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Many times I took out the notebook and tried to write, but I found it difficult, very difficult indeed. There is so much I want to write, to explain, but on reflection I ask myself: What am I doing it for? My reason is simple: I write for the sake of my son and my daughter.

For my dear son, now living in Paris: he never understood me and never even tried to understand me. I tried very hard to explain myself to him, but without success. This saddens me. The geographic distance separating us is hard enough; the distance separating our souls is insufferable.

I'm writing also for the sake of my daughter, to answer all the questions she never asked.

I don't know what sort of relationship I would have had with my parents if they were alive today. I know that when I was the age my children are now I was a very bad daughter. But in the ghetto the circumstances were different, so it seems to me, although parents expect their children to relate well to them no matter what the circumstances.

If I start the story from the beginning, perhaps I myself will see things more clearly; and perhaps the act of

IRENA LUSKY
11 BART ST. Apt 4
RAMAT AVIV, TEL AVIV 69104
ISRAEL

writing will help me to get through this difficult period -- the toughest in my life -- with greater tranquility, if that is at all possible.

* * *

My earliest memory is from when I was five, when I was told I had a new baby sister. How miserable the news made me! Hardest of all for me was the thought that I would have to share grandpa with her. This fear proved groundless. Things stayed as they were, just as I wanted. My sister grew up separate from me, in her own room, with her own nanny, and I still had grandpa all to myself. Until the ghetto I scarcely felt her existence. I knew, of course, that mother loved her more than she loved me, but my relations with my mother were in any case a little complicated, and of this I will talk later.

My second memory is of a fire in a factory in our neighborhood; and the terrible panic it caused. I was ill at the time (as usual), and being carried around at night in that terrible heat made me very afraid. Our house was damaged in the fire so we moved to a new apartment that was nicer and more spacious. From this point on the memories become more ordered.

I was very envious of my girlfriends because they had uncles and aunts and lots of cousins. Our family was very small -- grandpa and grandma, mother and father, my sister, and an uncle who was a famous musician and who used to come home from his travels with many gifts and stories. We always

looked forward to his visits, thanks to all the stories grandma used to tell about him. Grandpa seemed less interested in him.

Grandpa had come to Vilna from a small town in White Russia, hungry for bread and education. He had done his matriculation in Vilna and then came to Kovno to seek his fortune. In Kovno a wealthy and domineering older woman fell in love with him and helped set him on his feet financially. By the time I was born he was an educated business man of broad horizons, progressive, young at heart, industrious, and very honest. He married a beautiful, educated, and music-loving wife whose head was always in the clouds. She considered it absolutely natural that her husband would bury himself in his business day and night to provide her every need while she herself lived in a world of poetry and music and moved in intellectual circles, scorning everything to do with money and business. Her day was full of activities such as embroidery and piano playing, and she also devoted herself to different charity projects in the community. She was the only one in our family who kept up the ties with Judaism and the link with tradition. She and I never had a common language. In contrast, grandpa gave me his every free moment. In fact, it was he who brought me up, tried to explain things to me and to give me a sense of values, both general and Jewish.

I was very jealous of the other children

when they went
to the ice-skating rink, all in high spirits
all
and nicely dressed, particularly the girls with their short skirts and gay woolen bonnets. Before they left school they would fix a time to go skating but I to my great sorrow could never be part of the fun. My mother would not under any circumstances permit me to go skating for fear I would break a leg. But in the afternoon I would get my Fraulein to take me to the skating rink, and I would stand there listening to the music and watching the children running around on the ice, Their cheeks were red, their laughter was gay, and the sound of their cheerful bantering carried easily in the cold air. I so much hated to be alone that it hurt me very much to be standing at the side instead of being with them. I would go home in a terrible mood.

Once I met grandpa on the way home. He took one look at me and asked me what had happened. With tears in my eyes, I told him. To console me, he said that on Sunday he would take me to the River Niemen. This was the river that flowed through Kovno. In the summer ships sailed on it, but in the winter the waters froze and people who couldn't afford to skate on the skating rink would go there instead. I was thrilled at the suggestion and waited impatiently for Sunday.

Grandpa came to take me as he had promised. The sun ~~came~~ shone, it wasn't cold, and off we went together, with grandpa pulling me in a sledge. When we got

to the Niemen there weren't many people there, but I didn't give it much thought.

I saw that grandpa began to hesitate and ask people if the ice was strong enough, but I so wanted to go on the ice that I didn't bother to hear the answers. I wanted only to enjoy the outing so that I could afterwards boast to my girlfriends about it. Grandpa saw how important it was for me and didn't want to disappoint me.

Down we went to the river. Grandpa started to run and to pull me in the sledge. I was ecstatic - until I heard a sudden noise and to my horror saw grandpa submerged in the water, holding himself above the ice by his elbows. Terrified, I started screaming for help. People came and helped him out and offered to take him home in a horse-drawn sleigh. But my grandfather was clever; he asked that they take me, but he himself ran the one and a half kilometers home, which warmed him up; he got home but wet, he wasn't the ice block he would have been if he had gone by cart. Grandma put him to bed and the next day he went to work without so much as a chill.

As to me, by the time I got home I realized the extent to which I was to blame. The following day, I came to grandpa very embarrassed. He laughed, lifted me up in his arms, and said that it would be a good lesson for me and that I shouldn't take it to heart. The important thing, he said, was that we'd had an adventure, and he was sure I would remember it for a

long time. He was right. I remember it to this day, and still have twinges of conscience about having been so spoiled and silly.

It's funny how much my mother wanted me to be beautiful. To my sorrow, it wasn't that easy. My legs were very thin and my gait was bow-legged. This bothered her a lot and for a whole year she took me to professors in Berlin, which meant I had to suffer wearing an orthopedic support and having my Fraulein always telling me to walk properly. In addition to being bow-legged, I was always sick -- once it was my throat, once it was my ears -- and in this way Dr. Finkelstein came in to me life.

Dr. Finkelstein was a pediatrician, an ugly man but very interesting. His father was a shoemaker, so the social status he had attained was all his own doing. He was very musical, played the violin, was a sworn communist, and read alot -- a real Jewish intellectual -- and a very good doctor. He had a wife who was mentally ill, and two sons. He fell in love with my mother to the point of craziness, and because of my constant illnesses he regularly spent time with us.

My father was a very handsome man, good-hearted, sensitive and honest, a lawyer by education. He managed a big company for construction materials of which he was one of the owners. He had no bent toward music but he loved my mother very much and agreed to anything so long as he could be with her. He loved me a lot and called me "Daddy's girl," but he

never had enough time for me. Since we lived in Kovno and my father's family were in Vilna, which was across the border in Poland, I didn't know his family at all because the border was sealed until 1940.

My mother was a very interesting woman -- not particularly beautiful, but tall, elegant, and of strong character. She wasn't known for her good-heartedness and was very fond of herself. She was a graduate of the Moscow musical conservatory where she had studied piano under Goldenviser. She graduated as an honors student, and then continued her studies in Berlin. It was in Berlin that she met my father, who had just started his career as a lawyer. My mother was a brilliant conversationist, lively and well-read. She loved life and knew how to get the most out of every moment. She revelled in good food and card games, and was particularly good at poker and bridge. She thought rummy boring, even though that was what most of the Jewish women in Kovno played; she wanted something more interesting -- as far as that was possible in Kovno at that time. The men always found her attractive but the women were jealous of her and didn't like her. This didn't worry her very much for she didn't like women, paid no attention to anyone, and did exactly as she wished. She loved her father and my sister. At home -- at least, in our presence -- relations between my father and my mother were very good. My father would shower her with the most expensive gifts and since we in

fact saw them together only at meals everything seemed ideal.

At that time very little occupied my mind. I had my grandfather and I had a lot of friends. My mother, who was very talented (like my father, she had graduated from high school and the conservatory with distinction, something that was very hard for Jews at that time), couldn't understand how I could have been born so completely lacking in musical talent, and in her words stupid as well.... even in my school work I found success hard to come by. In the beginning she tried to change that: for several years I learned piano, and I had a Fraulein and several private tutors. But later, when I transferred to the Lithuanian-Russian school and was put down a class, I had fewer problems because the studies were easier, and my mother virtually ceased all interest in me -- particularly once she realized that Tamara, my sister, was both musical and talented. Moreover, Tamara found no interest in girls of her own age and so was very close to my mother.

It seems to me that my mother's attitude to me increased the alienation between me and my sister. We were always very different, had nothing in common and were never close. When she was taken to hospital with severe appendicitis, I cried because I found it scaring, but I didn't give her any further thought. In fact, we have been virtual strangers all our

lives. To my way of thinking, the estrangement between us is a tragedy.

I have tried unceasingly to create for myself an imaginary family, with Flora as the mother, my friends as sisters; and for a certain time the Levines were a sort of distant family to me. But these are all people who came later in the story. Basically, I have come to the conclusion that while I have friends who are more or less close to me, I don't have any real family.

Oh yes - I have a husband and two children, but this family always demands a lot of me and gives me very little in return. That's not a real family, because when I feel troubled and I want to share my troubles with someone, it turns out that I have no one and I am alone. Nobody shows me affection, nobody consoles me like my grandpa used to do. I give me soul to everyone around me, but they don't want it, or it isn't enough for them....

Until I was seventeen my life was relatively carefree. In the winter we went to school, my sister and I, and in the summer we would go with the whole family to a dacha (summer house) or to a holiday camp.

At home I heard a lot of music, and even though I had no special inclination for it , good music became part

of my life. I enjoy listening to it to this day. In my childhood I also got accustomed to good manners, ballet, and above all to books. People read to me from the time I was a baby, and I learned to read myself when I was very young. We had a large library of classical authors in the house, mainly Russians (I read Russian, German and Lithuanian). In addition I used to go to the public library every day.

I understood nothing at all of mathematics but I liked literature a lot and took an interest in politics. My math tutor would do all my homework for me, and then we would talk about every subject under the sun. He was pro-Communist while I was always anti, even though my grandpa had tried to explain that not everyone lives as well as I did, and took me for walks in the different parts of the city to show me the "facts of life."

I was also very interested in boys, and from a very young age I loved to flirt.

Another thing I loved was simply to dream -- how I used to build castles in the air when I was a child! Particularly in the summer when we were in the dacha, where there was a forest and a river, and lots of other children. We used to have a fabulous time there. To my sorrow I couldn't swim and ice skate like everyone else since my mother was always scared because of my illnesses and wouldn't let me do anything. Twice they took us to the sea at Riga, and there I got to know my aunt - my father's sister - who lived there with her two children. I never saw her again until she came to Israel. I remember that once the King of

Sweden came to the beach. Instead of lying down and resting, I went to see what a real king looks like. Seeing that he wasn't wearing a crown destroyed all my dreams of royalty.

