was they were separating me from my sister and her children. That was the last time we saw each other. My sister and her young children parting, the distance increasing between us. She went, bent over, burdened with all the troubles of the world

thereafter on her shoulders. She went to her death together with her children. She stopped suddenly, for a moment, threw me a glance that spoke for itself. I looked at her, a strong, one, sole single look - the last look.

A glance full of expression, which wrenches the heart and says that the moment of truth has arrived. The minute after which nothing will be the same again. A glance beyond all boundaries of human existence or imagination, beyond the distance of light or dark years that accompanied me from then on until this very day. My sister and her children died cruelly, but the look consoles me.

He continued to signal right and left - "who will live and who will die, who in their time and who not in their time, who with water and who with fire who with strangulation and who with stoning....." (From the High Holy day liturgy prayers) and no-one to annul the evil of the decree.

Following the selection they took us all the women, into a large hall and ordered us to undress totally, as the day we were born. We began to cry, to scream and to protest loudly. We were all modest girls and afraid of the thought of standing naked, full of shame and embarrassment, facing the prying eyes of the Nazi men. Their replied quickly, beating us with their sticks and canes mercilessly and cruelly. The pain was awful and we all understood, silence reined.

The Jewish Katzenkim then approached us holding scissors and razors. They shaved off all our hair beginning with the hair on the head and ending with any other place where hair grows. We looked at one another and did not recognise each other. Afterwards, we walked silently and in amazing succession towards the showers. We opened the faucets and freezing cold water came out. We showered in this for there was no choice. a strange smell emanated from the water, seemingly like some disinfectant which they had mixed with it.

The denigration was awful. The depression infiltrated the soul. It was already night. After the

shower, each one of us received a grey dress, a belt and a pair of shoes with wooden soles. There were no undergarments and the cold penetrated our bones. We trembled from cold and fear. We were not given much time to think about our new circumstances. A few moments later, we were ordered to walk in groups of five towards the camp huts. In these huge huts were three levels of wooden bunks, a small place that the Nazis had designated, for thirteen women no less, for each bunk. We were so tired after all we had endured during the course of the day that we fell onto the bunks into a nightmarish sleep.

At 4 am we heard awful cries, "Get up!, Get up!" - We jumped off the bunks and hurried outside to be organised for the morning parade. The cold was biting. They constantly shouted at us, frightened us and threatened us. When the sun rose we were able to see one another in the light of day, shaven - we could not believe where the beauty and grace of the women had disappeared to, how we had degenerated under the hands of the Nazi brutes.

The cold outside got worse, and it appeared the parade was endless. Standing in the cold, inappropriately dressed, unable to move and warm up. This was also part of the punishment for being Jewish. This parade continued until 9 am when we were released to go back to the huts where we received breakfast. A concoction that was accompanied by some bitter tea, lacking colour, with some leaves floating in it.

The Block Altester, (Officer of the hut) went in and announced, "All of you remain here, nobody move. The Lager Altester (Camp officer) is about to come and speak to you."

A few minutes later a young, good looking, tall woman with hair on her head came out. She was a veteran of this camp and spoke some Hungarian. She introduced herself and to our amazement this was her speech.

"Animals such as yourselves! Have you ever thought that you are never going to return to your homes, your parents,

your family! Forget it! You see this chimney?" she said pointing towards a chimney belching out smoke. "You see the smoke rising from it? At this moment you will find those Jews who arrived with you from Hungary, amongst them, your close family and many that have been cut off."

She then turned on her heels and left.

The smell of the smoke was terrible. We knew, without having to be told that at that moment, people were being cremated, their flesh disintegrating, fats flowing and bones falling apart. These were people we knew, faces and names. Fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters. These are the children of our people. Until today, decades after having come out of the most dreadful place on earth, I am still unable to free myself of that dreadful smell, it is as if it clings to the body and soul as if it flows in our blood. So much so, that the smell of anything roasted immediately reminds me of that smell, the smell of death, the stench of the hell and abyss.

A short while later, we were amazed to receive food. Each person was given half a loaf of bread covered in sawdust, but it was still sufficient to satisfy us as the hunger was very severe, a piece of margarine, and a piece of salami. These were provisions for a journey, for it wasn't long before we were crowded onto cattle trucks once again. This time we were fortunate, there were only fifty women to a wagon.

After several hours of travelling, we reached Krakow - Plashow concentration camp. It was also a camp with huts, and one in which more people entered its gates than left.

## Chapter Three

## WALKING SKELETONS

Kharkov-Plashow was a large camp. There were Jews from Poland, men and women, some of whom had been there a long time, as long as their strength held out. They divided us into the huts, large wooden planks extremely squashed. Living conditions for animals, at best. We received bread and a piece of salami. I immediately fell on the food, and after a short while, began to feel ill. The most terrible stomach cramps gripped me. No-one took any notice. Everyone was only concerned for themselves, everyone fought their own battle of survival. I felt so awful with no one to turn to, no shoulder to lay my head upon, no hand to wipe the sweat from my brow and no ear to listen to my cries. I was miserable and helpless. I burst into tears, but that did not make it easier. The warmth of my home and family cruelly crushed and shattered beyond belief, rose before me. I only had one great question. Why? What terrible sin had we committed that this should happen to us?

Krakow-Plashow was one of the worst camps. Not that there was ever a good camp but here the rigours reached new heights and the human degradation incomparable to anything. For example, we were taken out of the camp daily to perform physical back breaking work, dig canals, hew stones. Without knowing the purpose of the work that had been imposed upon us from morning to night.

After some time the purpose of the trenches we dug was clarified. Trucks closed with black tarpaulins loaded with people were brought. The people were quickly unloaded and before they realised what was happening, rifles were aimed and fired at them. Some of them died instantly, others were severely wounded and began to tremble, flowing in blood. The Nazis went over to those trembling and shot them through their head. No-one was left alive from that transport. Another transport

arrived and the same atrocity was repeated. The corpses were cast into the trenches that we had dug and they were quickly covered in earth and rocks. Amongst those that were thrown into the trenches were some who were still alive. These shocking sights pursued us in nightmares and did not leave us alone. Some days we were comforted with the knowledge that at least these were returned to the earth and did not become a cloud of dust, soap nor their ashes spread over the contaminated land of Germany as fertiliser.

If that was not enough, the smell of gas hovered constantly in the air which stifled our throat and lungs. At first we had difficulty acclimatising, but we quickly learned and understood that if we wished to live there was no choice but to try and cope with the fear until the opportunity to escape may arise. This was the name of the lottery game, existence.

Because so many people were coming to this place, thousands of others beside ourselves, the camp and new huts were hastily built. It appears that the builders of the hut in which we were, did not do their work properly due to the speed and one night whilst we were lying in the bunks, almost lifeless from the hard labour, the entire construction collapsed, three tiers of bunks. Tens of women fell on top of one another on to the hard concrete floor. Pieces of wood pierced the body, many braking their hands and feet, shoulders and pelvic bones. The crying from the pain pierced the heavens of the gloomy night, but no-one bothered to come and help us. In fact, why would our bodies burn differently when our bones are broken? To my great fortune, aside from bruises, I did not break any bones in my body and was able to help others to get up and share in their terrible pain for there was nothing else one could do.

At one point, the head of the camp came, a couple by the name of Hilowics to assess the wounded. As the women cried and complained about their terrible pain, they replied with a satanic grin, "All that's happened to you here, is nothing compared to what awaits you!"

After the liberation, we were afforded a little satisfaction when we found out that this couple were killed by the Germans too.

As a result of the collapse of the bunks, we were spread out amongst the other huts and so I happened to meet two old friends from the past who had disappeared, Vera and Elizabeth Stern. These were the two sisters who accompanied me to my sister's home on Chol Hamoed Pesach (intermediate days of Passover), to warn my brother that they were looking for him. The meeting with Vera and Elizabeth was some compensation for the lost senses and the helplessness that accompanied me during those days in the camp. In the middle of it all, I was suddenly able to return and grasp the past which was like a rosy dream and certainly in comparison to the frightening present. Together we were able to overcome the oppressive loneliness. They also relied on me somewhat. They had not mastered Yiddish, thus, when two sisters asked me to translate, this too brought us closer.

So much so, that one day they suggested to me, "We are so close, perhaps we should be sisters and even change your surname to Stern."

I burst out in bitter laughter, "Change a name, who has a name here, we are all numbers!" One day, feeling depressed and downhearted and even worse, hungry, I wandered around the camp. I was kicking the sand when suddenly I noticed a shining ring, quickly, looking right and left to be sure no-one saw me, I picked it up and hid it in my pocket. It was a gold ring.

With the valuable treasure in my pocket, I felt rather confused. On one hand, if anyone knew what I had in my pocket, they would not let me live a moment longer, for it was a capital offence to have anything valuable. On the other hand, a gold ring was a comprehensive treasure for one who wanted life even if it was only for one day.

There were a select number Jews in the camp who were goldsmiths by trade, that worked for the Germans with the gold confiscated from the Jews. Secretly, I approached one of them and told him about the

treasure I had found. He was prepared to buy it from me for eighteen Zloti. I handed him the ring on the spot, received the money and hurried to buy a loaf of bread from someone trustworthy whom I knew, and did some small business under the Germans noses.

Taking the bread and hiding it beneath my clothes, I ran back to our hut. There, away from prying eyes, the three of us sat and divided the bread to delight in a royal feast. A complete loaf of bread! That bread satisfied our hunger, raised our spirits and made us momentarily forget where we were and what awaited us. At that time we were sent in groups to do farm work in the fields and in the plantations. Much more pleasant work then digging trenches and occasionally managed to steal a succulent tasty and refreshing pear into the camp, that raised our morale and even gave us hope that better days lay ahead, all, the result of a loaf of bread and a pear.

Our hopes were soon quashed. In July 1944 they loaded us onto a freight train, with wagons bursting from the number of people squeezed inside and once again on a journey to an unknown destination. Six complete days we travelled in this awful train, without a drop of water, our throats were parched from thirst and all this in the heat of hell. The heat and sweat in the wagon were unbearable. Strangely, what helped us was the perspiration rising to the ceiling, forming fine drops of water. These drops of water got larger and began dripping. We stood with our faces upwards, tongues stretched out to catch the flowing drops and moisten our lips overcoming our thirst which was worse than the starvation. Thus, we were lucky to survive. Those less fortunate, expired and their corpses were thrown out of the wagons at one of the stations. Who would have thought that I would need to drink my own perspiration.

In spite of everything, I wanted to live. Many of us began the journey as women and ended up as lifeless bodies. I managed to survive and was amongst those who got off at the final stop. Auschwitz-Birkenau. It a was there I often wondered whether it was worthwhile remaining alive just to reach this awful place.

We disembarked the train as walking skeletons, ghostly spirits, shadows of men, skin and bones, worthless. There were those who lost their minds from the pain and suffering. They had lost the will to live and nothing bothered them as long as this awful nightmare would end.

As for myself, I felt like I was a stride away from death. Upon arriving at Auschwitz, I immediately found myself standing once again before the satan Mengele, who with a wave of a finger decided who should live and who should die. He glanced at me and decided that my fate should be death. His finger signalled me to go towards the group selected for the gas chamber and the crematorium.

Because of my terrible frailty I began to walk in the direction of this group without taking any notice of what my fate would be. Walking with my last ounce strength on earth, bereft of energy, automated and mechanical. When suddenly, I felt somebody pulling strongly at my neck. Looking behind me in surprise confusion, I noticed my good friend Goldie Farkash, who recognised me from the Mateszalka Ghetto. She realised I was walking towards death without recognising this was my final journey. She knew that this was a journey without an exit, glancing here and there, noticing that for a split second the Nazis were busy with something else, she dragged me from the line and quickly pushed me into the line that she was walking, the line heading towards the camp. The line of life. However, a life full of pain and suffering, but life.

"Idiot!" she shouted at me. "Where are you going? That is the line of death!" I didn't answer her. I was too weak to do so. From that day on I do not know how to thank her for on that day I was reborn.

Afterwards, the usual things happened. Delousing, showering the entire body. This time we didn't protest or cry. We knew it wouldn't help. We were accustomed to the most degrading things. Besides, we were so frail and tired, we didn't have the willpower or ability to cry Once again we were allocated wooden huts.

Approximately a thousand women to each, terribly squashed.

This was the gypsy camp. (The day before we arrived, there were thousands of gypsies.) The night before we arrived they exterminated them all with gas and burned them in the crematorium. After several months I was informed that not very far from there, in the nearby camp, a young lad, whom I was to marry in the future, heard the cries and shouts of those gypsies on their last journey.

The truth is at first, we had seen enough. Life in the gypsy camp was much quieter than the Krakow-Plashow camp. There was less physical and emotional strain. But we saw our merciless end constantly before us, the tall chimneys endlessly bellowing smoke and the awful smell that pervaded the atmosphere that clung to our bodies. We breathed it and it hurt. We knew exactly what was going on there. Often, when a transport of Jews arrived and passed the selection, the smoke began to rise in large clouds. We were sure that those who had just arrived were already making their way to the infinite heavens.

On the other side of our camp, was a men's camp, fenced off with a tall electrified wire fence. Each morning we would see bodies of Jews who could stand it no longer, having ended their lives by running into the fence. The electricity was only switched on from the late evening until early morning, for those wishing to end their lives did so during those hours. Death was instantaneous. This was a wall of death for the forms of man, downtrodden with nothing to lose, after their will to live had long been lost.

During daylight hours, the fence was not electrified, therefore, people would use the opportunity to approach the fence to find out who was alive and who had passed on to the next world. Everyone searched for one another. Names flew from one side of the fence to the other. No-one knew who was alive and who was dead and when there was news to convey, according to the cries or

the joy expressed one was able to distinguish between the good news or the bad, the majority being bad.

Also, if someone received news that one of their relatives was still alive, there was no guarantee that they would live to the morning. For, during the night, people fell and collapsed in the huts, weak, sick, sacrifices from the anguish of hunger, slain by the bitter cold, dead from a heaviness of heart. Each morning two men, prisoners of the camp went from hut to hut removing at least ten bodies from each hut. They wore gloves, grabbed each body by its head and feet and pulled them up as if they were sacks of potatoes, without a G-dly form, that only hours before still had a breath of life. Having made one tall heap or several heaps, two other inmates arrived, pushing a large wooden car, transferring the heaps onto the wagon. They loaded on as many as possible and brought them straight to the crematorium. Perhaps it would still be possible to make them into soap, perhaps something was still hidden in their intestines, so their death should not have been in vain.....