The most important thing of all they didn't teach me: to be independent. Everyone was always sure that if they didn't keep an eye on me I'd get lost. Once I did indeed get lost. One summer's day we went with my Fraulein to pick mushrooms in the wood. She got deep into conversation with someone and I continued on my own and lost my way. They almost went crazy searching for me. To this day, even though I am now fifty-one, I am still afraid to be alone in a strange town or even in a strange street in my own town. It was one of the greatest mistakes of my education and it has influenced my whole life. Several times in my life I have wanted to go my own way but I couldn't overcome my fear and stayed with the rest -- anything so as not to be on my own.

My mother often took me to the ~~theater~~ opera house or the ballet, and I remember that once I heard Shaliapin, who made a very deep impression on me.

I also remember that my uncle came once and gave concerts. How proud and excited we all were! The whole family was nervous with excitement when he played in concerts in Sweden or Germany that were broadcast on the radio. My grandmother owned one of the first radios in

Kovno, and all the relatives would gather there to hear the broadcasts of these concerts. I don't think they gave grandpa as much pleasure as they gave grandma for he had never understood his son and they had little in common. My grandfather was very attached to my mother and always supported her in whatever she did.

If ever Tamara fell ill and was confined to bed (which happened only rarely) I was delighted, for then I would be sent to grandpa's house and for me this was heaven. Grandpa was the manager of a bank (actually one of the owners) and was a very busy person, but as I have said he always found time for me. He used to meet me on my way home from school and we would have long conversations.

I did well at the Lithuanian highschool. I was popular in class and well-liked by the teachers, but in all the years I went there no one came to visit me at home and no one invited me. My only friends were other Jewish girls also in the process of assimilating.

I had mixed feelings toward Dr. Finkelstein; at one and the same time I loved him and I hated him. I liked him as a doctor for he always made me feel better and brought me little presents and books. He spent more time with me than my father did. But because he also spent more time with my mother than my father did, I pitied my father for what I interpreted as a sign of weakness on his part.

Once I overheard a conversation between my parents on this subject. Father said he would agree to anything as long as mother didn't leave him. But even so, the doctor's frequent visits to the dacha on days when my father was in the city made me very uncomfortable.

Grandma loved my father very much, and for years she hardly spoke to my mother. She spoke to her only when one or the other of them held chamber-music concerts in her house, or when they met at some other event. Grandma was very strict about keeping all the Jewish festivals. She and grandpa had seats in the big synagogue with a choir, and on the festivals grandpa used to take me there with him. I used to enjoy the choir very much, but when I was no longer allowed to sit downstairs with grandpa in the men's section I stopped going. Once I asked grandpa if he believed in God, and whether he didn't ask himself any questions on the subject. He answered that one has to believe unquestioningly: when you begin to ask yourself questions you stop believing.

I feel good when I remember the Passover ceremony in their house, with the guests and the nuts and the dates. I used to feel so at ease, as if there was a wall there giving me warmth and protection. But this good feeling turned out to be short lived.

At that time everyone was of the opinion that my only

talent lay in learning languages, and it was assumed that when I finished high school I would go to Belgium to learn languages at a finishing school. But the two things that really interested me were books and boys. I had already had more than my fair share of romances both big and small, and I was well aware that boys found me attractive, even if not always at first sight. I knew instinctively how to approach them and how to take them away from my girlfriends. I found it very absorbing, although by today's standard it was all very naive, harmless, and romantic. Except for kisses, nothing at all happened.

The first shock to this carefree existence was when my father had a severe heart attack.

I was fourteen at the time, ~~and~~ Tamara and ~~and~~ I and the Fraulein were staying with mother at the dacha near Kovno, while father was at the sea near Palagen. One day I noticed that everyone was whispering and pointing at us. Mother went away and didn't come back, and the Fraulein said that she had gone to see my father in Palagen. We stayed in the dacha until the end of ~~the summer~~

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I remember that the doctor used to come frequently, or mother would go to town to see him. I begged my mother to take me with her at least once, for I was curious to see what the city looked like in the summer; I imagined that everyone was out of town like we were, and that the city was completely empty. But mother always got out of it somehow and never took me.

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the summer without her. As we were preparing for the return home we were told that father had been ill but that he was getting better and wanted to see us. This alarmed me greatly, for I loved him very dearly.

We went back but not to our old apartment. The old apartment had been on the third floor, and father was now forbidden to climb so many stairs; the new apartment was on the first floor. It was big -- six rooms -- and I had a room of my own. A few days later, father came home from the hospital suddenly everything at home was different. Mother and the nurse from the hospital spent whole days with father, while we were allowed in for only a few minutes each day. Father lay in bed, pale and thin, and his voice was very weak. My mother, who normally concerned herself only with dressmakers, cards, cafes, and restaurants, stayed at home for days ~~at an end~~ and looked after my father. Dr. Finkelstein started coming every day again, sometimes twice a day, but he stayed only a short while.

My father's recovery took a whole year. After that he went to a convalescent home in Kaiserwald in Riga and came back completely healthy. Mother was with him all the time, but when he came back from the convalescent home she went abroad with the doctor for a couple of months. She went to Paris, to the World Fair, and from there she went to the Riviera and to Italy. She came back

very happy, with a beautiful dress for me from Paris, and everything at home returned more or less to normal. Mother and father began going out in the evenings again. When they went out I used to like to go into the kitchen to be with the cook and the maid and listen to the stories of their romantic escapades. My mother disapproved of this but I felt warm and cozy in the kitchen: I always liked being with people.

One day I came home from school and found my father in bed. He called me and Tamara in and told us that he had an attack of appendicitis and that they would operate in another two hours. He very much hoped he would be returning home, he said, but if not we should know that the doctor was our closest friend, and that we must stop hating him for he had helped us a lot. I simply couldn't understand how father could speak like that of the doctor. Apart from that, I was very afraid for him and couldn't stop crying. But, thank God, everything went well, and father made a quick recovery and went back to work.

I already considered myself a young lady and I loved to dance. It made me feel like a real woman. Since father was very fond of dancing he offered to take me dancing one evening at the Versailles night club. We danced together, and after that several of his friends invited me to dance. I was in seventh heaven! My father and I were told we made a good-looking couple, and that was very nice to hear. I heard the men saying there was something

attractive about me.

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And then, one beautiful day in 1940, the Russians came to Lithuania. I understood nothing in those days. For me it was all a new adventure. I had a good command of Russian, I was full of self-confidence, and I felt that the whole world belonged to me. In the beginning it did indeed seem that way. Father had a large family in Vilna, the town where he was born, and now that Lithuania belonged to Russia it was decided to send me to this family for three weeks. There was no end to my pride! They dressed me in my best clothes, put me on a train, gave me my relative's address, and I was on my way. I knew nothing of life, and was enthralled by the idea of such a journey.

Today is Yom Kippur 1976. The candles are lit, and as always I am thinking of the past. I so much want to tell everything as well and as accurately as possible, but to my sorrow I don't seem to be able to. I would like to tell it so people will understand it better and won't make the same mistakes. But each learns from his own mistakes; and rarely want to learn from those of others.

When I was sent to Vilna I was young and very spoilt. I went first to my mother's relative , a cello teacher with a wife and two children of about my age. I

found myself in a rather dismally furnished apartment. The whole family was sitting around the stove in one room, for everywhere else it was cold. In fact, it was so cold that the water in the bathroom was frozen. All this was a terrible shock for me, since we and all my friends had central heating and as much hot water as we wanted. I burst into tears and refused to stay a moment more. In vain did they try to persuade me to stay, I just didn't want to hear. I refused even to wait and meet the children -- that's how rude I was. Even though it was evening when I arrived, I wouldn't stay the night there, and I demanded that they take me to my father's cousin. Eventually they stopped trying to persuade me and took me there. To this day I cannot forget how abysmally I behaved.

My father's cousin had an apartment like ours, a beautiful wife, and a little daughter. They were very rich and made me very welcome. The cousin's wife began to look after me -- she had plenty of free time for the maid did all the housework. She had a car and started to take me to visit all her friends and acquaintances. We went to cafes, to the theater, to her dressmaker and milliner, and to buy presents for all the family. The cousin was her second husband -- she had divorced the first because he was too poor for her. She also had a lover, despite the fact that my father's cousin admired her and was very good looking, and she taught me how to conduct myself with men. Men were playthings in her hands, she could do anything she wanted

with them. It was a source of great pride to me that she would talk to me as an equal. The three weeks I spent with them were wonderful. As to my mother's relatives, as far as I was concerned they didn't exist. They telephoned and invited me but I never visited them.

I went back home feeling very happy, and proud that I was bringing back lots of gifts for all the family. On the train a Russian officer flirted with me and told me interesting stories about a world that was new to me. All in all, life seemed wonderful. At home I was given a big welcome, and my behavior toward my mother's relatives wasn't mentioned. I told my stories and everyone was in good spirits.

A month later the Russians began to nationalize private factories and to take over rooms in rich peoples' apartments. Although I continued going to school and finished the eleventh grade, I could feel the ground was beginning to give way beneath my feet.

At this time I began to lead a double existence: at home and away from home. The mood at home became blacker and blacker. Jews were beginning to arrive from Poland with terrible stories about what the Germans were doing. We didn't believe them, of course, but even so there was a niggling doubt. They didn't intend to stay in Kovno but wanted to continue on their way, and many even succeeded in getting out. This was when I first heard of a place called Palestine, and

of the need to have "certificates" to get there. At home there began talk of the possibility of going to the uncle in America. Each day they waited for an immigration certificate, the "affidavit." But the talk on this subject was never serious for we lived well and didn't want to leave our comfortable home and all the luxuries. When the "affidavit" eventually arrived from the uncle in America, my grandparents wanted to take me with them and go there but despite all the talk nothing came of it.

One day I came back from school and found my father at home. The business had been nationalized and father was left without a job. He was very depressed. A Russian captain and his wife were billeted in the apartment so we were scared to talk even in our own house. Two other rooms were rented to Jewish women. We continued living in three rooms. We covered our furs with cloth so no one would know we had them. We still had a maid, but things were not as they had been.

Worst of all, everyone began to look for work. It was said that no one wanted to give work to the bourgeoisie," and that those without work would be taken away. Here we were helped by mother's friend, Dr. Finkelstein. It transpired that he was a veteran Communist who had been working in the underground and that he was a friend of Palecki who had become president of Communist Lithuania. Father got a job as chief book-keeper in a building concern, and mother began to work as a proofreader in a Russian newspaper.

I think this was the first time she had ever gone out to work. I noticed how much the experience changed her. It seemed that she enjoyed the work -- the editor of the paper was a Russian from Moscow, and he liked my mother, it appeared, for she was alert, clever, and energetic. Gradually she even began to attend meetings and to organize all sorts of groups.

I felt very sorry for my grandfather. He had worked so hard all his life and suddenly, at sixty-three, he had lost everything. He was put in charge of a warehouse of medical supplies. I'll never forget how I came out of school one day and saw him sitting on a cart piled high with medicines, going down Vytauto Boulevard. It tore my heart to see him like this, for I thought that for him it must be terribly degrading. I understood that terrible injustices were going on.

My life at school continued basically unchanged, although with the coming of the Russians our time was taken up with all sorts of things -- a wall newspaper, teaching illiterate people to read and write, and doing away with "bourgeois activities." I was in love with a Russian boy whose parents opposed the Communists, and who had lived in Lithuania from the end of the First World War. He was very handsome, good humored, and a good student, and he found it absolutely impossible to understand how he had fallen in love with a Jewess!

The things going on around me in fact occupied me very little. I was in high spirits, I was busy with other things. My boyfriend told me he had information that the Germans would soon conquer Lithuania, drive out the Russians, and kill the Jews. He tried to persuade me to run away from home. He said he would help me to manage, and I would have to adopt the Russian Orthodox faith. He went on at me about this, and one day I went with him to church. The priest urged me to convert and I promised to come again two days later. But for some reason I was very scared. I proudly declared to my boyfriend that I was born a Jew and would die a Jew. at that time I didn't know what I was saying. He promised me that if the Germans came he would find me and save me. I left him and went home, my heart heavy with fear.

That same night, at two in the morning, there was a ring at the door. It was a ring of the type well known in all Soviet Russia, a ring feared by millions: the NKVD. we all leaped from our beds. Only the Russian officer and his wife stayed in their room. For the first time in my life I felt the meaning of terror, the meaning of being hated both as a Jew and as a member of the bourgeiosie.

We were given two hours to pack our essential belongings, we weren't even allowed to phone and say goodbye to my grandparents. They dragged us out to the street and

pushed us on to a truck full of people. The caretaker stood in the street and said, "These rich Jews always have all the luck: as soon as the war comes they evacuate them." The truck moved off toward the railway station.

Listening to the opera Yevgeny Eunegin I remember how I used to lie listening to it being broadcast from the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow. This opera holds many associations for me. My mother liked it very much and knew it by heart. We had the score at home and we had heard it many times with mother at the Kovno Opera.

The truck was full of adults and children, including acquaintances of my parents. No one knew where they were taking us, somehow we assumed it was somewhere outside the city. For the first time in my life I understood what it is to fear someone holding a gun and treating you worse than a dog. Everything was done at the double, with yells and curses. As we approached the railway station I felt my fear increasing. I understood that something terrible was happening. At the station we were ordered off the truck, and before we could move they had separated father from us. Soldiers of the Red Army stood in two lines, armed from head to toe. I saw many familiar faces among the prisoners. Mother and I (Tamara) were put into a freight car where there were wooden bunks, everyone scrambled to find a place. The

phrase "struggle for existence" took on a new meaning.

Mother showed herself to have tremendous energy. Somehow she found a place for us all. I wanted to drink, I wanted to go to the toilet, but it was impossible. As yet I understood nothing of what was going on around me. Mother, of course, found people she knew in the freight car. Some of them were in the transport with their husbands, others without them like us. I was very miserable because they had taken father away, and sat in a corner and wept. Soldiers came and gave us water to drink. When mother asked why they had taken father away they told her he was a political prisoner and would be sent to another camp.

When they closed the doors of the car, we found ourselves in almost complete darkness. At the top there was a small skylight which let in a little light and air. We were some twenty-seven people in that freight car, I think. Time passed and the train still didn't move. Inside the car there was torturous silence broken only by children crying. Outside we could hear the soldiers conversations. Suddenly the door of the car was opened and we heard an officer ask, "Is there a Deuel family here?" Mother answered, "Yes." The officer ordered us to pick up our belongings and get out. Mother quickly got us and our possessions together and we got out of the train. In front of us stood father, rather pale, and Dr. Finkelstein.

My happiness knew no bounds, for I had been sure we would meet our end on that train. How naive I was then! The soldiers ordered us to keep quiet and the doctor led us to a waiting cab. We got in but still couldn't believe that we were all together and going home. The first person we met was the janitor. He looked at us with hatred. Other people who saw us going into the apartment couldn't believe their eyes. In Russia people get taken away but they don't get brought back. Dr. Finkelstein said he had managed to get us out with the help of President Palecki, and added that he wasn't sure that we would always thank him for having saved us. He loved my mother and was prepared to do anything for her.

As soon as we got home I phoned my grandparents. They already knew that we had been on the transport. Throughout the week rich Jews were taken away but our family was left alone. I went back to school. I got some strange looks, but no one said anything. I began to understand the meaning of a Communist regime: everyone was silent and no one asked any questions, not even our closest friends. No one said anything at all.

The officer who lived in our apartment invited me to the movies. I knew I was attractive to men and I understood the degree of power this gave me over them, but I didn't like him and I didn't want to go with him particularly after the way in which he and his wife had ruined our beautiful apartment.

But mother told me to go and so I agreed. When the lights went down he started touching me and making passes. I tried to push him away, and was mad at mother for having sent me. When I got home I told her what had happened, and asked why she had made me go with him. My mother answered that our lives had changed completely and we would have a hard job to stay alive and that I, as a woman, could get a lot from people in general and men in particular. But one must always know how far to go, she added.

Early in the morning, two days after I finished eleventh grade, we heard the sirens. War had broken out between Russia and Germany. For us, life was to become hell.

The bombing began at six o'clock in the morning. Once again I was overcome with fear. At eight o'clock Dr. Finkelstein came and said that he had three tickets for the train taking party activists to Moscow. He tried to persuade my mother, Tamara, and myself to go. His own family, his wife and two sons, were already on the train. We had to decide on the spot. I saw that mother very much wanted to go. Tamara hated the doctor and didn't want to go. I became hysterical and said that I wouldn't go without father. Now it seems to me that our whole lives would have been different, and I don't know if for better or for worse, if we had taken that train, for it reached its destination safely. The

doctor's wife eventually died a natural death, his elder son committed suicide in Vilna a little while ago -- like his mother, he was mentally ill -- and his younger son lives in Vilna to this day. In any case, I firmly refused to budge. It seems that mother also didn't feel comfortable at the idea of abandoning father, and we decided to stay. I still believed that we would all be able to stay together, with grandpa and grandma.

The doctor left without saying anything, and I was sure we wouldn't see him again. The atmosphere in the house was terrible. We saw the exhausted Russian soldiers beginning to make their retreat. Suddenly, at noon, the doctor appeared again. He had sent his family away but he himself had stayed. He had obtained a car and a driver, and most important of all -- the necessary papers. He ordered us all to be ready in five minutes for the journey to Russia. I phoned my grandfather and we all spoke to him. I cried bitterly, for I felt I was parting for ever from the person I loved most.

We got into the car and started off in the direction of Vilna and Minsk.

This was a fateful mistake. If we had gone in the direction of Dvinsk we would have made it, it would seem that fate wanted otherwise. It took us three hours to get to Vilna, and when we got there we found that all hell had broken loose. They bombed the city unceasingly, and we had

to run from cellar to cellar. It never occurred to me that I could have been killed. I was afraid only of what was going on around me.

We didn't continue our journey immediately because Dr. Finkelstein, as a good communist, went to the NKVD and volunteered to burn important papers. He stayed there for six hours. It later turned out that these six hours were fateful for us. He didn't believe that the Russians would retreat so quickly and in such panic.

As we drove off in the direction of Minsk we saw the retreating soldiers, and when we saw how they looked we were struck by a fear so great I cannot describe it. A deathly silence gripped us all.

When we got to Minsk we immediately understood that what was going on in Vilna was child's play in comparison. The city was actually on fire. Bombs fell incessantly, houses collapsed, people were scattered everywhere. Mother ran one way with the doctor, father and Tamara and I ran the other way. The screams of families who had lost each other were loud enough to reach right into heaven.

Father was in a terrible state of distress. I saw his suffering and knew I had to help him. I begged mother to stay with him and not to leave him until we got to Moscow

(I still believed we would get there). I said that in Moscow they could decide about it, but meanwhile she must look after father and be with him and not with the doctor. Mother agreed.

In the afternoon we found ourselves shelter in a large building and sat down to decide what to do. There was no gas and there was not way of getting on to a train:

Thousands wanted to but only party members were allowed to. The doctor was a member of the party but he didn't want to go on his own and leave us behind. He went off with the driver to look for gas. We should have continued toward Mohilev, some eighty kilometers away, but we had no way of covering those eighty kilometers. Then the doctor came back and announced that the car had been hit by a bomb, that there was no way of reaching the station.

The feeling of panic increased immeasurably. As the only thing that counted was to escape from this hell, we decided to go to Mohilev on foot. Where father was to get the strength from I didn't know.

We started off toward evening. The road was full of people, children, cars, and carts so our pace was slow. We tried to get lifts on cars or carts, but no one would take us. Each person thought only of himself, of how to get out of this nightmare as quickly as possible. The Germans were advancing rapidly, and eightly kilometers still separated us from Mohilev. The doctor thought that there he would be able to get us all on a train or arrange a car for us, thanks to his rights as a party member. We continued for a little while after night fell and then lay down to sleep by the road.

I remember that I awoke with the dawn. Birds flew

above me as I lay in the long grass. At my side lay a soldier of the Red Army. Clouds floated in the sky, and I thought to myself: "I so much want to live -- why do I have to die?" I burst into tears. The soldier turned to me and said, "Don't cry, miss, you'll live, I feel it and I know such things; always remember what I'm telling you now."

Suddenly Messerschmidts appeared -- dozens of them swooping low over the road, mowing people down like grass. It was a ghastly sight. We lay down in the grass and luckily they didn't see us.

We decided to leave the main road and take to a quiet side road. The contrast with the hell we had left behind us was tremendous. All of a sudden a cart overtook us. My mother spoke with the people on the cart a little and they agreed to take us. We climbed up and joined them, and they took us to a big house that was hidden in the forest. They turned out to be a gang of petty criminals, but as always mother found a common language with them. She joined them in drinking vodka, and in the evening played the accordion for them. I don't know where she learned how. We stayed the night there, that was where I ate my first Russian pancakes with butter. I remember the taste to this day.

In the morning they gave us their cart, and one of their number led us to a neighboring village. We

stayed two weeks in this village with some people who spoke Lithuanian. We paid them only a few coins. My mother was afraid they would discover that we were carrying all our valuables and murder us for them, so she said we were penniless refugees. In fact, because we all spoke Lithuanian, they were very warm and friendly.