We were in Auschwitz-Birkenau for six weeks. Each day was an eternity. Each painful day began at 4.00 am, when they would wake us from our troubled sleep and took us out into the bitter cold. We stood there for a long time in a numbered order. This parade lasted four hours. In order to protect ourselves from the cold which cut into our live flesh, we stayed close to one another. We hugged and literally stuck to one another to absorb each others warmth. The first and last in line changed from time to time, they went into the line. For the first in line was exposed to the cold from the front and the last was exposed from the back and therefore these changes helped to preserve some body heat so we did not freeze from the cold.

Several days later they tattooed our flesh with a number. This was done with a needle and ink on the left arm. The personal numbers were in sequence. The stamping was done by of the young Jewish female inmates who were experts in this field. However, stamping this number, like herds of cattle was very painful and after

some days we had blisters from the needle pricks, but at least this was a definite guarantee of life, for this testified that we has been designated to work.

Above all there was the will to continue living. Anyone who was not totally broken dreamed of salvation and freedom. The interpretation of the dream was to breath the air of freedom, to merit the great moment when the downfall of the enemy of humanity would be seen.

There were minor happy events on the way. For example, in the course of time we were transferred to block number 25, situated close to the lavatories. This was an improvement to our situation for without underwear we were constantly freezing cold, which increased the number of times we needed to visit the lavatories and it was pleasure to have them nearby.

In the passage of time, we had the pleasure of meeting old friends. Goldie, whom I have already mentioned earlier and there were others too. We sat and talked. We spoke about the food and we settled into illusions about different foods. In the eyes of our spirit we imagined how we were sitting at a table as people of the village with whole loaves of bread before us and being able to eat as much as we wished. Next to the bread were fine dishes of butter and honey and we were able to spread the bread thickly with the butter and honey. With each bite we displayed our white healthy teeth. Oh! What a sweet dream, the sweetest dream on the face of the earth. Bread, butter and honey in limitless supply.

In the course of our illusion we did not forget, naturally, the Hungarian dish "Poprikas Krumpli". We only needed to mention it by name and we could smell its aroma in the air.

However, on awakening from these dreams we once again fell into the abyss of reality and despair, but on the other hand, there were occasions when we could pass the time pleasantly. Such small moments, were words, a mere dream.

## Chapter Four

## THE PRAYER BOOK AND THE KNIFE

One day, when I had the opportunity to wander around the huts, I found relatives, or those were of the past. On this occasion, I met a young girl who knew my brother Yitzchok Hersh. She had no idea what happened to him, but this mutual recognition brought us closer. This girl had an important role in the camp. She was responsible for distributing the soup. The one and only explanation of the soup was - life. Thus, after speaking about my brother, she invited me into her hut giving me a large portion of soup that revived my spirit. However, we were aware that the Nazis had mixed some medication into the soup to increase our depression. The truth is, there was no necessity to help our depression - for all that had happened to us and the environment in which we were at present was ample and more than enough to cause depression, but the medication had side effects too. We were dazed, we lost our monthly cycle and we reacted like zombies, which is exactly what these villains wanted.

There was the physical hard, back breaking work. Each day we went out to work with the sole purpose being to aimlessly move heavy stones from place to place. For hours we dragged rocks, strained our muscles and wounded our hands until the blood flowed. It was impossible to slacken from the work for the SS watched over every action carefully and the moment someone did not work as they wanted them to, they set their vicious dogs on them.

Returning to camp from work we were also accompanied by the Nazis and their dogs. On entering the camp, we were faced with the ironic sign "Arbeit Macht Frei" (Works makes Free) and to the butt of a Jewish choir, all prisoners, splendid music was heard. Their sentiments were, to add to the pain and suffering, they wished to take pleasure in mocking us and laughing at our situation. On one hand music and on the other, non

stop smoke rising from the chimneys. Burning and singing, only warped satanic minds can do something like this.

One day a special parade was arranged, at which two hundred women were taken out of the camp. The SS came to this parade together with civilian dressed Germans. No-one knew the purpose of the inspection and for what purpose the women were required. No-one thought it necessary to tell us anything. What are we after all? Dust, creatures living on borrowed time. We were afraid of this inspection, not just fear of the unknown, but also, for any change by the Nazis can only be for the worse. Even worse than the situation in which we were. I was amongst those selected for an unknown assignment together with my good friend Goldie and another young girl from my town. The two Stern sisters, my good friends were not chosen for this group although they desperately wanted to be part of it, if only that we could remain together. After separating us from the rest we were given a complete loaf of bread, margarine and salami. As a result of this we realised that we were destined for work, for had we been fated for death, we would not have been given this food. We were then taken to the infamous goods train and went out on a journey together with two hundred women, one hundred and eighty from Hungary and twenty from Poland.

We also had a Siddur with us on the journey. One of the city girls guarded this most important treasure - a small siddur which with all our moving around and travelling she had successfully hidden from the Nazis. She had kept it top secret and revealed its existence to us. This siddur was our symbol of our Jewishness. In the siddur was listed the Jewish festivals and their dates, those we were able to know, from time to time more or less, approximately during which period we found ourselves. Not only did we have a siddur but a knife blade without a handle too. We cut a loaf of bread in half removed the inside hiding the siddur inside and closed it with the soft bread.

We guarded the siddur more than anything and who knows, perhaps it was protecting us. The train journey lasted several days until we reached the German city of Rochlitz. There awaited for us a new hut that had been specially erected for us. Upon the wooden bunks were straw mattresses and a blanket. A five star hotel, literally, for when was the last time we slept on a mattress? After a short while, the purpose of our mission was clarified. To teach us to work on the special machines and the fine drills for preparing replacement parts of aircraft. This was very important work for the Germans. For the work, we had to learn its design from a German instructor. When we had mastered the work, we began working in three shifts. Each shift was eight hours long, no longer, in order not to jeopardise the work due to its delicate nature. For that reason the shifts were changed weekly making it impossible to complain about the continuous nightwork.

Twenty Polish women in the group who were more accustomed to the camps than we were, did not go out to work in the factory, but remained in the huts and were selected for various domestic chores such as distributing the food, stoking the ovens, etc. Five of them worked as Kapos assisting the head of the camp, named Risha Strasburg, a woman of approximately fifty five, who took the most important role of distributing the soup. She had a ladle that contained one litre, an amount fixed by the Germans for each person. Her eyes looked heartless. There was trouble with measuring out the foul soup and she would pour out the soup so that some of it would spill back into the large pot. Thus, the youngest girls one of whom held out her bowl to receive the soup received a smaller portion, making the situation worse.

There were some intelligent women from Budapest amongst us that spoke German. They did not put up with the camp commander and rebuked her for depriving us and stealing of the soup the Germans had allocated for us each day. The commander was shocked at their audacity and in a rage poured all the soup onto the ground. The noise of the goings on reached the camp

officer who investigated what the shouting was about. His entrance shook up the camp commander and she shouted at us, "What do you think then, cursed Jews, that this is a Synagogue?...."

There was also one gesture that I shall never forget, perhaps a small gesture, perhaps nothing of importance, but for me, in these conditions, it was of great importance. The SS guard who guarded us at the factory. They were far from showing any human emotion, but nevertheless, a spark of humanity showed itself in one of them. One night at the time I was working during the hardest shift, 10 pm to 6 am, I noticed that one of the wives of the SS left two pears on my work bench. This was a precious and generous commodity that revived my soul.

Suddenly, whilst I was thinking about the pears and preparing to hide them, an air raid siren was heard. American Airforce planes were buzzing overhead, blowing up the area. We all quickly ran from the building and ran for cover in the trenches in the courtyard. As we were sitting and waiting for the explosions to subside, I pulled out the two pears and also took out the hidden broken knife blade and divided the pears into eleven equal parts so that my ten friends and I could all benefit equally.

A short while later, the all clear siren sounded and we returned to work at the nightshift. At dawn we returned to the huts in order to sleep and rest after a night of back breaking work and to prepare for the work of the new shift. Our eyes were closing on the journey, our entire bodies were exhausted and finally upon arriving at our bunks giving some light rest to our bodies, we heard the wild cries of the head of the camp, Risha, with vocabulary from a sewer and the conduct to match. She awoke her assistant with roars and Polish curses, "Durina! Motkova! Pravruva!"

The assistants were tired, naturally, therefore were not displaying all the faculties of being awake. This aggravated the camp head even more and she opened up with a stream of insults. "Get up already animals, wake

up you beasts, come here you lowlives!" There was another long string of curses which cannot be written. The assistants didn't get up, but in spite of this we could not sleep. They awoke slowly and then the full blast of her words and screams streamed forth. We did not have the nerve to open our mouths and complain about the awful noise Risha made to wake them up.

We lived, however, in a strange and unusual world, with its own laws and inner rationale. But, not far from us was a calm normal world. Once a week, Friday afternoon, we were marched out of the camp to the city bath house in the nearby German city of Rochliz to bathe. This was a typical German city, orderly and peaceful, with small houses with red tiled roofs, cultivated courtyards, flowering plants of various colours. Children riding bicycles, mothers calling them to eat. Another world. People and families lived together in harmony as human beings calmly conducting their lives and ignoring everything going on around them. As we passed through the main street of the town, they looked at us as if we were from another planet. How strange, we were dressed in our old grey, shabby dresses, shaved heads and to complete the gloomy picture we wore blankets so as not to freeze from the cold. The three months of October, November and December 1944 were extremely cold. The winter was at its height, the cold penetrated our bones. This cold increased intensely after the shower, for we had no towels and we had to find one hundred different ways of drying ourselves, one of them, sitting in a room open to the strong winds.

Afterwards, we returned to our huts and passing through the peaceful city, I looked out of the corner of my eye at its inhabitants and asked myself, whether these people realised what was happening to us. Did they understand the meaning of hunger, labour, degradation or cold?

It was difficult to get a reply, their looks were blank, opaque and lacked expression.

Every Sunday we had the opportunity to lick the wounds of the past week and prepare ourselves for the

dreadful week ahead. The German workers and administrators went out for their weekend break. As a result we enjoyed this day of rest. If it could be said that a ray of light shone in those days, it was Sundays. We sat together, reminiscing the past home life that existed no more, we longed for the bygone days and for all we had that would never return. If we were feeling in a good mood we would even sing the songs we liked, from an age when we were still considered as human beings. There were two sisters with us who even had the audacity to rejoice, who would even break into song and dance together with the rest of us, on an empty stomach that was grumbling - helping us to forget for a moment, even though it was only a moment, where we were and what awaited us. We knew our end was drawing nearer and it was only a question of time. There were horrific moments too. Many years after that Holocaust when we settled in Israel, we were witness to political communal debates on the question of Who is a Jew. The Germans were not interested in a ruling. They knew and they knew exactly what to do with them - send them to the death camps and concentration camps. There was a mother and daughter with us too, apostates for three generations. They knew nothing about Judaism for their grandmother conducted herself as a gentile. But in Hitler's eyes both mother and daughter were perfectly legitimate Jews who belonged in one place, the concentration camp.

The mother although an elegant noble woman left no impression on her daughter. From time to time they would break out into arguments. On one occasion the daughter even blamed her mother for stealing her precious bread.

Days passed by and we remained in Rochlitz until the middle of January 1945. Then we went onto the trains and we began a journey to an unknown destination. It was a slow journey because of the concern that the allied airforces would attack us. Whenever a siren was heard, the train stopped and we ran into the nearby fields and forests to hide among the trees. When the bombardment quietened down, we returned to the train

and continued travelling. We did not need to be informed. We knew the war was drawing to a close and perhaps we would be worthy of seeing it end with our own eyes. The hunger and cold continued to oppress and afflict us, the burden was cumbersome, the Germans, although almost subdued, had not finished with us yet.

Finally, the train arrived at a place called Kalf in Germany. In this place there was a hut with wooden bunks, a familiar set-up. In the vicinity was an armoury at which we were destined to work. The camp was well guarded, armed Nazis accompanied by vicious dogs encompassed every corner, casting fear.

We worked once again with drills, putting microscopic holes in various pieces of metal, with great precision. All these parts were intended for making ammunition and parts for German planes.

The work shifts here were tiring. Twelve hours continuously, from six in the evening to six in the morning. Risha, the head of our group with her satanic assistants, were with us too. The Germans who employed us were prepared for the sake of the work and production, for us to receive a portion of soup at 2 am, but neither Risha nor her assistants wanted to be woken and therefore we worked for twelve hours continuously without anything passing our lips.

However, we realised that matters were drawing to a close. We were forced on more than one occasion to run to the factory air raid shelter because of the allied air strikes. On a couple of occasions we remained there for forty eight hours in terrible conditions, without sleep whilst death continued to afflict us. There were two sisters with us, one of whom contracted typhus. She burned with fever, but we were helpless. We had no medication. She suffered terribly and other than some cold water on her forehead there was nothing else we could do. Unfortunately, she passed away a short time later. The truth is, as death was nothing unusual to us we were not really affected by the young girl's death but our hearts were filled with worry and dread whether we would be affected too and whether our end was drawing near.

We were all mainly concerned for ourselves. This ideal we can definitely thank the Germans for, that we need not worry about anything other than our own skin that was stretched over our protruding skeletons.

## Chapter Five

## FREEDOM IN THE HEART OF THE FOREST

One day the Germans asked us whether anyone could sew. There were six of us were able to amongst our group. The Germans set up a corner of the hut where we sat and sewed clothes for the German army. In comparison to all the previous work, this was easy and pleasant. The trouble was that this work only lasted a couple of months until March 1945. On this date the bombardment reached its climax. Fire was to be seen everywhere, the destruction and ruin was great and it was clear that the war was nearing the end. The Germans were aware of this far better than we did for they had the full details, whereas we only had the rumours, but they did not forsake their desired dream so quickly that brought millions to their death amongst whom were six million of our own people. Because they were obstinate, they had this authority and time to increase the pressure on us.

It was then that we went on the death march. We marched at night in close pairs under heavy guard. During the daylight hours we found shelter in stables and store houses of the villages along the way resting our aching bones in bales of straw. We saw and heard the aeroplanes rumbling overhead and in our hearts we prayed that all that the German spirit had removed from us be eradicated and destroyed. However, the sun set and once again we were on our swollen feet, continuing the march, a journey without a purpose, thirty kilometres per night was our goal, thirty kilometres of struggle, weakened by the cold, in frailty, in death. Many of us perished on the way and found their eternal rest on the roadside where the bullets pierced their brains.

We passed through another German city called Ulam that went up in flames and was devoured in fire. Kilometre by kilometre and only the strong ones survived. Fortunately each one of us had a threadbare blanket that we took with us from the previous camp. This blanket at

least protected us somewhat from the harsh cold. Unfortunately, the blanket did not spare us from the awful hunger that continued to drive us insane.

We marched for twelve days - I thought it was thirteen, walking like robots we stopped counting the days - until we reached a bombed out railway station. In the station stood a damaged train. One of its carriages was broken and open. The security was very light, almost unfelt. Probably because the guards were worried about themselves and simply ran to hide amongst the inhabitants. We approached a carriage and could not believe our eyes. It was packed with boxes of meat and sacks of sugar. This time our captors allowed us to do as we wished. We entered the carriage and with great excitement we took whatever came to hand. We broke our terrible hunger and even took some in reserve for the future. We didn't know ourselves. We ate meat and sugar as much as we could. The truth is our hunger was greater than the ability to eat, resulting in our stomachs becoming swollen from the constant hunger until we were full up very quickly. In addition, overeating can be life threatening, placing a great burden on the body, having almost forgotten what food is. Food that was scarce over the past months and years suddenly in abundance and all we had to do was stretch out our hands and help ourselves. A dream come true.

. The joy, however, was short lived, for our captors ordered us to get upon our feet and continue the march to our unknown destination. The cold was severe. Snow began to fall, the mud stuck to the soles of our wooden shoes, turning everything into a type of sticky dough making it difficult to walk. The walking was hard enough at the best of times, tiring and exhausting. Some of the young girls could not continue for their legs swelled up and became ulcerated causing terrible pain. This time unlike previously, they complained about it to one of the German officers who was with us. However, a short while back, this request would have been answered with a good whipping if we were fortunate or a quick bullet in bad circumstances - this time their words did not fall on deaf

ears. Perhaps this was one of the signs that the end of the war was drawing to a close. Perhaps the Nazi wanted to score himself some points towards the day when the hapless sacrifices became the wronged ones. He responded to their request, and out of nowhere a German truck appeared taking the women from among the marchers. They were the older ones amongst us. We, the younger ones who still had the dull survival of the ability to walk, continued the journey on foot.

At that stage of the march there were one hundred and twenty women. Continuing the journey, we passed through a German town called Garmish Fratenkirchen after which we entered a dense forest thick and interwoven with gigantic trees. We sunk in the mud and snow freezing in the awful cold. It appeared that this death march would never end unless we died first. As if that was not enough, the Germans loaded their rifles on our bent backs, for they found them difficult to carry in the awful cold. In order to ease the load, we placed four rifles into one blanket, four girls each holding one corner of the blanket thus continuing on an endless journey. Some hours later, without any prior warning, the Germans came, quickly took the rifles from the blanket and disappeared as if the ground had swallowed them up. From that moment on we never saw them again. It was so sudden.

The Nazi guards disappeared and we were left alone in the forest, a Polish adult, one of the Kapo took command and said "Everybody halt!".

We did not know why. We were afraid that the Germans may be hiding behind the trees and were preparing to shoot us all as a burst of revenge towards the end. This doubt was accompanied with great anguish. Alas, we had endured and survived the seven stages of hell, the Germans had run away and hidden, all the signs showed that we were on the brink of release and freedom and yet felt that at any moment they were going to wipe us out.

With great emotion and real fear we approached one another, we embraced one another as if it were a final farewell. We didn't know ourselves because of the great fear. Terror of the unknown.

And then the Polish Kapo raised her voice and shouted "Today 28th April 1945, we are all free!"

We didn't believe her words. We were sure that she was lying or saying words only to annoy us, accuse us of another crime to which we were accustomed. We didn't move from our places. Our feet remained implanted to the ground. We trembled with great emotion in the heart of the endless forest. Surrounded by the darkness of Egypt, our hearts were thumping with great fear. We did not absorb her words. Is it possible that it was all over? Were we free to go where we liked? Essentially where were we to go? To remain in the forest and wait? Perhaps get up and move ahead or perhaps go back. We were confused. Indeed, we had waited for the Divine salvation to show us what to do in the new situation for which we had dreamed and when it arrived we weren't ready to greet it.

The baroness being the eldest among us suggested "Now, during nightfall, it was absolutely forbidden to continue. In the heavy darkness we were unable see the rain in front of us. Therefore, we should remain where we were. We had blankets, we will sit under the trees, wrap ourselves up in the blankets, rest, grab a little sleep after the long march and tomorrow, at the light of day we will continue - and advance in only one direction: Forward".

My friends and I took her advice which was very apt. So wrapped up in the blanket, huddled together, sitting and warming each other we grabbed some light sleep in the dense forest. With morning we looked around and saw that not everybody had agreed with the idea. Only thirty six of the one hundred and twenty were left, the remainder could not wait until daybreak and looked for a way to run out of the forest and escape.

I will never forget that morning. The sun shone and its rays lit up the darkness of the forest. It appeared

as if the entire world had woken up. Everything had definitely changed. With the light that shone down on us from heaven was a special ray that I had never seen before. Perhaps that is what the light of freedom looked like. Birds sung sweetly, singing the song of life. The truth is that after we had sniffed the wonderful scent of freedom we did not know what to do with ourselves next. Nevertheless, we continued moving forward as we had decided. Our eyes could look all around. After all this time we walked at our pace, nobody shouted at us or yelled at us, nobody to be afraid of. Suddenly the sunlight caught something that glinted in my eye. I bent down to pick it up. It was a piece of chocolate wrapped in silver foil. I thought, a small surprise at the beginning of the road to freedom. We continued walking and suddenly found a white sheet on the path. We took it too. Accustomed to the laws of the war of survival, we thought this would certainly come in useful and therefore we were not to leave it on the ground, thus, picking up anything we found on the way.

We continued to progress and from between the trees there appeared a most moving sight. It was a lake in the heart of the forest whose waters were calm, crystal clear. We sat on the bank of the lake, drawing the clear, clean air into us. The scenery around us was tranquil and relaxing like a piece of Gan Eden (Paradise), as if it was something out of this world. We soaked our tired and wounded feet rinsed our thin faces in the refreshing water.

We looked all around us, and noticed a small wooden house nearby. Although we were apprehensive at first, we approached it and went in. On the oven was a pot of cooking water with potatoes in their skins. They were still hot. It looked like the inhabitants of the house had left hurriedly, leaving everything as it was and fled. On the side of the room stood a cupboard. We looked inside and were amazed. The cupboard was stacked with money, Germany currency, we didn't touch it for we felt that with the downfall of Germany it was most certainly worthless. Besides, food had much greater value to us than money, and one good potato was better than a

cupboard full of currency. From time to time we heard the noise of a motorbike. We glanced outside in fear and saw that it was an unarmed German soldier, fleeing on his motorcycle so that he should not be caught and sometime later tell how righteous he was during the war years. After a short time we met more soldiers. This time they were Americans not Germans, thank G-d. At first they pointed their guns at us for they were unsure who we were, strange creatures walking towards them, unusually dressed, shaven heads, disguised in fear. Perhaps they thought that we were camouflaged Germans. We understood what was happening and therefore raised the white sheet immediately as a sign of surrender, as long as they would not shoot us. This would have been an unfortunate lot were we to die by the hands of the confused Americans having survived the seven degrees of the Nazi hell.

Nevertheless, they approached us hesitantly. One of the young girls among us who spoke a broken English explained to them that we were survivors of the Nazi concentration camps. At that moment their attitude towards us changed. They showed us human compassion such as we have never known before. They brought us closer, going out of their way to help us. They took us to their tank base nearby. At that time they were distributing food to the soldiers and all of them as one without exception, gave up their food ration to feed us. I will never forget the taste. There was macaroni with onion, a taste of Gan Eden. After we were satisfied, they took us in jeeps to a splendid and wonderful village nearby, next to Lake Planzei. In this village, the Germans kept the important political POW's amongst whom was a Jew by the name of Leon Blum, a one time official of the French Government. On the morning of the day that we arrived the Americans flew all the prisoners to their free lands and housed us in that village. We took the rooms of the political prisoners. All the German butlers who served the captives, remained to serve us. This was a wonderful feeling. The taskmasters become the lowly servants, the roles reversed.

The Americans understood that their first objective was to restore us to health, feed us in order to build up our hopes and strength for the future. It was as if it were a dream. Large rooms, soft carpets, pleasant colours, charming scenery. Food, loads of food. There was also a bath. My friend Goldie and I went into the hot bath, we sat in it and scrubbed each other's back to remove all the dirt that we had accumulated in the camps. The water was blacker than black. If it had been possible for the dirt to talk, each black drop would relate where it had been, what happened to the Jews there, how much horrific death had been seen, how many cries of pain it had heard, how many children were torn from their mothers' bosom and how many people were shot to death like dogs before its eyes. Afterwards leaving the bath we dried ourselves with clean dry towels, that still smelled fresh from the laundry. A dream come true.

We slept without regard for time, slowly returning to ourselves. We began to feel as humans once again. But in spite of the change from the inferno to the rest and the freedom, we would never forget for a moment where we were and from whence we came. Those visions and voices did not leave us for a moment nor did they leave us in the future. For from the holocaust no one was saved, for there are only survivors.

We began organising our lives from new. We had no clothes or shoes. Very quickly we began to find solutions. The woman's instinct, which the cursed Germans also tried to destroy, awakened in us became even more potent. We removed the curtains from the windows, we asked an Jewish American officer for a pair of scissors, needle and thread and we sat down to sew clothes for ourselves. The results were outstanding. Firstly we sewed ourselves some underwear, something that we did not have during the time we were in the camps and afterwards made some clothes. The American officer communicated a little with us in Yiddish. He tried to fulfil our requests and helped us with the minor things as well as the major things.

The food supplied to us was in abundance. Fine food and in a quantity that answered all our needs. It took a while for us to forget the manners we got used to from the camps, for in the early days we hid meat in a large pot, brought it to our room and in the middle of the night we would get up to eat. We laughed and we ate. We were so fortunate. But, as the days passed, we realised it was unnecessary for there was sufficient food whenever we wanted and as much as we desired.

Days passed by, and we began feeling physically stronger. We then decided that we wished to see what the free and liberated world from the Nazi regime looked like and mainly to find survivors. Who of our family was alive and who was dead. We didn't know anything. We asked the Jewish officer to help us return to our homeland, Hungary. We knew that, if there were any survivors they would move back to their "old homes". This was the purpose of the rendezvous. The officer replied shaking his head, "I am sorry, I am unable to do this, for Hungary was conquered by the Russians." We never reached Hungary, but did reach Austria. After sometime we were taken to Innsbruck, Austria, where we stayed at the Hotel Wilderman. We were not the only ones there. Refugees from the breadth of Europe were brought to this hotel. When we first met observant Jews, we were amazed. For at first we thought that there were no Jews left after the Nazi death plague and certainly not orthodox. Yet, we saw that they too remained. There was even a family from Poland, a father and his two sons.

We were in Hotel Innsbruck and Friday arrived. We prepared ourselves to receive the first Shabbos since we left our house and family, the city and our good old world. Our hearts filled with yearning, longing and emotion. For the Shabbos is a day filled in Divine glory. A special day. And we were now at the close of a very long weekday, grafted from all the hundreds and thousands of days in the camps. Years, without Shabbos, one great weekday, combined from day to day, from week to week, from month to month, from year to year. There was no Shabbos, no Yom Tov, no Yom Kippur. There

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was nothing at all. And so, at once, with the sanctity of the Shabbos, the memories flooded back and the tears gripped and choked the throat. We were deep in thought as we descended from our room to the dining room There they stood ready to recite Kiddush. This was Shabbos, different to anything we had known, no Germans or vicious dogs, in essence the same thing, the Shabbos that could not be removed from our Jewish possession by the murderers.

A holy atmosphere pervaded. A special ambience such as I will never forget. We, the dry bones, that got up and regrouped from new, standing ready for Kiddush. Refugees, swept away and mournful who witnessed all the evil in the world. The rescued receiving the Shabbos. What everyone thought in their hearts - only G-d knows.

A cup of wine in the hand of the older man the father of the two young lads. I looked at him - and I saw my father, his beard, a tall man and impressed by his appearance. My eyes filled with tears. Where was he now? Father? Perhaps, he was looking down at us now from heaven?

All of us in that room were united in the same feeling of bereavement and deliverance. The hand of fate, Heavenly Providence, united us in those moments. And I felt exactly the same as everyone else. All our hearts were beating in harmony.

Suddenly, as the older man raised his voice and began to recite Kiddush over the cup of wine, we all felt that we were truly victorious. They were unable to overpower us. A thousand different deaths, a thousand expulsions, actions and transports with the Kapo and Zonder Kommando and the dark shadow - all these were unable to eradicate us from the face of the earth, all these could not destroy us. They, the Nazis, were defeated and we were victorious. Behold the proof, "Yom Hashishi, Vayechulu Hashamayim Veha'aretz .....".

I could not stand anymore. I covered my face with the palms of my hand, my shoulders shuddered and I cried, I cried so much, for myself, my family, my parents,

my sister and her children, for my people for all of them. This was a cry of gloom, sorrow and grief, this was a cry of freedom, this was the cry of a lass whose youth had been snatched away by the hands of the wicked, but was now standing face to face with the future.

The man who recited Kiddush was Reb Shmuel Tenenbaum, together with his sons, Chaim the elder one and Yerachmiel the younger one. They had been through various concentration camps over the past four years, including the most awesome and difficult times that human history has ever known, included amongst them, Auschwitz, Dachau and others yet they survived.

How wondrous are the ways of fate, the concealed ways of G-d. From Heaven my path was directed to the path of Yerachmiel in order for our paths to unite. Yerachmiel, a good looking lad, wearing a peaked cap on his head. A boy of my age standing next to his father, literally facing me. He directed his gaze at me and I at him. No words were necessary. Our eyes met and our hearts were ignited.

We were sure, that one and only moment, that one time, was ours alone. The moment with which our joint paths began. And with the help of G-d, for another generation. That moment transformed us to being a couple. Love at first sight? Yes, definitely that!

# PART 3

## A NEW LIFE

Great fear was deeply engraved in our minds, and it seemed as if the inferno would never be removed from the depths of the soul. However, our eyes were directed to the future that rises and breaks through from the valley of the shadow of death and horror that we endured for months and years. Could such a thing happen? We were liberated. Now - how do we materialise the vision of the dry bones?

Firstly, the continuation of Rozie's story, followed by mine.

## Chapter One

## THE CROSSROADS

Innsbruck, Austria, was a very large centre of Jewish refugees who survived the camps. Not long after arriving there, a Jewish Kosher Restaurant opened, set up and run by Jewish American officers and Chaplains. The restaurant was not necessarily intended for the Jewish Americans soldiers as well as the refugees. Understandably, when a American soldier entered to satisfy his heart with kosher food, he deserved to be honoured like a king.