But the Germans were catching up with us, and we began thinking about what we would do. We heard that the Gestapo were already in Minsk, and that the Jews had been imprisoned in a ghetto. Since in any case we knew no one in Minsk, father wanted us to go back to Vilna where there were people that he knew.

We started on our way back, and for the first time I saw how the people hated us, as Jews. It was a terrible feeling. Other than the group of thieves no one had a good word to say to us. Everyone told us that our end was near, that soon there would be no more Jews.

We walked for several weeks, it seems to me. The following picture remains in my memory: Exhausted, we drag ourselves along the way: mother orders us all to sit down and rest. She takes out all the valuables and begins to conceal them in the hem of my clothes.

After that she takes a fine-toothed comb and begins to pick lice from my head. At that moment a car stops right by us and a German officer leaps out. He asks

what we are doing here and who we are. Luckily he is an officer of the Wermacht. I approach him and say that Minsk was bombed and that we are on our way to our relatives in Vilna. He calls to his three soldiers and then he says, "In fact, as Jews, I should hang you all on these trees, but because your well-educated daughter speaks German so well I am letting you live." After that he takes his whip and lashes father and the doctor on the back, then turns on his heel and drives off. This was our first face-to-face meeting with the Germans.

We came to the town of Smorgon not far from Oshmyany. As soon as we entered the town we were arrested and put into prison. The jail was a small, one-storey building with barred windows. Apparently there were still Jews in the town, for soon after we were arrested they began to come to our window, singly and in groups, to talk and to bring us food.

It was our first experience of prison. I knew they put criminals in prison - but to imprison people because they are Jews? Now we began to believe the stories of the Polish refugees who had warned us of the German atrocities. My god, how stupid we had been then - and particularly the grown-ups.

Among the Jews who came to see us were relatives of my father. We explained to them that father was in a very

bad way and we asked them to see if they could arrange his release. This was relatively easy because he didn't look Jewish, and because we had fallen into the hands of the Wermacht, not the Gestapo. The following day a German came, took father and released him. We heard that they had put him on a cart and sent him to Oshmyany, to other relatives.

This experience in Smorgon was the first time I saw how quickly news spreads among the Jews, how closely they are tied to each other and how much they try to help each other when things are bad.

The rest of us remained in prison. At night they began to call us for questioning. Me they called with particular frequency. My interrogators would get drunk and I had to amuse them. Each time I came back, mother would ask if they hadn't raped me. On the third night I was summoned again. Around me there were six drunken men. They started screaming at me and saying that they had played with me for long enough -- now they must "taste" me. They started casting lots between them to decide who would be the first. I was very scared, but I understood that crying wouldn't save me, that I must simply try to play for time, perhaps something would happen that would save me. I said I wanted to drink too, even though I had never drunk before, I started joking with them and pretending I was drunk. This carried on for some

time. Suddenly there was a sharp sound of a boot kicking the door, and a German officer entered. I threw myself at him and he asked what I was doing there. I told him we hadn't done anything wrong and that we wanted to get to Vilna, to our relatives. He looked around him, looked at me, and understood what was going on. He had taken a fancy to me, he said, so he would help me; but he added that we are a lost race. He then ordered them to return me immediately to the cell and to release us all the following morning, and said that he himself would come to check that his orders were carried out. I told mother we had been saved but she refused to believe me until the moment we were released.

The Germans gave us a little food for the journey. Once again we found ourselves on the road -- but this time without father. By now we all realized quite how bad things were. Our fear of the population grew. I already knew what it was to be hungry, but we began to understand that real starvation awaited us. In the course of my life I would be forced to bear hunger more than once.

We had dreamed of Vilna as if of a paradise, and yet the Jews of Smorgon told that in Vilna there were Chapunim -- groups of Lithuanians who kidnapped Jewish men from the streets and from their houses, and no one knew what became of them. Rumor had it that they were shot, although the Germans claimed they were

sent away to work. The Jews didn't know what to believe. But it was clear that life under the Germans would be hell itself for us.

We stopped in another small town before we got to Vilna. Again we were arrested immediately and put into prison. The local people behaved terribly toward us. Already Jews were worse than dogs in their eyes, and that meant they could do anything to us. ~~They made me watch how~~ they beat my mother and forced me to watch. In the first instant I felt as if I had turned to stone. Then, as if in a dream, I said to the torturers that if they would stop beating my mother I would show them something. They stopped, and as if deep in shock I began to tear open the hem of my dress and take out all the valuables. There were some six people there -- if one can call them people -- and they stood there open-mouthed. Never in their lives had they seen anything like it. They were particularly awed by a watch that father had ordered from Cartier in Paris, with diamonds encrusting the face and entwined in the bracelet. They stood there stunned, their eyes moving from the table laden with rings, brooches, watches, and earrings to us and back to the table. Then they barked at us to get out. That's how it was at the beginning when they first came to power. Afterwards these human animals who called themselves "supermen " became a thousand

times worse and more despicable.

We went off in the direction of Vilna. None of us said anything at all for a long time, and when we began to speak it was as if nothing had happened. I had liked jewels since I was a child and loved to see mother wearing them, but I didn't regret what I had done for one moment. I couldn't forget how they had beaten my mother.

A day or two later we got to Vilna and went straight to mother's relatives, the relatives from whom I had fled only a few months earlier in such a shameful manner. We had no possessions, no money, and were absolutely filthy, but they welcomed us very warmly. They gave us a room and we settled ourselves on the floor. Mother washed us and poured kerosene on our heads, and then she went out to look for father.

In this period of my life I began to see the people surrounding me in a different light. Tamara was completely unspoiled, although she was a very silent child and very introverted. But I still couldn't find a common language with her. I loved my father very much, but I felt sorry for him because he was weak. He was a very good and warm-hearted person, but because of his poor health and inability to do manual labor he was not much help to us on the many occasions along the way when the assistance of a man was sorely needed. The doctor was also not used to manual labor but

while we were on the road he would heal people and in return they would give us all food and lodging. My attitude to the doctor gradually changed; I began to feel sorry for him, and even to like him. Of all of us, the one who adapted most easily was mother. Chameleon-like, she knew how to suit herself to circumstances. She was very healthy and had quick hands and she soon learned to light fires, prepare meals (or more correctly, to improvise), to sew and to wash clothes. I was useless with my hands, which infuriated her, but like her I knew how to talk to people of all sorts, to adapt myself to everybody, to speak fearlessly and not to feel embarrassed. Mother aroused in me wonder and admiration. And I was jealous of the way she loved Tamara.

As I have said, rumors used to fly round with the speed of lightening. A few days after our arrival people came and told us that father had been admitted to the Jewish hospital. "He isn't ill, it's just safer that way," they explained, because so far the Germans hadn't touched the hospitals.

Except for mother, we hardly went out of the house. Mother would run around to arrange various things, a Star of David on her clothes, back and front. We had no clothes, no

shoes, no money. What the Jews of Vilna still had, we had already lost. Nevertheless, we had to eat to live, and mother's relatives had a bad enough time feeding themselves. I don't know how mother did it, but somehow we managed--although I was often hungry. All day we sat and waited for mother, and then she would come and tell us what was going on in town and in the hospital. It was rumored that some of the more respectable Jews with good connections wanted to set up a Judenraat as the Germans wanted.

Today I know that the Germans planned each step, and especially at the beginning, so that the Jews would believe them. People wanted to believe the Germans' promises and declarations, for of course everyone wanted to believe they would stay alive. The desire for survival is the strongest instinct I have ever seen. Everyone wanted to survive that terrible period. It was 1941, when the Nazis were at the height of their power, and yet in their hearts all the Jews believed that soon the Germans would be ousted, Hitler would be deposed, and the terror would come to an end.

Dr. Finkelstein knew no one in Vilna. He was scared to leave the house because of his being a Communist. The situation gradually wore him down. As I have said, I became increasingly close to him, and we would spend long hours together, he told me a great deal about

literature, music, and even medicine, Things that always interested me alot.

And that's how we lived until they put all us Jews into the ghetto -- the Vilna Ghetto.

I am in a very bad mood because of the things I am thinking and everything going on around me, and one thing of course influences the other. I live with my past, with my getting older, and now also with my loneliness. All around me I see that people aren't what they were, that relationships aren't what they used to be. How hard it is to get accustomed to the new style. Even young people are different: nothing interests them apart from themselves. The only thing they want is to get rich as quickly as possible, at any price. Compared to people like that, my children are wonderful. Though neither of them have easy lives, for different reasons, their inner world is richer and more spiritual. But to my sorrow I can do nothing at all to make their lives easier.

They came to get us at dawn. The Germans and the Lithuanians came in and began to scream and to hurry us up, and finally threw everyone out of the flat. Even though

it wasn't the first time I had encountered these animals, I was overcome with such great fear that my heart stopped beating. To see grown-up, educated people suddenly behave like small, scared children was terrible. They were almost crazy from fear.

Thousands of people plodded along the road without looking right or left -- pale, exhausted people carrying suitcases, their children in their arms, the yellow Star of David on their clothes. People who had been sentenced to the most terrible death plodded along thinking only of the next moment and no more, their only concern how to bear it and how to make it easier for themselves and those dear to them. The effect of this sight was so deep that I feel that people must experience it in order to understand how strong is the passion for life.

Originally the Germans set up two ghettos, a big one and a small one. The ghettos were in the old part of Vilna, where the Jews had lived for hundreds of years and where the famous Jewish culture of Vilna had flourished. Our destination was the large ghetto.

I want to tell everything from my own viewpoint. This period has been much written about and much debated, and I am writing about it from a warm and comfortable home. It all seems like a film being

run and rerun in front of my eyes that I am interpreting at my will. But even today as I write, I am convinced that every detail is as it happened, that that's how I felt it at the time.

We entered the ghetto -- mother, Tamara, the doctor, and I. My father, as I have said, had already taken refuge in the hospital. The hospital was the only organized Jewish institution in the ghetto, and its administrative director, Genz, was appointed Commander of the ghetto. Not unnaturally, he got people connected with the hospital to serve on the Judenraat, and among them my father for people liked him and respected him very much, largely because he was honest and good-hearted. In addition he spoke Lithuanian and German well; and he looked a pure Aryan, which I am sure was very important during this period. One of father's acquaintances, Dr. Freed, was appointed as chairman of the Judneraat.

Genz himself was married to a Lithuanian, and their only daughter had been my friend at school. I was very surprised that he was in the ghetto. He was a captain in the Reserves in the Lithuanian army, he had many Lithuanian friends, and had always considered himself more Lithuanian than Jewish. But he turned out to be a faithful Jew. He could have hidden behind his fine friends but he reckoned that with his connections and his charisma he would be able to help save his fellow Jews

if he took it upon himself to be their leader. All the pleading of his wife and daughter were to no avail, and he threw in his lot with the rest of us.

My father had already prepared a place for us at 3 Arklu Street, right by the Judenraat. It should be remembered that the entire ghetto covered only a few streets, and as the houses in those few streets had to provide homes for everyone a terrible struggle began for every square meter. But with my father a member of the Judenraat we were among a privileged group lucky enough to share a room with only one other family -- in our case, a family from Warsaw with a daughter my own age. In all, the apartment had five room. Joseph Glassman, the head of Beitar, who came from Lithuania and was appointed deputy chief of the Jewish police in the ghetto, also lived there with his girlfriend and her little sister. There were lots of other people whom I knew only slightly.

Father and I began to work from the first day. Father was appointed assistant ghetto supplies officer and chief judge, since he was a lawyer, while I worked in the Registration Department of the police, the office which registered all the population of the ghetto. The doctor got work in the Jewish Sick Fund , Kupat Holim. We were lucky to be working; staying at home was hell because there were so many people in such little space, all sharing one kitchen, one bathroom, and

one toilet. Mother used to tell of the quarrels that broke out over all sorts of trivial things. Since there was nothing to eat, terrible jealousy developed among the women, and they used to peer into each other's pots to see what was cooking. But it was the rumors that occupied people most -- who had said what and who had heard what.

It may be hard to believe, but even there, in that hell, some people were more privileged than others. I had the good fortune to be one of those with more privileges. After all, I was seventeen and wanted to live every moment and to have a taste of all those things I had read about. I wanted to do it all quickly for I knew the end would come soon, and I wanted to do as much as possible before that end came.

> Today I think about it, how strange people are, how little they understand of life and of themselves. People are so petty, such money grabbers, so little concerned with the good of others.

We had entered the ghetto empty-handed. At the beginning father and the doctor slept in one bed, mother slept with Tamara, and I slept on my own, which was considered a luxury. But since father was a member of the Judenraat he received most of the basic things and a little furniture. And in addition we had food cards like everyone else, but it was hard to live off the food cards alone. Luckily, because of father, we were

entitled to an additional weekly ration of butter, bread, sugar, and horse meat. Mother learned to cook horse meat very well. Also since father was in charge of supplies for the ghetto he was permitted to go to town on his own (wearing the yellow Star of David) to make the necessary arrangements, and he would take advantage of these outings to buy us additional foods.

And so we began to live our lives. Mother always tried to get it into our heads that this terrible period would soon be over and everything would go back to what it had been before. It's interesting that in the ghetto she went back to my father. Her affair with the doctor ceased to interest her and she broke it off. As always, she did exactly what she wanted. Once she told me she lived as she wanted because nothing had meaning any more. Then she said that she was very happy, and that she hoped that I would manage to leave the ghetto unsullied and find the happiness in life that she had done, and that then I would understand her and understand her behavior with the doctor and father.

Today I am fifty-two, and I understand her very well. Father wasn't man enough for her, he was too good , too moderate, not musical, and of unfortunately weak character.

In any event, the doctor was now on his own. Mother had been his whole life, it was on her account that he was in the ghetto; yet now he found himself without her and without his family, as lonely as a dog. Father, who came from Vilna, had lots of relatives round him and we were also near him.

Since mother made sure we learned all the time and that we read books, I quickly learned Polish. I read a lot because the famous Strashone Library was in the ghetto. The rest of the time I spent with other young people. Since I worked in a department that belonged to the police I wore an armband that enabled me to walk around the ghetto in the evening too, something that was forbidden to the others. Commander Genz's daughter was my friend, and she would come to the ghetto often and we would all meet at Genz's house. He had a two-roomed apartment with a record player and records, and every evening he put it at our disposal. Sometimes I would go and visit her in the apartment outside the ghetto where she lived with her mother. Genz would remove my yellow patches and take me there, and we would walk on the sidewalk like people and not in the road like animals.

I remember one such evening. It was cold, and cold stars shone in the night sky, and as I walked I asked myself if I would ever again be a person with full privileges, able to walk on

the sidewalk like everyone else without being afraid -- the most important thing being not to be afraid. We went in to the apartment and closed the door behind us, and apart from us -- Adah, my friend's mother, her father and myself -- there was no one else there. There was no noise, no quarrels between neighbors. One thought ran through my mind: There are still people who live in peace and quiet like this -- why can't I be one of them?

Tamara studied with several teachers, among them Mrs. Gershowitz, who was considered the best music teacher in the days before the war. At the beginning Tamara didn't work, and mother didn't work until the end. Father even arranged for a woman to come and help mother cook and do the dishes. Since we belonged to the Judenraat and had many friends, our lives were relatively easy. Very frequently there were aktsias and each time they would take people away. The mood was terrible when the Germans and the police came and took away adults and children. Everyone was smitten with panic and fear. At such moments, I would always say to myself: "It isn't our turn yet, they haven't come to take us." And the following day my lust for life would increase and I would do my utmost to get some enjoyment out of life.

I enjoyed my work very

much. All together we were ten young women and our boss, a very interesting and cultured man from Warsaw. By chance he was living in the same apartment as we were. In the cellar there was a bath house, and thanks to him we were washed and dressed in clean clothes. The relationship between the young women and girls I worked with was good. I got particularly friendly with one young girl, who was very smart and educated and from a rich home. We were very similar in build and since I had hardly anything to wear she used to lend me dresses if I had a date. We talked a lot about the relationship between men and women. I got a great deal out of these conversations, for At home nobody talked of such things.

People ignored many of society's taboos because they thought they had only a short time left to live. Everyone began to expose themselves and to show their true faces, both the good and the bad sides of their personality. It was as if they had thrown off all restrictions. While some became real animals, others showed themselves to have staunch morals and inner beauty right up to the last moment.

I felt things very clearly. All my senses were overwound. Things that weren't love I felt as love and all my emotions were exaggerated. The most important thing was not to miss anything, to do everything and to try everything, and quickly... to achieve all one's ambitions as quickly as possible.

I worked in an office where our job was to issue pink cards to the families of those who had yellow cards showing that they were needed by the Germans. The wives and children less than sixteen years of age of those who had yellow cards were entitled to receive pink certificates that entitled them to stay in the ghetto. The Germans pushed us to finish the work as quickly as possible and as there was a great deal of work, we worked from dawn to the small hours of the night. The queues of applicants and their families stretched to infinity. At this time I was very pleased with myself, for my boss had put me in charge of organizing the whole operation together with him and he was very satisfied with the results. I think it was the only time someone was satisfied with my work. But these unfortunate people were in a terrible state, and for the first time in my life I encountered bribery: people came to me to ask me to arrange fictitious pink cards for them. The various gifts they were willing to give me in return greatly tempted me but I refused, for father had explained to me that refusal to accept a bribe must remain a principle all my life, no matter what the circumstances in which I found myself.

When the issuing of certificates was completed there was an aktsia, which was called 'the the Yellow Work Card Aktsia. The people with the yellow cards and their immediate families were transferred to the small ghetto, which had long been

emptied of all its inhabitants. All those who remained in the big ghetto were taken away to be killed.

Father had been given a certain number of yellow cards to allocate between the workers in his department. He knew that everyone who had a card would be saved. For my father, making that allocation was a traumatic experience; I don't know how he did it. From a psychological point of view it was a resounding German victory -- forcing people to do things that in their worst dreams they had never visualized they would ever have to do. From that time on, father always said he had no right to live in this world.

With hundreds of others we were herded into the small ghetto, into what had been Vilna's largest synagogue. It was a magnificent building with a beautiful interior made largely of white marble. No one knew if they would take us back to our houses. We were all very scared and talked in whispers. After three days they took us back to the large ghetto, and life returned to what it had been before.

Summer came. Three or four times they took us out under guard to bathe in the river. We lay there beneath the trees -- the birds sang, the air was wonderful, everything was green, but we were like hunted animals. Why? No one could answer.

A sports ground was set up and many matches were

organized. There were lots of logs there that had been readied for the winter, and after work we would climb up on the highest wood stack and lie there, warming ourselves in the sun's last rays as we dreamed and flirted and loved. There was also a theater, and an orchestra that played classical music, and we would all go together from one place to the other.

I fell in love then, or so it seemed to me, with Gamak Stutman, a young man who was a member of the FPU (the United Partisans' Organization), an organization like that in the Warsaw ghetto whose purpose was to fight the Germans. But in the final analysis this organization achieved nothing at all. Later, almost all its members took to the forests and became partisans. Gamak was the son of a very Zionist family that spoke Hebrew and dreamed of Palestine. He worked as a policeman on the guard at the gate and helped to smuggle in weapons. He loved me very much, much more than I loved him. We used to spend a lot of time together and he took great care of me. He would even bring me toffees, at a time when they were simply not to be had in the ghetto. I was very grateful to him for being good-hearted and worrying about me so much at ~~that~~ This terrible time. I knew that as long as I was with him he would take care of me.

I was already seventeen when I came down with very severe chickenpox. Gamak, his mother, and my mother sat for hours by my bedside so that I wouldn't scratch my face and remain scarred all my life. My appearance was still a matter of

great importance to those near to me! It seems that deep in their hearts they still believed that they (or at least I) would live.

Gamak's family liked me a lot and I was hardly ever in my own home. Then when I got better Gamak brought a key and said that he had found a room just for us -- a room belonging to his friend, who used to work nights. I decided that the time had come to make the last step and go and live with Gamak. I came home and told mother. Gamak's family may have thought of me as his future wife but I was only seventeen and didn't yet really feel ready. But in that terrible, narrow, gray, crowded, dirty ghetto, where people made love on the stairs or in even worse places, it meant we had a room of our own where it was warm and where it was even possible to eat a little.

My parents, or so I felt, didn't understand what was going on around them. Discipline had always been very strict in our home, but I suddenly became very independent. They had lost all their authority in one blow. Their only thought was how to save us and themselves, but they could see no solution.

> Only now do I understand how difficult it was for them to be parents at that time. If now under normal conditions I cannot help my children and shed tears at night because of wanting to help them and not being able to, then it must have been absolute hell.

For me it was easier for I was selfish and thought only

of how to make the hours and the days pass as pleasantly as possible. As I have said, I gradually grew closer to the lonely Dr. Finkelstein. I would go and visit him and tell him all my thoughts and impressions, and this gave him a great deal of pleasure. My physical relations with Gamak gave me no satisfaction whatever, and we talked a lot about that. Gamak was still young and inexperienced, and it seems that I didn't love him. I was only terribly grateful to him for everything.

Somehow, everyone knew what was going on at the front. Everyone's dream was that the Russians would come in time to save us. And so we lived from day to day until the ghetto was finally abolished a few months later.

I have just read everything I have written so far. I look back at experiences I have had since then in the eyes of a fifty-two year old woman. Were these really my thoughts and my feelings at that time?

I only know that the Germans took my best years

my youth. And that the events of those years left an indelible mark on my life.