Very soon this restaurant became far more than an eating place. It developed into a club and a meeting place. A pleasant atmosphere reigned, relaxed and calm where we talked quietly planning the future, something which was still shrouded in mystery just a short while ago

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Innsbruck was a ordinary city, but with a beautiful panoramic view which broadened the mind, and living in it brought us back into the cycle of human life. It was the beautiful season of spring as well as the spring of our new lives. Everything flowered with a blaze of colour and a wonderful scent filled the air. The sight was marvellous and relaxing, all our senses were awakened. We were humans once again, we were young women once again. We wanted to wear beautiful clothes, enjoy G-d's world and perhaps more than anything we wanted to compensate for what we had lost and had forcibly taken from us.

The journey to the restaurant was something that required deliberate preparations. From time to time we went to the cinema. Even just talking with friends was a pleasure. Just to sit, talk in our free time without anyone pressurising us, ordering us, urging us to finish, run, do and carry. These talks, other than giving us great pleasure, helped us forget. This was most important.



Rozie

We would arrive at the restaurant in a group. There were eleven of us. Girls whose lives were bound by fate. Amongst them was my very close friend Goldie (Oranko). There, one day I introduced them to Yerachmiel. They knew who he was, but understood, from the looks passing between us, something special had intertwined our hearts.

My friends adored Yerachmiel and his resourcefulness. He managed to obtain an American soldiers uniform, thus he had no trouble befriending the manager of the local store and persuade him to supply us with large lengths of material for dresses.

Truthfully, we lived for each moment and each day. We were too feeble to plan for the future. But very slowly we regained our self esteem. Interestingly it was Reb. Shmuel, Yerachmiel's father who was concerned about our future. He looked ahead and urged us to leave Austria and Germany whose earth was saturated with Jewish blood, and to seek our future elsewhere. "What and who do we have here", he said. How right were his words. Where do we go? Naturally, to Eretz Yisrael. This was the desired destination that we anticipated with great enthusiasm. This time it was not an unattainable dream, it was a real and definite goal that we could achieve.

At that time, an idea was presented to Reb Shmuel Tenenbaum which was difficult to refuse. He was asked to take on the responsibility of area manager for supplying meat products to the Jewish refugees. This was suggested by the Americans Jewish Chaplain who was satisfied to rely on the unique qualities of Yerachmiel's father. Although this was enticing, however, Reb Shmuel pushed it aside as he did not wish to settle in the area, but to direct his enthusiasm towards going to Eretz Yisrael. After some time we were informed that the person who accepted the position was successful and thereby made a lot of money. After this was brought to the attention of Reb Shmuel he remained unperturbed, for money was not important in his eyes and he continued preparing for our immigration to Israel.

Two weeks later, we travelled to Italy, our first stop on the way to Eretz Yisrael. We all travelled, eleven friends, father Tenenbaum and his two sons as well as a few acquaintances. The journey was made by train. Once again in goods carriages, for there were no passenger cars available as the American army had seconded many trains for their service, but this time it was totally different. The carriages were open, many stops for refreshments were made along the way and there was no terrible squeeze. It was impossible not to remember those difficult days in those cursed demonic times. This time the journey lasted no more than a day, and by the following day we had already reached Italy. A station with toilets, running water. We were able to rinse our faces and refresh ourselves, all in silence without shouting and terror. Remembering the stations we had passed on the journey to death, it was obvious that we were now in a new era.

We reboarded the train, continuing our journey and reached the refuge camp in Bologna. The camp was full of tents. It was very hot. We stood in a long line and received soup and a roll. Just a few days passed and volunteer soldiers from the Jewish Brigade of the British Army arrived, to assist us in whatever they could, to hear what we needed, to see how they could make our return to life easier. They told us that they came from a nearby army camp. We were delighted to find some soldiers who spoke Hungarian enabling us to communicate without an interpreter. The feelings of camaraderie grew and they invited the girls back to their camp. They ate with them and spoke about anything and everything. They even allowed them to use their showers and toilets which the girls considered a luxury. I only joined my friends once as I considered myself Yerachmiel's girl and did not belong with them.

My obligation was not only to Yerachmiel, but to his family. For his father, Reb Shmuel brought me into the family. I was alone in the world with no idea what had happened to my family, who was alive or who was not and found within the Tenenbaum family support, assistance and hope to continue my existence.



Yerachmiel and Rozie,
our son Abraham and wife Yona,
grand sons Shmulik, Moishi, Malki and Bat-Shevale



Above left 1st. line
Son in law Boaz with child,
our grandchilds: Zvika and Moishi

2nd line left
grand child Sarale, her mother Yona.
Grandchild Malki as a bride, son in low Gershon,
Our son Abraham, his son Shmulik and wife Esther

3rd line left
grandchild Bat-shevale. Yerachmiel-Rozie,
Moishi's wife Sari with her childs

down 4th line, great grandsons

One day Reb Shmuel said to us "If we wish to reach Eretz Yisrael, we have to travel to Rome, the route from there will be much faster and easier ."

My friends were not too enthusiastic about the idea. They became attached to the Jewish soldiers of the Brigade and continued to meet them and visit their camp. They spoke Hungarian and felt at ease. They also hadtheir small luxuries from which they did not wish to cut themselves off. My friend, Goldie, did not want to come with us either.

Yerachmiel was not of the same opinion, and encouraged me to join them. Emotionally I felt that I should travel for I felt very close to the family, especially Yerachmiel, and did not wish to be cut off from them. On the one hand, I thought, in spite of everything, I hesitated travelling to an undefined destination without any of my friends to whom I was so close. After all, we had endured innumerable atrocities together and never separated, then to separate now? Besides, in the group planning to go to Rome there were only men - three Tenenbaum's and two acquaintances. I insisted that at least one of my friends should join me. I therefore tried to persuade Goldie without much success.

On the other hand, the possibility that Yerachmiel and I would travel to Rome alone leaving his family behind also seemed unrealistic. He was torn between the two options. Firstly, he did not wish to travel without me, on the other hand, he did not rejoice with the thought of leaving his father and brothers. I for similar reasoning reckoned, after having been together with my friends for four years through the camps, each of us helping and encouraging one another in the hard times - to part company?

We were still struggling with this difficult question when Reb Shmuel turned to me with heartfelt words, "Come with us, dear Rozie, we have accepted you as a daughter. Wherever we may settle, you will be with us. All that we eat, you will eat with us, all that we will have, or lack, will be yours too. We will divide everything equally. Precisely as we will divide between my children

and I, so we will divide everything with you, you are my daughter, Rozie...."

His words penetrated deep inside of me and made a strong impression almost putting an end to my confusion. His fatherly treatment touched my heart and I was ready to answer affirmatively. However, it was difficult for me to break my principles and I was insistent that at least Goldie should join me. One of the lads entered the picture and I almost succeeded in persuading her to come to Rome. But, at the last moment she changed her mind. She did not have the courage to make the decision. And then, determined without any hesitation, Yerachmiel grabbed her bag and began to walk in the direction of the train station. This was the straw that broke the camel's back. She joined us and together we travelled to Rome.

The train journey to the capital was very pleasant. Firstly, we were all pleased that we had finally overcome our qualms and struggles and found ourselves travelling together towards a new and promising future. Secondly, the journey was in a passenger train with other people dressed as human beings, talking quietly in a cultured manner and sitting together. Everyone was engrossed in their matters, one reading a paper, another satiating his heart, a third sitting with his son describing the passing scenery through the window. Another world totally. A different world, yes, even the transport in which we had recently travelled was called a train, but what a difference! Precisely a difference between life and death.

Our mood remained optimistic, in spite of not knowing exactly where we were going and what awaited us. But, this we did know - we were getting closer to the Land of our Ancestors - The Land of Israel. The Land for which we had prayed all the years, the Land about which we dreamt all the years, the Land was becoming a reality.

"You know Rozie", I suddenly heard Reb Shmuel's voice, "my father, may he rest in peace, would dream about Eretz Yisroel in Poland. He would always say "b'ezras Hashem" (with G-d's help) we will all travel

to Eretz Yisroel." He didn't just say it, but even did something about it too, he ordered tickets for all the family! That was a fortnight before the Germans invaded Poland. Father travelled to Warsaw to obtain the tickets for the sailing of the ship as planned. To add to the pain, we did not have sufficient time to organise and reach the ship. After sometime we found out that it did not sail at all due to the sea blockade set up by the Germans.

The train continued its journey and when it stopped in Rome, we were advised to go the refugee camp next to the city in a place called Ciencita. This city was internationally famous, for the film industry. However, the camp set up was real, not fiction like a film.

Reb Shmuel adamantly turned down the suggestion, "No, we have been in enough camps. Its time to live in a city in a normal house as human beings and not in camps. We are free people!"

We began looking for two rooms in a small hotel, but in the city. Our search was productive and we found a concealed hotel in the centre of Rome. We rented two rooms, one larger for five men and one smaller for two girls.

Having resolved the problem of a lodgings, we concentrated on finding a means of sustenance. Our first mission was the International Philanthropic Organisation, UNRA and the Joint, set up to assist refugees in need. We were told to register immediately with the alien registration department at the Rome Police Department, in order to receive a certificate of residence in Italy. Without these certificates, so we were told, they were unable to help us with even one pitiful lira.

We completed all the forms and awaited a reply. Until the documents were obtained, Yerachmiel sold his new shoes, clothes and some other articles we possessed in order to exist. Approximately two weeks after arriving in Rome, we received the necessary permits and together with them, the first help of rehabilitation from UNRA, the organisation for the support and employment of refugees, who supplied us with a large food parcel filled with all good things.

The only Jewish American organisation to give us financial support was The Joint as it was known to me in those days. They took out at the end of World War Two, $270 million - an unbelievable sum in those days - for the support of refugee rehabilitation closing the DP (displaced persons) camps and to assist in their rehabilitation.

Nevertheless, we lived in great poverty. Our daily menu was minimal. Bread, cheese and tomato for breakfast. If we wished to alter the menu, we ordered - cheese, tomato and bread!

The hotel proprietor was amazed, she could not understand how poor we were. It wasn't too pleasant, but life taught us how to survive on the bare minimum. In Rome, at least, there was room for hope that tomorrow would be better. For with all the difficulty of absorption, we did not forget for one moment after the background we had been through that we were literally in Gan Eden (Paradise).

There was a language problem too. In Italy they did not understand any other language. In Rome do as the Romans, we knew the expression well. The problem was we did not understand a word of Italian. The first one to grasp the language fairly well and quickly being able to communicate freely with all those around him was Yerachmiel. It was a long time until we also absorbed the language. He was our spokesman and guide.

## Chapter Two

## THE FISH AND CHICKEN TEST

After overcoming the initial difficulties, we began raising our heads and looking around. Rome, a wonderful place. We went through its streets drunk, but not from wine. Beautiful streets, elegant stores and cultivated cafes. Amazing abundance and all the good of the world. We couldn't buy anything there, but we purchased it with our eyes and that too was something. Lunch was supplied to us at a kosher restaurant by the name of "Raymondo", that was supported by the organisation of Jewish Philanthropists. The restaurant was established in the centre of Rome, near the Presidential palace. We enjoyed the daily journey to the restaurant. Quiet streets veiled in green, windows with wonderful displays. The Italians did not seem impressed with all this, but we had come from another world, another planet.

The first time we arrived at the restaurant we were very tired. Although the road was unique and nice, it was also long and we had not yet fully recovered our strength. It was very hot, the temperature was very high and the journey tiring. We were pleased to enter the pleasant, airy restaurant. The tables were nicely laid out, the tablecloths were white and starched with waiters roaming in white jackets and a pleasant aroma filled the air.

We were also very hungry. And then the first plate of Italian food was placed before us. The first portion was a piece of aubergine with dark skin. We had never seen food like and it tasted very bitter. Do people pay to eat these bitter herbs, we wondered amongst ourselves!

That was not all. On the table were sharp black olives which we did not recognise. What's the surprise, we all come from Eastern Europe. Everything is different there. Truthfully, we were sufficiently disappointed by the

first taste of Italian food. The pleasant entrance aroused our false hopes which quickly turned sour. But, we couldn't say a word for the food was free. Therefore, there was no choice but to wait for the next course, perhaps the situation would improve somewhat. Deep down in our hearts, we waited for hot tasty chicken soup. But, instead of soup we got spaghetti. Pasta in tomato sauce. At a time of trouble, this course still left much to be desired, but was sufficient to calm the hunger somewhat. We thought , what is it with these Italians? Are they from a world that has never heard of Polish or Hungarian food? Are they not human? Strange!

The courses continued to arrive, together with great disappointment. We then received two thin slices of dry meat with vegetables. This too did not settle our stomachs. In brief, we never left there with an empty stomach, but we derived no pleasure from it.

In the course of time, the menu at the restaurant changed, perhaps because of the complaints of the guests who were less polite than us, mostly because we were served macaroni with tomato sauce in various forms. It was easier getting used to this type of food and it was difficult to believe but we began to enjoy it.

We didn't like standing in a long line to receive the coupons for lunch, something that always entailed much pushing and being squashed. But, there was no alternative and we therefore made the journey to the restaurant daily. We went in two shifts, Goldie, I and Yerachmiel, his father and brother, whilst the others went separately. New groups of Jewish refugees arrived in Rome and to the restaurant daily. The restaurant was however, full and cramped. Seeing this, the proprietor decided to divide us into two groups eating at different times to overcome the great burden.

It's a well known secret, that Jews do not like wasting their time. If it is possible to do a good deed, there is no reason in the world not to do it. Thus, at the time they stood in line, the Jews conducted some business between themselves mainly involving the change of money. How did the money arrive, from where - this was

not a matter for question it was something that happened and the exchange flourished. And so in the course of two months, deals began in the course of two months, deals began in the waiting of the lines to receive food. The business flourished and thrived and there was no one who complained for one boring moment.

As time progressed, my financial situation improved too. I managed to save some money and together with my friend Goldie, we left the small hotel and rented a private room for ourselves in a nice new house which was very pleasant.

We were introduced to an entirely new world. We learned a lesson from all that we saw and experienced. For example, one day I was struck with a severe infection and swelling in my right hand. The doctor told me it required hospital attention so Yerachmiel accompanied me. After being examined, I required a minor operation on my hand to lance the swelling. Afterwards, I had to attend hospital daily and Yerachmiel accompanied me all the visits.

Whilst on the train, travelling home after the operation, I suddenly became very pale and fainted. An Italian woman also travelling on the train seeing what had happened, immediately grabbed me and together with Yerachmiel helped me out of the train. We went into a nearby cafe where she ordered me a black coffee with cognac. After sipping some I began feeling better. Having recovered somewhat I apologised for delaying her from going to work at the nearby cinema where she worked as a cashier. She left us her address, both at work and at home and asked us to visit her or at least to keep in touch. I did contact her at a later date to inform her of my progress and to thank her once again for her kindness. I shall never forget the humane and emotional deed of this unknown widow. In my heart, I thought what would have happened had I been in Hungary. No one would have offered to help, for the hatred by the gentiles towards us was terrible, a blind hatred without limits.