An incident concerning my father is very clear in my mind. As a judge, he had sentenced several people to a few days in prison for theft. (Even in the ghetto there was a prison, for there were a lot of people and order had to be maintained somehow.) The conditions there were terrible. Then one day the Germans came, took the prisoners away and shot them in Ponari, a small village outside Vilna. Father could never forgive himself for what he had done. He paced up and down the room as if he were deranged. I do not know where he got the inner strength from after such severe heart trouble. He said that if we were liberated and he were to be hanged, our liberators would be justified in doing so. His conscience wouldn't let him live, he said, but to my sorrow his life dragged on to an even more terrible end.

The end of the ghetto was approaching. We lived in continual fear. No longer did we spend our evenings singing and playing the guitar with friends. More and more people slipped out secretly and took to the forest. One night the Russians bombed Vilna. How happy we were to know that the Russians were bombing the Germans!

At this time the Germans made an <u>aktsia</u> because of the Wittenberg affair. Wittenberg was a Jew and the representative

of the Communists in the FPU in the ghetto. The Germans captured the runner of the organization, a Pole, and under interrogation he gave the Germans Wittenberg's name. Wittenberg went underground. The Germans ordered that he be given up or the whole ghetto would be in danger. The ghetto split into two camps -- those who were prepared to hand him over and those who were not. After a few days the Germans threatened to put an end to the ghetto if Wittenberg were not handed over. People from the underground instructed me and my girlfriend and many other young people to position ourselves by the window of the library I loved so much. They gave us lamps filled with vitriol and ordered us to throw them at the Germans if they entered the courtyard. In the end, Wittenberg chose to give himself up. Under custody he committed suicide with poison he had put under his fingernails.

> Spring 1943. We are in the Vilna Ghetto. I walk through the narrow, gloomy lanes. I walk and am always afraid of what the future holds -- the next hour, the next moment. I want so much to leave the ghetto, to be like everyone else, to breath the spring air -- but no, for me it is forbidden, I am not allowed to do so. I look up at the patch of blue sky above the gray houses and

I think to myself: it is worth trying to get through this time, one must try as hard as one can to do that, to foresee the end of the Germans -- and if I succeed I will be able to see another beautiful spring day.

Today is a beautiful spring day and I am in my own country, in my house, and I go for a walk, and life is good to me.

I remember that moment, when we stood by the window and thought that with the canisters of vitriol we would be able to defeat the Germans. Or even to die as heroes. But they didn't want us to die as heroes, they knew exactly what to do with us. They blew up two houses in ~~Zachuno~~ Stroshnya street, fired a few rounds, and left. Then, standing there by the window, I had been prepared to die, but after that I was nevertheless delighted to be alive still. We ran to look for our families. Nothing had happened to mine, but my friend's mother had been killed; only her father and little sister were left. Her father went to pieces and became completely apathetic and my friend had to assume the responsibility for her ten-year-old sister.

The following day, groups began to organize in secret to escape to the forests and operate as partisans. The fate

of the young people was determined by whether they belonged to the FPU. Once the FPU command had decided not to defend the ghetto, they decided to try to escape from it. Both my boyfriend and my girlfriend were members. My girlfriend firmly refused to go, because of her mother's death. She didn't want to leave her little sister even though until then she had found very little in common with her. But now she felt obliged to do what she could to take her mother's place. She stayed to the end and went to her death with her sister.

My boyfriend bought himself a gun. He wanted to take me with him. He asked some of the leaders of the group if they would agree, but they refused. My father asked too but it didn't help. They said I was too spoilt, that I didn't belong to the party; how many young people could they save? (Many were later killed as partisans, but that was a different sort of death.) Who gave them the right to decide who was allowed to go to the forests and who wasn't? The Germans managed to arrange things such that people would have to face the most terrible choices! Many people had to make choices that weighed heavily on their consciences, decisions that have remained as bitter memories, as nightmares, all their lives.

I begged my boyfriend to go to the forests without me, but he felt we must stay together until death. It didn't occur to him they would separate us, and he wanted to be with me to the

end. When he said we would be together I believed him and I stopped trying to persuade him. My girlfriend also didn't go. We stayed in the ghetto to the end.

Now, when I remember everything that happened in the ghetto, I understand what a terrible time it was. They deprived me of the most beautiful time in my life -- my youth. Nothing was holy anymore, everything lost its value. I saw the most terrible sides of life. I saw things that no imagination could succeed in conjuring up. It was as if I fell from a high mountain to a deep chasm, the deepest on earth. The events of those years marked me for life. The entire flow of my life was to be molded in a way that depended almost entirely on the events of those years, not on me. My ambition was to stay alive at any price and to get the most enjoyment out of life. Now I am a mother I understand that in the ghetto I was a bad daughter. I was preoccupied with myself and my own life.

The only person there to whom I showed any kindness was the doctor. I felt very sorry for him. He was trapped in this hell by his love for my mother, while she for the last year and a half had been taken up with

herself, with Tamara, with father and the house, something which wasn't at all easy under the conditions we lived in. Mother still tried to give Tamara everything she could. But I forsook them all. I was eighteen years old but I was already a woman, a ripe woman, and it was my fate to experience, to see, and to hear many things. But independent I wasn't even then. I was Douel's daughter, I had Gemak, who gave me all he could, and my life was good -- or as good as it could have been under the circumstances. Of course, there were people there who were brave and less egoistic than I was. On one of the last days Gemak gave me high boots with thick soles. This gift saved me in the first year of the camp, for they didn't take away our boots.

A short time before the destruction of the ghetto I met Gentz. He said to me "Escape to the forest if you can. I'm on my way to the Gestapo and it's likely that I won't come out alive. Give my love to my daughter. I believed I could save at least the young and the healthy until the Russians came, but I didn't succeed in doing even that. They are afraid to destroy the ghetto as long as I'm here. They told me that I can escape, I have friends who would help me, but I want to die as a Jew."

He went to the Gestapo. It was said that they let him shoot himself, but I'm not sure that's the truth, nor is his

daughter. She is now living in America, and I am in contact with her to this day.

After they took Genz, we knew the end was near. Although it was possible to escape or to hide, it needed a lot of money or connections, and we had neither. We simply had to accept our fate.

The day the ghetto was destroyed the Judenraat divided the money that it had and father gave part of it to me and Tamara. Then all the Jews who were left put a few belongings on their backs and straggled out in a long line, surrounded by Germans and ~~Latvians~~ Lithuanians with dogs, in the direction of "Rossa." I vaguely remember "Rossa" was some sort of huge field, a place without any houses. There they separated us from father, the doctor, and Gamak. I never saw them again. I want to add that grandma and grandpa had been murdered right at the beginning in Fort 9 in the aktsia in Ghetto Kovno when they murdered all the people over sixty years old. We had heard the news through friends.

We didn't have enough time to take leave of each other. Father only said that if we remained alive we were to go to Uncle Yasha the cello player who had our money and he would help us. Gamak said, "Don't feel sorry that we didn't go to the forest. I will try to stay alive for you and we will meet again." The doctor said nothing.

"Rossa" was hell. We stood on our feet all night long. Children tried to find their parents, parents tried to find their children. The fear was inconceivably great. No one knew what was going to happen. The following day we saw several of the people we knew from the FPU -- five, I seem to remember -- who had been hanged and their bodies left to sway in the wind. We tried to stay together the whole time and not to lose each other -- Mother, Tamara and I, my girl friend and her sister. I remember the Germans carrying little children and asking who they belonged to, but no one answered. Knowing that to be a mother of small children meant certain death, women refused to acknowledge their own children. When morning came, everyone tried to make themselves look as good as possible, smoothing down their hair and painting their lips and cheeks so as to look younger and healthier. Our column was of women only. And once again the column began to move and no one knew where to.

There were the most terrible rumors that our turn had come. Germans and ~~Latvians~~ Lithuanians with dogs stood in long lines. One German directed us left or right with a whip. Everyone was allowed to go to the left, but to the right -- only those who had been sent there. My girlfriend could go to the right but they sent her sister to the left, and she went to the left after her sister. My mother they sent to the left, Tamara and I were sent to the right. We did not follow our mother. We were

afraid. Even though we didn't yet know where "right" would lead, we thought it might mean a little more life. We left mother and we went. I know how terrible it was, even though there were many who did the same, but mother seemed quite pleased, even happy, that we had a chance to live. For a mother, to watch her children die without being able to help is a devastating experience. But in one way, in abandoning her, we somehow failed her. And to this day I can't forgive myself for it.

For some two months it was as if I had been turned to stone. For the first time I was in a state of depression. I hardly saw or heard anything that was going on around me. I knew only that they loaded us on to freight cars that were terribly overcrowded. How many we were I don't know, but I remembered the freight cars that were to have taken us to Siberia, which had seemed terrible to me at the time. What a fool I had been! Here in the German freight cars, bodies were lying on top of each other; women cried, went out of their minds, hit themselves hysterically, tried to escape through the small blocked opening. They relieved themselves and the stench was awful. Tamara and I half lay, half stood. I can't remember exactly what happened, only that we didn't say a word. Neither she nor I. I think we traveled some three or four days. Once a day they would unlock the door, give us a drink, throw out a few bodies and

continue on the way. More than that I can't remember. Many times the train stopped and stood for hours. Finally we reached somewhere. It was night, there were a lot of sounds. The door of the freight car was opened and we were ordered to get out. I can imagine what we looked like when the spotlights landed on us and we saw the Germans and the dogs. We already knew that there were camps and that gas was used to murder people. We were ordered to march. On the way they ordered us to throw down all the possessions and valuables we had with us, including money. Tamara and I had hardly any possessions and no valuables at all. The money that father had given us we threw down immediately. Some huts could be seen in the distance and they sent us there.

We found ourselves in the same group as a woman called Flora Rom whom I knew only by sight. Her husband was a doctor and she was an architect. They had also been in the ghetto and she knew my parents. She seemed to me to be a wise woman, full of spirit. Everyone asked her whether it looked as if the huts had ovens. She said that she didn't think there were ovens there because she couldn't see chimneys.

They herded us into a hut. Here I was to learn many other lessons in my life. To this day I cannot understand how I succeeded in staying alive there and adapting to the situation. In the ghetto I had still been my father's spoiled daughter. I could say in a tone of superiority that

I was Douel's daughter. But here in the camp it didn't interest anyone. We were like animals. Each person worried only about himself. The only important thing was to stay alive.

I am with my second husband in Tiberias, in a luxury hotel. This is where I started my life in Israel, some thirty years ago. The view here is beautiful, really wonderful. But I am fifty-two years old, and very tired. How good it was when I was twenty-one with my first husband whom I loved so much. Then I was virtually barefoot and without clothes, but life was good. I felt then as I had felt years before, that the whole world belonged to me. To my sorrow, everything changed again.