Whilst going for my daily check ups, Yerachmiel would get up very early in order to get an early number in

the line and afterwards wait for me. Besides the ticket with the number, his hands were laden with various fruits and on his face a special smile, warm and heartfelt, that always raised my spirits. He always welcomed me in the same manner. I do not lie when I openly admit that his conduct and the manner in which he treated me made me wonderfully happy, which enabled me to endure the terrible pain that lasted a long time. One day whilst my hand was still bandaged, I stood in the line at the restaurant waiting to receive a meal coupon when a young Polish lad , also a holocaust survivor, approached me and introduced himself as Yaakov. He offered to stand in line for me, collect my coupon and the two of us could eat together. I told him that I was collecting three coupons, for myself and my two friends, who had gone to lengthen our residents permits at the Police department. In the interim, Yerachmiel and Goldie arrived. I introduced Yaakov explaining he was alone and from thereon the four of us would always go to the restaurant together. It wasn't long before Yaakov and Goldie became close friends, not mere friends but from Yaakov's side, true love. However, Goldie wasn't ready for a permanent relationship and therefore continued going out together.

A fair amount of our daily pastime was going to the city to feast our eyes on all its precious commodities. We could not satisfy our eyes looking at the classy houses, a combination of the new and old with the curvaceous fountains and the astonishing statues with their beautiful and powerful features coupled with the most wonderfully shaped gardens. The vast quantity of craftsmanship and beauty besides for the glorious stonework and spectacular store windows with an abundance of clothes and articles full of taste and beauty. The sight of all this we silently consumed in immense pleasure asking ourselves, when if at all, would we be able to enter one of these stores and come out with a bag of clothes or even an article we fancied.

Days passed and we were on the brink of the Days of Awe. Reb Shmuel began arranging places for prayer (daavening). He was responsible at that time for

supplying religious needs under the communal affairs religious department of the Joint. This entailed supplying all manner of holy artefacts which were in great demand e.g. Taleisim, Tefillin, Kippot, Mezuzos etc. to any place where there was a refugee centre in Italy.

The next step towards independence arrived on the eve of Rosh Hashanah. Reb Shmuel said, "This is the beginning of a New Year, we have had enough of the restaurant already, the time has come for us to have our own kitchen where we can prepare our own food with the flavours of home."

We agreed with every word he said, except we didn't exactly know what to do. He did not waiver, but went out and bought all that was necessary to set up a kitchen. When everything was up and running, we decided to inaugurate it. With what? Gefilte fish, naturally!

This responsibility was given to me. No one knew why I was chosen, but then why not. Everyone was eager to see how I would manage, more so than waiting to taste the fish itself.

Whilst preparing the fish, Reb Shmuel asked me to think carefully about what I was doing. "Tell me Rozie, is it customary to add sugar to the mixture in Hungary?"

"Yes, definitely", I replied, bearing in mind that I would have to add two cubes of sugar as was customary in our house.

When Reb Shmuel saw the amount of sugar I added, he burst out laughing and said to me, "You should be well, but is that what you call sugar? We put in more than a monchke!"

At first, I didn't know what monchke meant, only later did I realise he was referring to the sugar. He then took the bag of sugar, filled up a large kiddush goblet and poured it into the pot with the fish.

In amazement I asked him, "One moment, do you intend cooking desert?"

Goldie and I were unable to eat the gefilte fish. At the end of the meal, Reb Shmuel, who was a thoughtful

person and a gentleman, noticed that we were not eating was upset and immediately apologised. From thereon we reached an agreement as to how much sugar should be added to the fish, so that everyone, Polish or Hungarian would enjoy it. In the end, I learned to cook more and more Gefilte fish.

It was then time to prepare the chicken. Reb Shmuel then asked me, "Rozie, you come from an orthodox home so you must know how to cook traditional Jewish food and no doubt, know how to kosher meat. My question to you is, on how many sides does one salt chickens?"

"Six sides", I immediately replied.

"You've passed the test", Reb Shmuel said with great pleasure.

We bought chickens from the Shochet and before we began working in the kitchen, Reb Shmuel then asked me if I knew how to prepare stuffed chicken. Naturally, I knew. I passed the practical exam with outstanding results. I also believed that on the wings of that chicken Reb Shmuel would consent to bring me under the Chupa (marriage canopy) with Yerachmiel.

Once Yerachmiel and I had decided that we were destined for one another, Reb Shmuel encouraged us to get married as it would be easier as a couple to emigrate to Israel. It soon became apparent that there were more difficulties than we had imagined and we never reached Israel until 1948. We got married in Rome in July 1946, and invited two quorums of Jewish survivors to the house where Rabbi First, who was ordained by the Chief Rabbinate of Rome and was acceptable to all, officiated at the Chupa.

Before we were able to emigrate, we took entry exams of the combined culinary tests of the various public kitchens, which was of definite wider personal interest. But at the same time there was a national humanity crisis on a larger scale than anticipated when thousands of refugees arrived in Italy and spread their wings from there going to various parts of the globe. Italy became a centre for holocaust survivors, most of whom wished to reach the

shores of Palestine - Land of Israel. Just across the sea and they would be in the land of their dreams, a dream of generations. There were those who wished to emigrate to America, Canada and South Africa as they had relatives there, but they were in the minority.

This was the era of the second Aliya (immigration) at the time of the British Mandate in Eretz Yisroel, and the determined struggle between the Jews and the British over Aliya. The Aliya, illegal on the eyes of the British Mandate, continued until the founding of the State of Israel. It was organised by the Zionist Foundation of Settlement and Movement, the Hagana, the Revisionist Organisation and Beitar. Immigration continued in spite of the prohibitions and decrees that were imposed. Although the shores of the Land were monitored and many of the brave immigrants were forcibly driven away, they persevered. The British obstructed the gates to the Land and attacked ship after ship loaded with immigrants, holocaust survivors on the shores of the Land. Most of them were caught and exiled to Cyprus or Mauritius (before the war, there were those who were sent back to Germany and died at the hands of the Nazis). Some of them were successful in reaching the shore safely, but there were tragic incidents of drowning and deaths of people who had escaped the greatest holocaust of all and the British could not accommodate them. However, the episode of clandestine Jewish immigrants continued.

One can say here that in this matter too, the British Mandate was guilty and all because of their original objective. For what was the mandate? It was a power of attorney in the form of a governing body that was given to the British Government in July 1922 by the International League of Nations in order to materialise the general objectives of the Balfour Declaration and to assist in the founding of an international homeland for the Jews in Israel. In the foreword to the power of attorney, I came across the brief historical connection between the Jewish People and the Land of Israel, which served as a basis for permitting building on the land as an international

homeland for the people. One paragraph obliged the ruling mandate to found in the land, a policy of administration and support that would guarantee the establishment of an international Jewish homeland whilst observing the religious and civil rights of all the inhabitants. Another paragraph dealt with the obligations of the British Government in order to ease certain conditions of the Aliya and to assist the Jewish Agency in settling the Jews in Eretz Yisroel. However, the Government aside from not fulfilling the obligations of the mandate worked in opposition to them. They limited the Jewish Aliya and vehemently fought against it both before and after the war. At the end of the Summer of 1945, with the conclusion of the Second World War, the immigration under difficult conditions increased manifold. The governing board delegated the running of the Jewish Agency to the Aliya office. Thus, from August 1945 until the establishment of the State of Israel in May 1948, sixty four ships arrived at the shores of the Land with seventy thousand immigrants on board, some of them from Italy. The people of the second Aliya established a meeting point at the seashore where the bold immigrants were organised, they boarded the ships and went out on the difficult journey finally to Eretz Yisroel or so they hoped.

Thus ends Rozie's story and Yerachmiel's continues.

## Chapter Three

## SIGNS OF LIFE

One day, a short while after the festivals, my brother Chaim was informed of the news which made him freeze. "Your bride, Polcia Unger, with whom you bound your fate before the war, has been found in Germany!"

Chaim did not hesitate and immediately set out on the journey. It wasn't long before he located her in a refugee camp of the Bergen Belsen extermination camp and brought her to Rome. Polcia moved in with Rozie and Goldie and together they became three friends who gripped firmly onto their future dreams.

As for their material sustenance, Chaim went into partnership with his uncle, Hershel Tenenbaum, but this did not last long.

Approximately a year after reaching Rome, we moved to a new place, another station en route to Eretz Yisroel. We all moved to a small four storey house, a villa out of heaven, within the framework of an organisation, it was like a small religious settlement (Kibbutz) that was known as, "The remnant of the settlers". The name suggested to the refugees their obligation in returning to the Promised Land. En passant, there were those amongst us who called it "The Gateway to Settlement", alluding that this was the gate to settling and rebuilding the Land. This Kibbutz was established near Rome in a place called "Lido di Roma Ostia", close to the sea. The Joint established and supported it. Its purpose was to prepare people to emigrate to the Land and to bring them to a situation that they should quickly find their places in society both commercially and residentially.

The entire kibbutz schedule was conducted in a communal manner. There was absolute equality, everything was in partnership, everyone gave what they were able and received what they required. The religious group was varied, and there were people affiliated to the

"Mizrachi" and "Aguda". It was a form of a religious ingathering of the exiles. And in the interim, our friends Goldie and Yaakov left us and went to a non religious kibbutz not too far from us. We respected their wishes and continued to meet them at appointed times.

At that time the flow of refugees continuously increased and many people, survivors of the camps arrived at our kibbutz. The air began to get oppressive, but at the same time a constant, good and positive atmosphere prevailed. For after all, the true meaning of oppression each one of us had known and felt in our flesh in the not too distant past. Everything was dwarflike in comparison to the awful past, from which we escaped by the skin of our teeth.

There were naturally, fiery debates to the hearts of the heavens, that continued into the small hours of the night. Everyone came with their approach to life, their religious and political beliefs, their personal and general outlook and their ideologies. We already knew and recognised it from the days before the deluge that the infinite differing opinions are one of the recognisable characteristics of the Jewish People. Two Jews at least three opinions, but in contrast to the past, although the debates reached a very high pitch, they never went out of the limits of entertainment and didn't influence the joy of our lives in the slightest.

There were a wide variety of activities. Lessons in Torah study, Ivrit et al. We adhered to the full orthodox way of life. Prayers were organised three times a day in the Shul and we were meticulous in observing all the Jewish customs during the week as on Shabbos and Festivals. The allocation of work at the kibbutz was divided by the Secretariat. There were daily notices displayed on the public notice boards informing everyone where they were allocated to work the following day. Women worked in the kitchen - cooking, baking, sewing for the Joint, etc. The men had a rota of cleaning and shopping which entailed going out and bringing food daily. Once a week, we went to the main marketplace in Rome to buy wholesale fowl, fruit and vegetables.

I was selected together with a small group of teenage lads to go to the nearby forest to collect cones. We used them for lighting the ovens and for general burning purposes, as necessary. These outings to the forest were very pleasant. We took sandwiches and sat under large statuesque shady trees enjoying the clear air and serenity. Collecting cones was not exactly backbreaking work, thus we had plenty time to share our stories and recall all that had transpired over the past years, which were still vivid in our minds. These were special moments. However, before reaching our destination and inheritance, the future was still enveloped with more questions than answers. Nevertheless, for us, whose lives hung before them on a hair breadth over such a long period of time, there was some rest for the tired soul. There was nothing better than sitting in a group, in the arms of nature mulling things over. It was therapeutic.

Our new existence did not cause us to forget the awful past. That was something we could not forget. But, it made it easier on the soul, it calmed the soul, it silenced somewhat the stormy sea of life which almost caught us in the net. Remaining in the huge forest sustained us with a feeling of freedom and rest, days without financial or family concerns. Each one of us felt like a swallow in a dense forest, encompassed in a delightful world of nature with the beautiful and abundant works of the Creator of the world.

We had Simchos (joyful occasions) too. Many couples decided to marry, set up a Jewish home and raise families which was a sure sign of recuperation and hope. My brother Chaim married Polcia immediately after which, Rozie and I decided to do likewise. And so, the A-mighty spread His canopy of peace over us under which we established a Jewish home. As I broke the glass under the Chupa, besides commemorating the destruction of the Temple it was a symbol of the destruction of Jewry too, for the millions of sons and daughters about whom we did not know what had happened or where they had gone. We did not allow pessimism to govern us and although we

were positive and definite which members of our families had perished, we continued to consider them as if they were still alive. Not only consider it so, but we did everything possible to locate them. Whenever groups of refugees, survivors of communities arrived from one camp or another or from different cities, we immediately approached them, cross examined them in order to acquire any information so that we could try and follow up the whereabouts of our missing relatives.

One day a group of Hungarian refugees arrived. Rozie, while the fate of her two brothers gave her no rest, she used every opportunity to clarify what had happened to them. When, this group arrived, she hurried to them and began questioning them about her two brothers, Yechezkel and Hershel.

"Yechezkel Sobovitz?" replied an elderly Jew, "I saw him last week!"

Rozie almost fainted with great excitement. With the rest of her strength she asked the man, "Where did you see him, how is he, what does he look like and what happened to him?"

The man replied, "I saw him in a Mikva (ritual bath) in Germany. He looked fine. I do not know what happened to him, but he is alive. He even gave me his temporary address in case I met up with one of his family. Behold, Divine Providence has directed my steps that I may pass it on to you so that you may find him."

That day, Rozie sat and wrote a letter to Yechezkel and eagerly awaited his reply. Sure enough, several days later an answer was received. In his letter he described everything that had happened to himself and his family. He was now married and their brother Hershel was alive too, and he was making his way to the Land of Israel. Yechezkel himself was preparing to open a new chapter in his life far away from murderous Europe - in the United States. A short while later, even before meeting Rozie, he moved to America. We only met six years later, but the stream of letters was continuous, relating everything that had happened to them. Several weeks

later a letter arrived from Israel addressed from Hershel who had taken his first steps in the Land of our dreams.

Then to our delight, the link between the family was renewed, something not many people were able to boast about, after so many families had been broken into pieces.

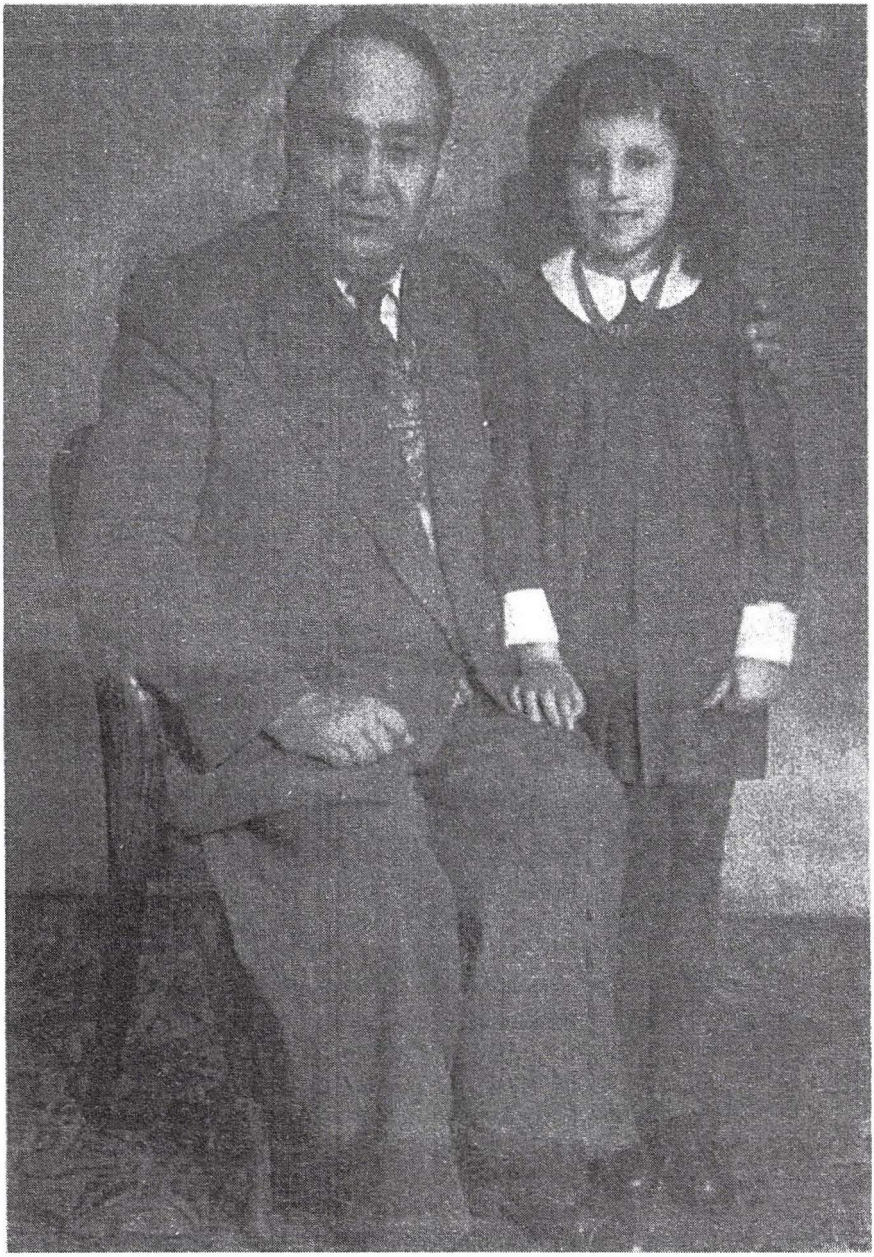
## Chapter Four

## THE AMAZING RESCUE OF LUZI

Now we, essentially my father Reb Shmuel, set out on a campaign to locate Luzi, my sister Rochel's daughter. We realised that my widowed sister had disappeared without trace and began to come to terms with the knowledge that we would never see her again. But her daughter, young Luzi, had been placed in a gentile orphanage in the heart of the forest, out of desperation and the time to save her and return her to the embrace of Judaism had arrived. It was over six years since then, would she remember us? Probably not. Would it be easy to get her back? What would she look like now, as an eight year old?

Each one of us, especially our father, had no doubt that this was the correct thing to do and the time had arrived. Father, at that time, had a communal responsibility, supplying religious needs in the religious department of the Joint and this work spread throughout Italy. For this job he had one identity certificate which enabled him to cross the border and pass between countries. Father decided to travel without delay, he even thought about getting a woman to accompany him to assist in getting the confidence and faith of the young child. A woman's approach and compassion would make it easier to save the child from the gentiles. Father began to make enquiries and news of a woman from our town reached us. Her name was Bronia who lived in Lodz at that time. It was said that she was very courageous and practical. He contacted her and she agreed to join father on his journey to the orphanage. Father reached Lodz, met Bronia and the two of them travelled to the orphanage.

Father's heart was pounding when they knocked on the door of the orphanage. The door was opened, his eyes flicked all around in case he saw the girl. However, his hopes had been raised in vain, for he did not know at



Father with young luzi in 1948, after her release from Poland

all what she looked like as an eight year old, he pulled himself together and was led into the director's office.

The director said to him, after verifying all the details and information, "The situation is this, a couple of elderly Polish farmers whose daughter was killed in one of the bombing raids, approached us and requested that we give them a child for adoption. They accepted Luzi."

Father's heart dropped.

Bronia enquired, "Is it possible to have the couple's address? We would like to approach them to return the girl to the bosom of her family and her people. If necessary, we will pay whatever sum is necessary.

The director opened the Foundation's adoptions book and gave them the address which was a small village, not far away. Father and Bronia hurried to the said address. Upon arriving there, they were filled with gloom. It was a farmer's house built of wood and mud, the poorest of the poor, half sunken into the ground. Its owners were frail, miserably poor without a thing, two lean ducks roamed in a muddy pond and a broken wooden fence that was falling down. Suddenly, an eight year old girl passed through the derelict yard, in threadbare clothes, carrying two heavy buckets.

This was Luzi.

It soon became clear that the farmers' made her do all the hard work in the house, cleaning, housework and other difficult tasks. In effect, she was no more than an abused servant for a poor couple.

Bronia saw her, ran to her, hugged her and said to her in Polish, "Luzi, your grandfather has arrived!"

Bewildered, the girl crossed herself.

My father then drew near, taking her in his gentle hands and hugged her with great love. She did not understand what he wanted of her. My father looked deeply into her eyes. Yes, this was his granddaughter Luzi.

He opened up his suitcase which was packed to the brim with clothes, food and sweet things. Luzi opened her large eyes. She had never seen anything like it. Stretching out her small hand she took an orange from

the suitcase and began eating it with the peel. Father took the orange from her, peeled it and gave it back to her. She ate it entirely and licked her lips out of great pleasure. Father could not believe what he saw. Young Luzi, his only granddaughter had eaten an orange from his hand. Who could believe that. After so many years. He was unable to control himself any longer and the tears streamed endlessly from his eyes.

The farmer couple, hearing strange sounds from outside, went to see what was going on. They were surprised to see the two of them, suitcase in their hand and Luzi enjoying their company.

"Who are you?" they asked.

"I am this girl's grandfather", my father quickly replied.

The farmers froze in their places.

"How did you get here? they asked.

"We got your name and address from the forest orphanage," my father replied, "we want to thank you for looking after this young girl and to take her."

"Do you have any proof that you are her grandfather?" the farmers wife asked.

"Yes, definitely," my father replied and pulled out of his pocket a proper document.

The couple studied the paper and hesitated. Father said, "Look, I suggest that you hand the girl over to me willingly and in good spirits, for with this document I shall be able to get her legally and then you will receive no benefit not even a penny."

The farmers raised their eyes. Perhaps they would count their losses.

My father continued, ".....but, if you agree to return her I shall give you a respectable sum of money with which you can obtain furniture and belongings, cattle and fowl to farm and you will be left with some money in order to live comfortably!"

The couples eyes lit up, but they still hesitated. "Explain one thing to me," the farmers wife said finally, "why should she live with you? True, you may be her grandfather, but she is accustomed to living with us, it is

good for her here, it is good for us to have her, why disturb everything?"

My father turned towards her and replied very slowly, "For she has to return with us and to her faith! Luzi is Jewish."

The farmer looked at his wife, and she returned his look which was full of meaning.

"Jews", she stammered, "I always thought she wasn't one of ours, that she was Jewish."

"Why?" my father asked "Why did you feel like that?"

"Because of her wisdom and alertness," she replied. The couple looked at their feet and went into the house. Father and Bronia remained outside. Luzi was left in the middle. She looked at my father and once again at the suitcase and after raising her nimble feet, she entered the wretched house.

Father and Bronia went inside and continued their business. Finally, the farmers agreed to hand Luzi over to them for a respectable sum of money as promised. Even then, it was not before they had received, as they requested, a certificate from the local courts, that the child was to be handed over to her true grandfather. The departure of the couple from the young girl was not easy. After all, she knew them, grew up in their house and in spite of all the hardship she regarded them as parents. However, the statutes of life are stronger than anything.

Father, Bronia and Luzi arrived in the Polish city of Wroclaw. There was a large centre for Jews who had been saved from the Holocaust and an orphanage that gathered and cared for the Jewish children saved from the inferno, included amongst them were relatives of ours. Father was forced to leave Luzi there due to the bureaucracy. He had a visa to remain for a short while in Poland and when he approached the Government requesting a permit for Luzi to leave Poland, they not only refused, but they even held back his visa, which in the interim had expired. The Poles categorically said, "The girl can stay in Poland and grow up her as a good communist."

This wasn't exactly father's dream, but with no choice he reluctantly left her at the orphanage in Wroclaw with the intention to collect her once he had overcome the difficulty with the papers. Father returned to Rome and Luzi remained behind in Wroclaw. But the link was not broken. Our relatives, who were still in Poland, would visit her from time to time and they anxiously awaited for another open miracle. They remained in contact with us and every letter they wrote to Rome they related everything that was happening with her. Father's mind continued to think of ideas how to rescue Luzi from Poland and bring her to Rome on her way to Eretz Yisrael. He even tried using his various contacts but was unsuccessful. The Poles were very hard. Even a handful of dollars waved in front of their faces did not help this time. Who knows why?

In the meantime, my brother Chaim and his wife Polcia decided not to wait in Italy to emigrate to Israel. They spoke to the people of the organisers of the second Aliya. They arranged a meeting point on the Italian sea shore in order to arrange and join the group sailing to Palestine - Eretz Yisrael who were trying to enter the land illegally.

The arrangements did not take long, the boat arrived, they boarded and went on their way. That was the problem, the dream very quickly became a nightmare. The British caught the boat with the illegal immigrants on the high seas, forcing them to sail to Cyprus, and imprisoned them in a detention camp together with all the refugees that were on the boat. As if that wasn't enough for survivors of the sword of the Holocaust, in the concentration camps that they survived, they were once again behind wire fences. The trauma of the death camps, from which they had barely survived, returned once again like a slap in the face of history. Had they not endured enough? Didn't the world see what happened to them? Had they not paid with the affliction of their souls and bodies the right to be and live as all free people upon the earth? Why were the British and French correct, e.g. to live in total freedom, whilst a Jew who had just survived

the terrible claws of the monster that history created, have to get up in the morning and see rifles with bayonets and watch towers facing his eyes?

This was an awful experience, broken and crushed people snatched from the burning fire, survivors of families, distinguished dynasties, branches dangling from the pedigree of the old days - shoved with force once again into concentration camps. However, the incinerator did not wait for them on the roadside, but once again took their freedom, and their journey to their longed for birthplace was obstructed.

The tragic result was not long in coming. My sister in law, Polcia, did not have the strength to bear the heat and the pain and before the year was up in Cyprus she became ill, she contracted a brain disorder (Meningitis) and a short while later returned her soul to her Creator.

And so, aside from our personal loss, Family Unger a well respected family from our city lost another member. In fact, of the six children of the family, one son, Heshek (Zvi) remained. Heshek went through the awful death camps in Germany including Auschwitz and others, emigrated to Israel and set up home in Ra'anana. His son Yossi is named after his father.

A year after Polcia's death, with the founding of the State of Israel, her remains together with the remains of those who died in Cyprus were brought to Haifa for burial. They saw the Land, but did not manage to reach it, precisely as our teacher, Moses, they were Righteous like Moses.

My brother Chaim arrived in Israel after the establishment of the State and the closing of the detention camps in Cyprus. He was lonely and depressed, broken and crushed, a young widower in a new land. As a result of all the strain, he was unable to muster enough strength and begun fighting for his existence, to build a new home and family. He, who survived four years of the cruel extermination camps, that ever existed upon the face of the earth, and each time his hopes were raised in reaching the Jewish homeland that was promised to us as a home

and an inheritance, he was unable to pull himself together. Not long afterwards, he returned to Rome and continued on to Rio de Janeiro where members of our family lived even prior to the Second World War. In Rio he soon found a wife, got married, with a family relative and remains there until today.

Brazil played a significant role in an amazing manner with Luzi's story, before its conclusion. The hand of G-d was the cause of all that occurred until she eventually reached her destination. As mentioned, Luzi remained in the orphanage in Wroclaw after the Poles stubbornly refused to allow her to leave the country. It was almost four years until she got permission. One day, my brother Chaim happened to meet a Jew in Brazil who introduced himself as Bernardo Herzog.

After a brief and quick introduction, it was found that this man was Luzi's uncle, her father's brother, Shaul Herzog of Ostrowiec. Bernardo was a seasoned citizen of Brazil and well off. He had a family and lived in Rio de Janeiro. However, to our great distress he was very distant from the Jewish way of life. His great wealth bought him a place amongst the distinguished people of Brazil and was known to have contacts and connections with heads of state, including influential senators.

Upon meeting with Luzi's uncle, Chaim explained her fate, specifically the difficulties in bringing her out of Poland. At that time, a delegation of senators from Brazil was due to make a state visit to Poland. Bernardo quickly contacted some of them and asked for their assistance in releasing the girl on humanitarian grounds. In other words, he explained the need for her to be brought to Brazil. In order to do this, father had to issue a power of attorney to Uncle Herzog of Brazil, in order to take the girl under his jurisdiction. Truthfully, father struggled with the idea, for he was worried with Luzi moving to her uncle's house, an assimilated home that had not even loose ties with Judaism, but if there was to be any change, perhaps from Heaven it had been decreed that specifically a Jewish assimilated family

would return her to the Jewish fold, a Jewish girl from a religious home raised as a gentile.

One way or another, the Power of Attorney was transferred, the Senators were successful in bringing the girl out of Poland. Thus, Luzi, at the age of fourteen, arrived at Uncle Bernardo in Rio de Janeiro. The transformation was incredible, from a very poor impoverished Polish orphanage to a glorious wealthy home in Brazil filled with all kinds of good things. In picturesque terms, the transformation was from a house where running water was a luxury to a house with gold plated taps.

Father's joy with Luzi's release from Poland and her return to the family fold was mixed with pain that she had arrived at an assimilated family. We were all sure that if she continued living there she would forget all of the Judaism she had absorbed in Wroclaw orphanage and far away from the circles in which she was born.