We spent the first night on the floor in that hut. The women still thought there were ovens there, and everyone screamed and argued. I lay there like a stone. My mind was a blank. In the morning they gave us some muddy liquid to drink and sent us to another hut. There, on that same cold morning, they ordered us to take off everything except our shoes. We stood there crowded together, trembling from fear, from cold, and from shame. The Germans and the Latvians stood looking at us, hitting out at us and laughing.

By now I had learned that the camp was in Kaiserwald, near Riga. Before the war Kaiserwald was a lovely place, people came there to rest. There were

many villas, dachas and sanatoriums. My father and mother had lived here for a long time after father's heart attack. The cruelty of fate!

They led us to the shower. They gave us a very little time but even so we succeeded in washing ourselves after that nightmarish journey. They let us out on the other side of the shower and marked each of us with a number. From then on we were nothing more than numbers. They gave us some clothes to wear and sent us to the huts. As if on purpose we had been given a real mixture of things -- odd shoes, dresses that didn't fit (although it was hard to call such garments dresses), some underwear, a coat. I tied my coat with some string because it was too long.

The huts had three-tiered bunks and they were very crowded. I understood that here there were iron rules and if I didn't adapt to them and make an effort to stay alive, nothing would remain of me. Here too for the first time I heard words like Kapo and Blockelteste that were the key to everything -- except freedom. In the beginning I was like a block of wood and if I hadn't learned to adapt my end would have been ruin. The Germans wanted us not to adapt; they wanted us to die more quickly.

And so began the routine of camp life: In the morning

they gave us a muddy liquid to drink and some bread, a quarter of a loaf per person. In addition to the bread they gave us a small portion of jam. We would follow the blockelteste keenly when he gave out these crumbs to see if some got more or less than the others. It was a question of life or death for us. After that they would make us run outside for Appel. We would line up for roll call and they would count us. It took hours, and the whole of that time we would have to stand in the cold. After that they gave us some more muddy liquid, which they called soup. And once again each of us looked hungrily at the other's portion -- perhaps she had been lucky enough to have a potato or some barley fall in to her plate -- for this soup was made almost entirely of water. After that we again had to stand for hours, until the Germans and the Kapo had finished counting and beating us. In the end they gave us a muddy drink known as ersatz coffee and sent us off to sleep.

As if through a cloud, I noticed that something was happening around me. Women were bringing clothes that fitted them better, a little more food, a potato or two, and trying to get water for washing. I didn't understand it at all. Then the day came when they gave us soup and said that all the women under thirty could get another helping. Tamara pulled me and we went. Suddenly a German was in front of us, a whip in his hand, and he kicked me and screamed, "How does

an old woman like you dare to take a second helping of soup?" And yet I remembered very well that they had said "women under thirty," and I was eighteen and a half.

I was stunned. Fortunately, Destiny or my guardian angel made someone drag me back -- a girl by the name of Esther, who recognized me from the ghetto. She had known my mother well when she worked in the ghetto collecting clothes for children and orphans. She was three years older than I, and as a child had lived in the street where the ghetto was later established. Her mother had died young and she had brought up her little sister, whom the Germans had afterward sent "left". Her father had once had a small haberdashery. She was very independent, talented, and good hearted. Later I came to know that she was not afraid and had her wits about her: she had the most wonderful high boots where she succeeded in concealing gold that her father had given her. Now she took me and Tamara to sleep us next to her and her friend Raya , so now we were four and no longer so alone. She was a sort of leader for us, because she was better than we were in adjusting to the circumstances. She gave me lots of warmth and caring , and from the women who worked in Kleiderkamer she got me clothes that fitted better. When my appearance improved she signed the three of us up to work in the SS hospital, and Tamara to work in the battery factory.

Even today I don't understand why she took such care of us, wasting on us the money that she and Raya carried the entire time at such great risk. I think that she loved me, even though we came from such different worlds. She taught me how to adapt, and I told her of my former life -- something of which she had no idea at all. She simply had no conception that such a life of luxury was possible. Now she lives in America, married with two children. It can be assumed that she is very happy. Over the years I have met her three times; we live in different worlds, as we did before the war. It bothers me that I have no way of repaying her. I told her this, and she answered that I have no need to repay her -- simply that if I can I must help other people. From then on I have tried to help everyone I can. But if the help I give equals that which she gave me I don't know.

I started to go to work each day. We now spent less time on our feet in the daily roll calls. Our work was sorting potatoes - we could take a potato or two back with us, and if no one saw us we could bake them on the stove for supper. And if not we could always swop a potato for hot water, which for us was more important even than food. All this involved great risk.

One morning I was sent off to work in the SS hospital, where I was ordered to scrub the floor. I had never scrubbed a floor in my life. The German who had taken me there said he would come back in an hour. I didn't know what to do or where to begin. I stood and cried. Suddenly a young boy came in. By his clothes, he looked like a Zvanges Arbeiter, a forced laborer from Holland. He looked at me and then at the bucket and understood everything. He ordered me to go out into the corridor and to warn him if a German approached. The things were said in such a way that I said nothing and went out. My heart pounded like a hammer. I knew that if we were surprised it would be the end of me, and he would be shot or sent to the front, which was the same as being killed. At last he came out and called me in. Only then did I dare look at him. He was a very good looking boy. He thrust a piece of bread into my hand, asked me to be by the fence before the evening roll call, and disappeared. I looked around me. The room was clean, washed, and in perfect order.

I waited for the German who was supposed to come and take me. He came and escorted me back to the basement where the potatoes were sorted. There I told my friends about the meeting with the young Dutchman and added that at six in the evening I would go to the fence to meet him. They started explaining to me that this was very dangerous, but the rendezvous interested me and I decided to go.

I wasn't sure I'd be able to recognize him. Even so I went. I had no idea at all what went on by the fence. The men and the women in the camp were separated by a barbed wire fence three or four meters high. But it was possible to see each other and to shout across, and people would even send each other little gifts, such as bits of bread, potatoes, and the like. People tried to help each other, if not physically at least morally. One word of warmth helped to support you through a whole day of cold, hunger, blows, lice, and the other afflictions of camp life. Of course, all this had to be done in the few minutes while the guard's back was turned. When the guards saw the slightest attempt to make contact they would beat the "culprits." But the young man recognized me, brought me a potato, and tried to cheer me up (he wasn't Jewish). I met him every day, at work or by the fence. He was my second guardian angel.

I stayed in Kaiserwald for another ten weeks. In the ninth week Martin came -- and suggested that we make an escape from the camp -- he had heard that they were sending his group to the front, which was as good as a death sentence. I knew that this was an empty dream. It was impossible to escape from the camp. I told him that he should escape without me. To this day I don't know what became of him. He gave me a good luck charm as a parting gift, a small brooch. I managed to keep it despite all

the searches and took it with me through all the camps until Bucharest, and then I lost it -- I don't know how.

In the tenth week my friend Esther suggested it would be worth signing on for work that meant sleeping in the factory. The huts were places of terrible filth and awful hunger, on top of which there were lice, epidemics, and sores. We knew we couldn't last out for very long. I agreed immediately. She promised to arrange it all herself. Everybody wanted to do work of this kind, for we had been told that anyone who did work important for the Germans wouldn't be killed for the time being. My girlfriend bribed the Blockelteste and the Kapo and one morning the three of us -- Esther, Raya, and I -- were sent to work in the AEG factory. Two months later Tamara was sent to join us, after many attempts and much effort on Esther's part. Initially they didn't want to let her go, which put a strain on my nerves. But Esther said that we must begin to work there, and that afterward they would let Tamara come. And that's exactly what happened. And here, after eleven weeks of hell, we found ourselves in relatively normal conditions.

We meet now every year -- the women from that camp who remained alive. We meet on the anniversary of the day the Russians entered the town and liberated us. The more I think about the past, the more I

believe that it was a real achievement in the camps to preserve one's humanity, not to become an animal. For the Germans wanted us to become animals and to die. But we in our group, and first and foremost Flora, did everything we could to remain homo sapiens. The thing that helped most was hope, and it also helped to find in this terrible time even the smallest little positive thing, the slightest good attributes in the people around you.

They brought us to the AEG factory, where we worked in eight-hour shifts making cables and parts for aeroplanes. They housed us in four blocks where we slept on three-tiered bunks. There were only women there, even the guards were female SS. One of them was a real animal, she persecuted us day and night. In the roll calls after work she forced us to stand on our feet for hours and carried out searches to find even the smallest forbidden articles. The food ration there was very small, but it was warm because of the central heating. Most important of all it was clean, because the Latvian women who were our work overseers were afraid we would infect them with something.

In the beginning they put me in hut 3, apart from my friends, but Esther got me transferred to hut 2, which was more comfortable and warmer and had good showers.

We belonged to the factory, and only to the factory. Every morning we would get up and wash, and drink coffee with a slice of bread and margarine or jam. Then they would count us quickly and we would go out to work. At the beginning I worked by a drilling machine, and then they transferred me to a machine making engine coils. At one o'clock in the afternoon they would give us something they called soup -- water with a potato in it. At three in the afternoon we would go back to our barracks, like the Latvians, and until six we could do as we pleased. Then we would have to go outside again for roll call. Discipline wasn't so bad. When the lover of our female SS Commander was with her, her mood improved and she didn't persecute us so badly. When she was alone again everything went back to what it had been before, but even so we now had a little more time for ourselves here, and each day Esther would give me an extra portion of bread, two slices that I shared with Tamara. under those conditions, that was a lot. She also gave us some soap when ours was finished. Esther used to buy it from the Latvian women in return for the gold coins, which she concealed in her vagina (or in her boots).

Led by Flora, a group of women emerged -- Sula, Adela, Dobka, Hinda, Tamara and I. As time passed other women joined us. Among them was one who had come to the camp pregnant. If the Germans had got wind of this they would

have killed her. Because of this it was a closely guarded secret. When she was in her fifth month they operated on her, thanks to the connections our doctor had with the doctor in the camp clinic in Kaiserwald, and took out a dead embryo. All this entailed terrible danger. When they took her to Kaiserwald, we didn't believe we would see her again. But they brought her back safe and sound.