Father never rested or remained silent. He constantly thought about what he could do to bring the girl to her family in Rome with the intention of moving to Eretz Yisrael at a later date. He could not find any practical way and, as a last resort, he told Chaim to approach Uncle Bernardo and tell him sternly, "Free Luzi immediately that she may return to us so that we may emigrate to Eretz Yisrael together. If not, I warn you that your fate will be bad and bitter."

When no reply was forthcoming and after ignoring a summons to the local Beth Din - after all, the Torah and the Rabbis were not considered to be worthy of honour or awe - Chaim took steps to pressure the Uncle. He leaked to the Jewish newspaper in Rio details of the story and his refusal to release the girl. The publicity struck a chord and made waves within the Jewish community and Bernardo began to feel the pressure. Chaim continued using the opportunity to pressurise the uncle until he changed his stance. Finally, it bore fruit and one day the uncle informed him that he was sick of the whole matter and was prepared to release Luzi from



Luzi in nurses uniform

his house, but refused to incur any expenses that may be involved.

The first rung in the struggle for Luzi met with success. A small problem remained. To persuade Luzi to leave her uncle's house, throwing behind her all the wealth, pampering and pleasures in which she had been immersed. Since the struggle lasted a long time, not months but years, she had already began studying at University, had mastered the Portuguese language which placed a heavy burden on her to give it up, leave everything and begin anew. A new language, a new country, a new mentality, new people and a new faith.

She spoke openly about it with Chaim and he promised her that if Eretz Yisrael did not find favour in her eyes she could return to Brazil. To our great sorrow, my father did not merit to see his granddaughter return to her faith in his lifetime, as he had dreamed with all his might and as he struggled, without any compromise. By that time he was already in the World of Truth.

The great merit of returning a strayed soul back to the fold became our responsibility. Rozie and I warmly received her with love into our home, which was in Rome. She was introduced to a new world, totally different to that which she had been accustomed until now. An orthodox home, observant. Remember, her religious foundation was Christian as she had been educated in the orphanage near the forest and in the Polish farmers' house. She used to cross herself and on her neck hung a chain with an icon.

The period of her life in Wroclaw did not leave much of an impression on her. What made the greatest impression on her was the time she spent with her uncle Bernardo. Although she never crossed herself, she did not acquire an iota of Judaism whilst she was there. She saw Shabbos, Kiddush and kosher food for the first time with us. I took upon myself the responsibility to explain our way of life and to bring her into the path of Judaism, from which she had been compelled to be severed due to the difficult circumstances.

Luzi, on her side, explained openly and sincerely to us how difficult the change was. Christianity, the path she took until the age of eight, the sweet life in Brazil and the one additional turn. Luzi was also afraid that upon arriving in Israel she would be forced to accept the orthodox way of life. She did not understand the good or nature of the Jewish land. In her ignorance, she believed that this was a land where everyone was obliged to conduct themselves according to the strict laws of orthodoxy, which frightened her. She also felt that observing the religious way of life was not merely mechanical and technical, but involved emotions. We repeated what my brother Chaim promised her, that if she would not be successful in any way settling down in the Jewish land she could return to Brazil.

In 1959, at the age of nineteen, Luzi emigrated to Israel. Father had already passed away and we were pained to know that he did not merit to see the result of all his efforts in returning Luzi to her people and her home.

Luzi arrived at the home of Refoel and Ahuvah Tenenbaum, my uncle and his wife, who lived in Kiryat Chaim. Aside from my father, Refoel had five brothers and one sister - Moshe, Chaim, Binim, Avigdor, Rachmiel and Balcie of blessed memory, who perished in the Holocaust. Refoel and father were the only survivors out of the family. Refoel and Ahuvah's home was valuable, a family steeped in their limitless love of their fellow Jews, patriotic Zionists. They emigrated in 1935 and were spared from the awful Holocaust. A genuine family of princes. (By the way, the photographs, some of which are published in the book, were sent before the war by my father to his brother, Refoel and that is how they survived) Luzi felt comfortable in their home, enjoying every moment and managed to overcome her worries that accompanied her in the period before her emigration. She knew how to respond to the warmth with which she was embraced and felt part of the family. They, considered her as their daughter in every respect.

Upon reaching the age of being drafted to the Zahal (Israel Defence Forces), she had two options,

military or national service. She chose national service working at the Rambam hospital in Haifa, during which time she completed her studies in Nursing School.

Barely two years had passed and in 1963 Luzi married Dr Motti Paz, a doctor with whom she worked at the hospital. Who was one of the wedding guests? Uncle Bernardo from Brazil!

On arrival, he was astounded to see Luzi as a Jewess in the full meaning of the word. He was visibly moved and said, "Now I agree and confess that you were right in your great battle against me. Difficult, nevertheless, trying to take Luzi from me, from Brazil and bring her to Israel. I made a mistake, you were right!"

Hearing this, Luzi fell on his neck and with eyes filled with tears of emotion. She would never forget his efforts on her behalf nor all that he did for her. As a wedding present, he bought the young couple a house in Rechov Arlozorov, Tel Aviv. That was the start of their path to financial independence.

Years passed, the family grew and Luzi with Motti had four children, two boys and two girls, they consolidated, and today they own the "Synopsis" hospital at Migdal Nachum in Bat Yam and run it with great efficiency and success.

## Chapter Five

## AND RETURN OUR EYES TO ZION.....

Luzi's story reached its pinnacle in later years; however, in the interim, as mentioned, we were still in Italy. Whilst my brother Chaim and his wife Polcia were still in Cyprus, Rozie and I decided to emigrate to Israel. We knew, that there was no point in delaying any further for if not, to quote the verse, *'if we will yet reach the situation of it you will leave me for a day, for two days I will leave you'*. We made the necessary contacts, received the vital details and on the appointed day, we went to the meeting point adjacent to the small port in South Italy, intending to board a ship in the Aliya Bet (second immigration). Together with many others, we waited impatiently for several days for the ship to arrive, but it did not appear on the horizon. One night, men of the Haganah who organised the immigration, in great haste ordered us to disperse quickly, fold up the small tents in which we lived whilst we were waiting, to gather our meagre belongings, clean up without leaving the slightest sign that we had been there. What happened? What was the rush? We had heard that the British found out about the meeting point and intended going there. As mentioned, the British placed a sea blockade on entry to Eretz Yisrael, with an open battle against the émigrés.

We cleared the place quickly and in less than an hour, there was no sign of anybody having been there. A short while later, large trucks arrived, we boarded them quickly and abandoned the place. With large tarpaulins covering the sides of the vehicle so no-one could see even accidentally who was sitting inside. But on our journey we were able to see through the tarpaulin, the vehicles with English soldiers inside hurrying towards the meeting point where we had been and where we had waited in vain for the ship that never arrived.

We continued the journey occasionally stopping at several camps, where people alighted. We, the

orthodox members of the group were sent to a religious kibbutz, when we were prepared for immigrating to the land. The kibbutz was in a place called Aqui, an amazing beautiful area, flowing with soothing ethereal, and wells flowing with mineral water. The reception for us was astonishing, long tables with white clothes and a midday meal in the shade of the trees with the breadth of landscape. This was a heart warming change in contrast to the living conditions in which we lived whilst waiting for the boat at the Italian port.

A week later, we were informed of a new programme of immigration. This time they were going to send us to another arranged point.

Father remained in Rome during all that time. We kept in constant telephone contact and were fortunate in getting advice which was helpful and correct. He was our beacon of light, a tower of strength. Even now, when we were told that the new plans of immigration had failed, I telephoned him for his opinion for encouragement. The conversation was very emotional. He carefully chose the correct words, asking us to return to Rome, to live in a group as we had until then and to wait for the right opportunity to immigrate not hastily, not going back and forth and perhaps and in due course, who knows maybe tomorrow, or if not the day after, or another week and even then it is not definite.

Father's words were sacred in my eyes and his wish was a command not to contradict. Immediately after that conversation, we packed our belongings once again and returned to Rome. When we met, we hugged and kissed and felt easier. We had been released from the pressure of the unknown. We breathed easier. We did not give up on the immigration, but merely delayed it for the moment. We knew that before coming to a new land we had to prepare ourselves properly, to do it sensibly, for the new existence that awaited us was not a bed of roses. In addition, we were already tired from an immigration programme that never materialised, from the ship that never arrived, the travelling from one camp to another, from the anxiety of the waiting. After receiving father's

advice, we felt and we knew to savour the good days in Rome which were steeped in the light offered to us with great generosity. A unique feeling being with father, added much to us, and he did not remove his good eyes from us, continuing to be devoted and concerned for all our needs, day by day.

Nevertheless, the thought of immigrating to "the Land" wailed within us. It was like a mosquito that did not stop piercing our thoughts. After some time almost simultaneously, we moved to a religious kibbutz set up in Grotaferrata in the midst of outstanding scenery, near Rome. The kibbutz was named Nimala, and most of the colleagues there were naturally refugees from foreign lands. There were married couples, many of whom had recently married. The aim of the kibbutz was the preparation and acquiring a trade for the immigration to the Land of Israel.

We lived in a glorious villa supplied by the Joint, who met all our needs from a thread to a shoe lace. We truly enjoyed the villa not only because it was nice and functional, but mainly because it belonged to the Italian General Graziani, a well known fascist. There were twenty two rooms in the villa, which was surrounded by a fabulous garden with a stream. The villa was situated in a place that was breath-taking on one of the hills that crowned Rome from all sides, the sight of the scenery was awe-inspiring. The air was clear and pure and we were all upset that we were unable to go up to Eretz Yisrael together with this villa.

To satisfy the ear, how much pleasure we Thank G-d enjoyed at this place, let it suffice to be told that during the Summer we took the tables out into the courtyard of the villa, under the fig trees that were bowing under the weight of its fruit. The aroma of the figs was beautiful, and from time to time, figs dropped onto the plates. Literally a land flowing with milk and honey.

We also enjoyed the worthwhile camaraderie, which helped us overcome all that had transpired, and to begin a new life, we conducted a collective programme, including study and learning a trade, each person in the

area of their interest. The courses in teaching the various trades were run by experts from ORT. Their main thing was teaching to weave by machine for men and women, completing the knitting, finishing by sewing the overall, complete the manufacture of the product. The courses were held at a college not far from our villa and we made our way there every day by train. We went out in a large group and suddenly felt like students of an industrial school, with the special way of life and student mentality. True, we were older than the average student of a trade school, but that was not our fault.

The date of the completion of the courses will never be erased from my memory. It was the first of October 1948. What was so special about that date? It was precisely the day our eldest son, Avraham, was born. Rozie gave birth in the hospital at Marino, not far from the villa. Thank G-d the birth went smoothly without complication and Rozie quickly regained her strength.

It was the middle of December 1948, our son was six weeks old, when we found ourselves on a boat sailing to Israel, which had just become independent. We sailed legally from Naples, with raised heads, free and released from the fear of the British hunters. We boarded a cargo ship named Caserta, that would somehow accommodated the transportation of the immigrants. However, I stress, although it was far from being suitable for people to travel in, there was no choice. The crossing was not easy, it took eight days in stormy seas with the strong waves on one side and the gusty winds on the other mercilessly beating the ship.

We survived that, alighted at the port in Haifa from where we travelled to the immigrants house at Be'er Ya'akov. This time we lived in long wooden huts, with rows of iron beds set up like a military parade with gaps between them. It was not exactly like our villa in Italy, but in contrast the villa had a thorn, it was not in the Land of Israel! We lived in those huts with nothing to do breaking our heads how to get out and what to do. Several days after our arrival, we heard a rumour, that in a desolate area between Tel Aviv and Yaffo, the length of

the sea shore, there was a deserted district, that the Arabs had abandoned in the rage of the war, which could be taken. Also heard at the same time was that people were taking over these ruins in whatever state they were and attempting to make them habitable . After some time we heard the name of the neighbourhood, Hasan Bek.

I made a swift decision, to get up, travel there and to have a look. I got a bus, from the stop near the Immigrant centre at Be'er Ya'akov and went to Tel Aviv. The short distance from the central bus station to the sea shore bought me to the deserted area. The rumour was true. People were claiming ruins. I began to move between the abandoned houses and seeing an empty ruin, I claimed it. Simple, I inherited it. Afterwards, I looked around to see what I had actually got. It was a one room ruin with a broken roof with heaps of stones and rubble in each corner. But, it was mine!

Once I began feeling that I owned the place, I started cleaning it up, removing the stones. Sweeping the heaps of plaster and stone. Afterwards, a problem arose, how do I ensure that the place remains mine when I travel to Be'er Ya'akov to bring Rozie with the child and who will know it is mine?

To my joy, a man was wondering around who offered his services as a guarantor. I arranged with him that in exchange for a set fee, which I had with me, he would seal the broken door of the ruin with boards ensuring nobody else would take it, until I arrived with my wife and baby. I told him it would not take long.

I had no idea that this man was a fraud and a crook.

I travelled back to Be'er Ya'akov in a happy frame of mind for I had already a house! It was not at all easy to squeeze into the bus which was already full of passengers with all our belongings, including a baby's collapsible cot that we bought from Italy. Without going into graphic detail about our journey, I will only relate the end of the matter when we arrived at "our" ruin. When Rozie saw the glorious "palace" it was more than she

could cope with. She could not contain the deep pain and humiliation and burst our crying. I understood her.

But, there was no time for any introspection, nor was there any sign of the person who promised to look after the place. Neighbours told me that he was a crook for he had tried to sell our ruin to several people after having received the money from myself. There were others too who had paid him a deposit and he had disappeared as if swallowed up by the ground. We were lucky that there was another contractor who knew the crook and testified against him, so we were fortunate in coming out complete. The second contractor even assisted with his own hands in putting a door into the broken building to seal the entrance and to stop the winds coming from the sea.

In the meantime, in the neighbouring ruins we met additional immigrant families. It was a most frightening sight. From every ruin peered a pair of eyes, in each ruin sat people amongst the rocks, stones and the remnants of building material and in essence, nobody knew what to do. They were not exactly building workers. All in all they came to realise the dream of settling in Zion after the destruction of war and behold, where have they arrived? At the ruins of Hasan Bak.

The closest neighbour to us was a person with initiative. He was successful in organising the place, closing here, repairing there and opened up a factory to repair bicycles. Thus, he had double success, a place to live as well as a place to work.

Nightfall descended. The first night in our "personal" house in our homeland. My wife and I slept on the boards which we used to seal the doorway before putting on a door. Neighbours gave us a torn blanket with which we tried to seal the cracks. We tried to protect the baby from the wind that continuously swept through our ruin in spite of all the attempts to block it. However, that night passed peacefully. The next morning I gathered the broken bricks and the rest of the stones and rubble that was accumulated in each corner and set up a primitive kitchen with a paraffin stove to cook on..

## Chapter Six

## THE NATURE THAT FIGHTS WITHIN US

If we thought that we had suffered in the time we had lived in the desolate ruin, once winter came along, we realised that we had no idea what that meant. The rain was strong, hitting mercilessly. The roof was full of holes and streams of water poured in unceasingly from all sides. Through the broken roof, we saw the lightening as if it was exploding above the house and heard the roll of thunder as if it was merely two metres away. At night we would carry the baby's cot from one side to the other, from one corner to the next trying to protect the baby from the rain.

We crossed the rivers flowing through the house and somehow we survived the wintry days. The water flowed as did our lives. One day our relatives who lived in Kiryat Mozkin sent us a large bed with a mattress together with two warm dresses for my wife. This was a splendid gesture, there was nothing like it. It was exactly what we needed at that difficult time.

But, this did not help us overcome the impossible living conditions in the ruin near the sea.

In our pain, without any help and lacking experience we earnestly began trying to locate our relatives with the addresses that father had given us.

I reached Yosef and Chana Tenenbaum, seasoned citizens, who lived in Bnei Brak. I told them everything that had transpired and they lent me fifteen lirot, a nice respectable sum in those days and something that I will always remember. However, even this sum of money did not help to dispel the hopelessness that began to penetrate my heart. One has to understand, the entire State was in a difficult economic situation, having just come out of the War of Independence still licking its wounds, for there was not a home that had not endured a casualty.

Nothing was definite yet, the leaders did not know what to do first and we coming out of camps having

known suffering tried to overcome all the terrible hardships on our own.

I was the head of a small family with a child, without work and work meant a loaf of bread. The trade that I had learnt in the kibbutz in Italy was machine knitting. And so, with my trade, I had no one to turn to and nowhere to go. There was just one answer, "your trade only begins with the approach of next winter i.e. in the month of April. We are now in January 1949, come back in four months."

They were right, and I was left with another difficult problem, for until April we also had to eat, although this was not the reason.

However, I came to the conclusion, that this path was not in my best interests and that I had to find a new avenue, totally different, otherwise we would all starve until the knitting season of the forthcoming winter. In the meantime, I found out that a colleague from my town, Aharon Markewich, who was also in Auschwitz and survived, came to Israel and was living in Haifa. He was a carpenter. I had no knowledge of carpentry, but I understood that carpentry entailed a finishing process for wooden furniture, known as polishing. I had no idea how to polish, but I thought to myself it would be easier to learn the art of polishing than carpentry.

With this thought I travelled to Haifa. He remembered me well and was pleased to see me expressing the will to help.

I approached him saying, "Aharon, listen, I urgently need work to earn a living. Perhaps you would teach me the secret of polishing and all that it entails?" He immediately agreed and only asked whether I intended travelling from the Hasan Bak neighbourhood to Haifa daily to learn the trade.

I scratched my forehead. The truth is, I had an idea how to overcome the travelling issue during my apprenticeship, but implementing it, I travelled to Kiryat Chaim to my uncle and aunt, Refoel and Ahuva Tenenbaum to ask whether we could stay in their home whilst I was studying. They were delighted to see me and

listened intently to the entire episode from the time we arrived in the Land until this moment. Upon hearing of the conditions Rozie and I were living in, they suggested that Rozie, the baby and I immediately move into their house. That we did. We lived in Kiryat Chaim for seven weeks whilst I was learning the trade.

After completing the apprenticeship, we returned to our "house" and three days before Pesach I reached a store near the Bezalel Market square in Tel Aviv, the attic of which was used for restoring furniture.

"Do you have any vacancies for work?" I asked someone who looked like being the owner.

He asked "Do you know how to polish? Have you got any experience and where have you worked?"

"I am an expert polisher," lying with a serious face, for I had no choice, "I have had seven years experience in the trade!"

"Seven years," the owner exclaimed in obvious doubt, "come and show me what you can do."

The test, it served me right. He dragged an old wretched cupboard and asked me to polish and renovate it properly. After all, for someone with seven years experience, this should not be difficult.

Fortunately, my friend from Haifa trained me well, teaching me all the tricks of the trade, that within an hour, the closet was gleaming and shining like new. The owner looked at it repeatedly almost not believing what he saw, and said "Well done! I see you are genuinely experienced artisan, who knows his trade. Are you ready to work and when can you start?"

"When?" I exclaimed, trying to control my desire to jump up with joy, "perhaps now!"

"If possible," he said "right away, there is plenty of work."

My fortune was playing once more. As a result of the big impression made on the store proprietor in my daily work, he immediately appointed me as the manager of his polishers, which meant being responsible for three workers. He also set me a very nice salary which was already paid after doing three days work, towards the

Festival of Pesach. This money helped us make the Festival of Freedom which we had never experienced before. We financed everything with our money from the polishing. Rozie prepared all the necessities of the festival and we even had two guests, my brother in law, Yitzchok Hersch, Rozie's brother, who had just been released from military service and my brother Chaim who had recently arrived from Cyprus after losing his wife there.

It was a unique Seder night. Four adults, four worlds each with their memories, memories brightening memories sitting around the table. I remember the Seder night in our house, Yitzchok Hersch and Rozie remembered theirs. We all remembered the Pesach that we endured without the aroma of the festival, only the smell of burning bodies and death. The fact was we survived it all and now we were celebrating Pesach independently in our country, a reality beyond all imagination.

After Pesach I went back to work with renewed vitality. With the knowledge that I would receive a wage and would now be able to sustain my small family, new life was blown into me bold life and great optimism. As mentioned, my brother Chaim arrived in the country broken and shattered, a young widower without the energy to begin life anew after the death of his wife in Cyprus. He wondered around the country without peace, aim or purpose and finally decided with all the pain in his heart to leave Israel and seek his fortune in the wide world. Firstly, he returned to father in Rome and afterwards he travelled to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil where our relatives lived who came to South America before the outbreak of World War One. There, his fortune glowed, he set up a new home and merited to have great economical success.

My brother-in-law, Yitzchok Hersch was wounded in the War of Independence, because of this he was given help from the Ministry of Defence. They suggested two possibilities. Either a position in an office or to be given a store in Yaffo that had been abandoned. I suggested he take the store and together we opened a

factory for renovating furniture. I considered myself a professional in the area of polishing and actually, not just myself, but anyone who saw my work, and I thought that together, we could make a successful business.

He advised the Ministry of Defence of his decision and the business was set up. The work was backbreaking and hard and the dream of making a good living proved to be overly exaggerated and too soon.

To add to this, life in our ruin had become unbearable in spite of all the efforts. It was a terrible building, broken, tatty and on the verge of collapse. We felt almost like in nature, strong cold and damp in the winter, very hot and humid in the summer. We decided to find somewhere else to live come what may. On the other hand, we hesitated doing it after putting so much money and effort into our ruin, and we knew it was not worth doing unless the change would be for the better. But the whole idea of the change was problematic to me, for the place was a deserted property and only the licensed authorities could endorse the transfer to another person and receive payment for it. This time, we were successful. One day, a demobilised soldier and his mother came to the place. The Ministry of Defence promised to help them with a house and they came to look in our area. We offered them our house and the office responsible for the abandoned property permitted us to transfer the ruin to the soldier and to receive in exchange a respectable seven hundred lirot, a reasonable sum.

With this money, I found a home with the key money, two rooms and a small kitchen in the Montefiore neighbourhood of Tel Aviv, in a Jewish street opposite the Kirya (Government office). Had we finally reached a place to settle? A short while later it was ascertained that it was not so.

We lived in this house for two years until the winter of 1951. This was one of the worst and most severe winters that the new Israel had known. It rained constantly for seven days without a stop and in unbelievable torrents, fierce floods overtook all ports of the land. Behind our house, there broke through a



Yerachmiel and Rozie,
son Moshe and wife Tova
grand daughters Rivki-the bride,
Racheli and Michali and grand son Daniel

channel of a wadi. Today it has become a fast barren road, in the side of which there is still the extended canal. This wadi to which all the rainwater that came down in the area gushed especially that which flowed from the western mountain ranges, rose quickly and unbelievably over the banks. The entire Montefiore area became one large swamp in minutes, whose waters reached 1.20 metres high. In the house, the water penetrated inwards and made a mess. The water level quickly rose destroying anything good, all the furniture that we bought with great toil, everything we possessed with great effort. In order to protect ourselves we quickly climbed on the tables but this did not help either. The water was rising. We fled somehow from the house and went up to the second floor, to the neighbours, standing there penniless, watching all our possessions disappear in seconds before our eyes.

The situation progressively worsened until a state of emergency was declared. Soldiers of Zahal came in boats to rescue the elderly women and children who were unable to save themselves and were in danger of drowning. In addition, the oil and petrol stoves nearby with all their contents were collapsing. To the trouble of the water an additional fear of oil, petrol was mixed and the stench was difficult to describe. All this deluge the likes of which, so it appeared, have not occurred since the flood in the days of Noah.

The water began subsiding after two days. The homes that were flooded were beyond recognition, there was limitless amounts of grime, coated in mud, oil, petrol and above all a terrible smell which was impossible to get rid of for a long time.

We said to ourselves, at least the flood is over we can sort out the smell and the dirt. We began cleaning and drying earnestly for it was Friday and Shabbos was drawing closer. Several hours passed when suddenly without any prior warning a second wave of flooding began much worse than the previous one. As if it was not strong enough, it penetrated all the homes in the midst of the night, the evening of Shabbos, catching us all in bed.

This strong wave totally surprised us. We were sure it was all behind us, and all there was left to do was to reconstruct the homes from the first flood damage. And now it had all began again in greater force and destruction then previously.

In brief, anything left from the first wave, which wasn't much was totally destroyed by the second. This was our black Shabbos.

On Motzoei Shabbos, my brother in law, Yitzchok Hersch came to our apartment, having heard on the radio of the terrible floods, and took us to his house in Ramat Hachayal. It was a small house, but dry. His wife made every effort to welcome us, to dry us out and to bestow on us the feeling of a house that had been flooded by the powerful waters.

In the days that followed a deep feeling of despair overcame us. After all the difficulties of absorption, rain pouring through the roof in the ruin near the sea, and when we finally found ourselves a roof over our heads, it disappeared beneath us and washed away it the deep waters. We were left like gypsies, without a corner to rest our tired and weary heads, without our own four cubits. Homeless! What do we do? Where do we go? Why do we need to continue suffering? Have we not paid in full with our suffering?

There was always one ray of light open to me, in the good times and the difficult times. Father. With the terrible situation that we were in I telephoned Rome, and I bent his ear with all that had happened to us.

He did not hesitate for a moment when he said categorically, "Come to me immediately, to Rome!"

We arrived in Rome before Pesach of 1952.

Father managed a restaurant and a boarding house which supplied us all with sufficient work. Managing this type of work always requires an extra pair of hands. We had not forsaken our dream of the land of Israel, but came to the conclusion that a both the heavens and the earth were fighting against us, perhaps it would be worthwhile taking a break until the stormwinds calm down and we will try again.

We remained in Italy, becoming Italian subjects and to our good fortune in 1955 our second son, Moshe was born.

Four years later on the 8th Nissan 5719, my father was smitten with a severe hernia. He was immediately admitted to a hospital in Rome where the doctors decided to operate without delay. However, to add to the disaster, his heart stopped in the middle of the operation. We were stunned. After all that had transpired, after all the great difficulties and inhumanities, he collapsed through an illness that was seemingly easy to heal. The shock was severe. My brother Chaim hearing of father's serious situation, flew immediately from Brazil to Rome. However, he was unfortunate that he did not arrive in time to see father alive. Father had returned his pure soul to the Creator. His will was to be interred in Yerushalayim. Jerusalem. Chaim was given the responsibility in performing the mitzvah of transporting the coffin by aeroplane to the land of Israel, where father was buried on Har Hamenuchot until the arrival of the redeemer our righteous Moshiach. Chaim remained in Israel for thirty days until after the erection of the tombstone.

## Chapter Seven

## SIXTEEN YEARS LATER.....

In 1975, sixteen years after father's passing, we returned to Israel and from that time we share our time between Israel and Italy. Therefore, we kept an apartment for ourselves in Milan, where we stay from time to time.

Our two sons, Avrohom and Moshe are scholars, absorbed in Torah and worldly knowledge who consecrate times for the study of Torah, side by side with their daily work. They are highly intelligent and well versed both in their religious studies as well as secular.

After completing their primary education at a Jewish school in Rome, we sent them at the age of eleven to study in Switzerland at a religious Jewish institution where they studies both their religions and secular subjects in French diligently. This opportunity afforded them to become fluent in the language, after which they continued their studies in England.

Avrohom, the eldest son, continued his studies at Yeshivah University in New York and at Bar Ilan University in Ramat Gan. He has six children, the older ones studying at Yeshivot in Israel. Moshe has four children, he studied pharmaceutics at Rome, his birthplace and was awarded a doctorate at the end of his studies.

Good fortune has convened upon us, especially on our children, in obtaining nice and successful brides from orthodox homes of respectable families of true Chassidic descent.

At this point, I permit myself to be proud, to repeat and stress the great pains we endured to ensure our children received the best education, the most expensive and all of this in order to see them continue the orthodox Jewish family tradition following in the path of our ancestors and live according to the inheritance that we inherited from generation to generation.

In conclusion, here I must acknowledge and if only in one law because of modesty, our distinguished family ancestry, that we are grandchildren and great grandchildren of the Kotzker Rebbe. There is no doubt that in our family history in the course of our lives, exists one of his well known sayings *"There is no greater perfection than a broken heart."*

**THE END**



I remember it all as if it were yesterday, today, this very moment. As I write, my pen fills with tears and picturing those awful scenes my quill breaks from the deep pain.

In my eyes, the vision of those clouds of smoke, the stench, the broken cries and the destruction.

I am using worlds and expressions well known to all, but their meaning is different to all those who were there. In the midst of the shadow of death and in the barrenness of the howling desert. Bread, water. Bread not only baked from dough, but from life. Water, no drops to be found other than in the climax of the dream.

How do I describe that which cannot be illustrated through words in human terms?

As the following pages unfold, they tell not only my personal stories and that of my wife Rozie, but those of the entire Jewish People. A nation like a bird of the sand that is tied shaking off the ashes, that spreads out its wings to fly upon the wings of the wind.

The forthcoming pages are a testimonial to my close friends who survived as well as all those who did not. I shall be their mouthpiece.

The mouth that speaks, the monuth that relates and the mouth that cries. May these words pass form generation to generation.

From our generation who endured the tremors and most awesome of experiences, to that of our children and most awesome of

experiences, to that of our children and grandchildren. Children of freedom and deliverance, who will read these words with our oath that accompanies them until the end of time, NEVER AGAIN!