We would talk among us about different things: music, history, literature. Flora even organized a puppet theater: she wrote a cheerful text, we sewed the puppets in our free time, and in the evenings we put on a real play. Flora was generally in high spirits; she swore that everything would be alright and that we would go free. Every morning before roll call, I would go up to Flora and ask her, "Flora, will everything be all right again?" and she would answer with confidence, "It'll be good;" sometimes we would say, "Flora, say something good," and she would say "Halva" -- something that for me symbolizes something good to this day. In the camp, words such as these gave us the strength to get through another day. It was the moral encouragement that she gave us and her desire that we should leave the camp psychologically unharmed that saved us. We were also devoted to each other. We gave each other birthday presents -- pieces of bread or a piece of soap, things that were very dear to us. I received from my Latvian

work overseer the book Anna Karenina, and we would read it between shifts. And then one day our female SS guard came up suddenly and caught me with it. She slapped my face and wanted to know who had given it to me. Knowing she liked men, I said I wanted to tell her what was written in the book -- after all, she was a primitive tyrant. She answered me, "Try. Tell me." At the beginning she stood opposite me in a threatening pose, legs astride; as I told my story she gradually relaxed her position until finally she sat down in a chair and listened. I don't remember how long I talked, but she didn't interrupt me and listened to the end. Of course, I told her only the bits dealing with the love affair between Anna and Vronsky. When I finished, she left the book in my hands, and didn't ask me again who had given it to me. And I carried on getting books.

At night, as we lay on the bunks after a hard day's work, a girl called Leah who had a lovely voice would sing "Eli eli lama azavtani" ("My god, my god, why hast thou forsaken me"), and we would lie there crying soundlessly.

When summer came we would sometimes sit a little in the sun in the yard, warming ourselves and dreaming of freedom.

After a few months in AEG they brought us striped prison clothes and shaved our heads. It was real mourning. We watched how the hair fell from our heads and we cried. Even

the young women looked like monsters without their hair. They gave us white kerchiefs to wrap round our heads. Even though there were no men in the camp, we wanted to look human. I once went a whole day without eating after I had given my portion of bread to another female prisoner who had altered my dress for me and taken it up. Afterward I tied it with a red belt.

The kerchiefs were as white as snow. We took turns in washing them and then we would leave them to dry on the central heating pipe, and in the morning we put them on again clean and dry. Under Flora's leadership, we did everything we could to stay human, and today it seems to me that that was the bravest thing we could have done in our condition.

The Germans could deprive us of everything but not of our dreams. We dreamed of the past and sometimes we even dreamed of the future. Each of us had her own plans for this misty future. We had one girl with us who secretly wrote poems on little pieces of paper, and then she would read them to us.

From the Latvian women we heard that the Russian front was getting nearer to us, that the Germans wanted to evacuate us, together with some of the factories, to the heart of Poland. There was terrible panic. We didn't know if this was really what the Germans intended, or if in fact they

wanted to take us to our deaths. The panic was terrible. All our group with the exception of ~~Dofka~~ Dolka appeared in the list for the transport. Flora believed they were taking us to work and we believed her. Some people did everything they could to get their names off the list. We decided that we were going -- to life or to death.

The whole time in the camp I didn't stop wondering what had happened to mother and father and the doctor. I asked myself whether Gamak was still alive. We all talked a lot about what had happened to our friends and families. As far as mother went, I had heard rumors that all those who had been sent left went to their deaths. But where we didn't know. As to the fate of the doctor, father, and Gamak, I knew nothing at all. All the time I was in the camp I believed that despite everything one of them was alive. This gave me strength to struggle with the depression that was the most terrible enemy of all.

Yesterday was the first day of 1977.
My god, how many things I have experienced, and how many more I still have to experience, or so it seems. I am struck with fear at the thought of it. My mood is black. Haim, my son, phoned to wish me a Happy New Year.

The day of the transport they woke us up with whips

and shouts. The place was full of Germans. They drove us into the shower and ordered us to strip. Suddenly we began to doubt that they were sending us off to work -- after all, the Germans were monsters. We started asking ourselves if it wasn't better to stay here in Riga. But it was already too late.

After the shower they gave us new prisoners' uniforms and shoes with wooden soles. Once again we looked like inmates of a lunatic asylum. We were struck by terrible fear. Once again they led us to freight cars, filled each car to capacity, and sealed it with a lead seal, So started the long journey to the unknown. All the members of our group were in a single car. Flora tried to calm us as best as she could. She said that as the Russians were approaching they were evacuating us and the machines to the rear. We tried to believe her. We tried to take our minds off the subject by talking of different things, and we told one another whole books. It was bitterly cold and we were starving, and we warmed ourselves by pressing close to each other. There was no toilet. We tried to hold back for as long as we could, and when we could not we relieved ourselves in a bucket.

Today, as I sit in a warm room, I find it absolutely impossible to believe that I managed to survive all this -- I who was always so weak.

Once again we journeyed for several days. One morning they opened the door of the car and ordered us out. All the people in our car, thank God, had arrived alive. We found a huge crowd of Germans waiting for us, yelling and lashing out at us. This was the Polish town of Torun with its medieval castle, "Fort 13". In this fort the Germans had decided to set up an underground factory. That was where we were supposed to work and to live. All this became known to us later. At the beginning, when they brought us to the fort, we were convinced that death awaited us.

The camp commander was Ludwig Blaterspiel. Not wanting to be sent to the front, he did everything he could to prove that the camp and the work in it were important. They held a roll call and started counting us and getting us in to groups. Suddenly he asked who knew how to read and write German. I don't remember if Flora stepped forward or if someone pushed her -- in any event she answered and said that she did. He asked what she had done before the war, and she answered that she had been an architect. He pointed at her and asked, "Das ist ein Architect?" ("This is an architect.") She said something and they wrote her name down. At that time to be treated like a human being was alot. They led each group downstairs in turn. This was the beginning of our lives below ground.

I haven't written for a long time because a very close

friend died. I lived with him and his wife for half a year. That was one of the hardest periods in my life, after the war. It was in Germany, in Munich, seven years ago. Both of them, and particularly he, gave me a lot of emotional support. I had the alternative of going to Germany and getting a large sum of money as reparations, or sitting and waiting in Israel and getting very little. I felt that my husband's financial position was deteriorating and even though I knew that a stay in Germany would be difficult and traumatic, for I hate the Germans, I decided to go to make things easier for my husband. Were it not for this family, who welcomed me with tremendous warmth and helped me in every way they could, I wouldn't have been able to get through it. I had terrible nightmares for I was forced to go the way I had passed in those terrible years. It is very probable that my visit to Germany shortened my life by several years. But I am pleased that I succeeded in doing this, for it helped my husband and eased our situation.

They led us down a very long corridor and assigned us to rooms with bunks. Our group tried to stay together. The food was a little better than in Riga, but there were hardly any facilities for washing and the lavatories were in a terrible state. The damp and the cold were unbearable,

and on top of that we looked absolutely terrible in our prison clothes with our heads shaved. We tried to improve our clothes a little and I remember that I cut a piece of cloth from my overall and made something resembling a brassiere from it. A whole staff of Germans were in charge of us now. They persecuted us as much and as often as they wanted. There was a bunker there into which women were thrown for the slightest offence.

The following day they divided us into groups. They made me the groupenfuhrer (group leader). The man in charge of me was a Latvian engineer, a very nice man indeed.

In the morning we would go up above ground, to the fortress, and my group had to be the leaders in running raw material to the different bunkers. I am sure that they all knew that no factory would be set up there, that we were merely treading water. But since the Germans and the Latvians were afraid of being sent to the front they all pretended they were doing very important work. There wasn't even enough electricity in the fortress for us, let alone enough for a factory. But we all thought that this way we were gaining a little time, that perhaps they wouldn't have time to kill us before the Russians came.

Every morning when we crawled out above the ground they would take a long time counting us, and then each Latvian would take his group. I remember that once the Latvian in

charge of our group approached me, took off his hat, and greeted me. I almost fainted. That someone would say a good word to me, "a dirty little Jewish nothing" was totally inconceivable, and it was an act of sheer bravery on his part. And that's how he would receive us every day from the Germans. He would tell me what had to be moved from one bunker to the other, and advise us not to hurry. the sun shone above us, the birds flew, the fort was wrapped in green, and we moved the equipment for the factory.

Around the fort was a large moat with one or two bridges, each with a German guard. In the distance two camps could be seen: one for Russian prisoners of war and the second for American and British prisoners. The difference between these camps was the difference between night and day. The Latvian in charge of me said they treated the Russian prisoners even worse than us, that they were dying of starvation and disease, while the American and British prisoners enjoyed relative freedom. We saw them playing football and basketball. It seemed they knew about our being in the fort for they began to send us through the Latvians all sorts of things from parcels they used to get from the Red Cross; or sometimes we would find all sorts of things they had thrown in the greenery for us. It seems they weren't afraid of the Germans. For us, a piece of chocolate, a dried date or a prune was a great treat.

One morning they told us to go outside for roll call. We saw that the counting was taking too long and we understood that something had happened. After we had stood from morning to evening without food or drink, we learned that they had searched all the bunks and found small items that were forbidden -- an improvised brassiere, a comb, a piece of soap. In the evening the commandant came with all his entourage. They yelled at us in terrifying voices and finally they threw all the women responsible for the rooms into solitary. Among them was Flora. After this we were so tired we could hardly reach our empty bunks, and there was a feeling of emptiness inside us. It's surprising how important ones small possessions are, how much one gets used to them and takes comfort from them. We were very concerned for Flora, but two days later they were all released. Everything went back to what it had been before, the same petty crimes.

My friend Esther worked in the same group as I. When the Germans weren't looking, we would stop work and sit down and tell each other stories we had read, or talk about what the future held for us. The Latvian in charge of us was nice to me. He told me that the Russians were approaching and gave me hope that perhaps everything would turn out all right, and that we would be free. When I spoke to him a wonderful feeling would fill my heart -- that here we were, two human beings with equal rights, and everything that was happening was no more than a bad dream that was bound to come

to an end. On several occasions he brought me a lot of medicines. I gave them to our doctor and she was delighted with them.

After work we would go back underground. After the roll call we used to go for walks in the never-ending underground corridors, and Flora, who had had a talent for acting since childhood, would tell stories and sing songs and promise us that everything would turn out alright.

One day they brought some women who spoke a language we didn't understand. They looked wild, scared, and disgustingly dirty. They were a group of Hungarian women who had been sent to us after the camp commander had claimed that he needed reinforcements, of course in order to show the importance of the camp's work. Since the group of women who had arrrived were complete strangers to us, and as we had heard that all our girlfriends from Riga had been put into a concentration camp in Stuthof, a camp from which we knew there was almost no chance of getting out alive, we sent a delegation to the commandant to ask him to send the Hungarian women to the camp in Stuthof, on the grounds that they didn't know the work, and to ~~ask~~ request in their stead our girlfriends from Riga, who did know the work. He agreed.

One morning they asked for volunteers to go to town to clean huts. Since we wanted to go out of the awful fort for a while to see something of a normal town, several women said they were willing to go. Among them were Esther and I.

For a whole day we had to work in a big camp full of empty huts, but before that we rode down streets and avenues, we saw houses, people in normal clothes and even shop windows. For us it was something really special. We returned to the fort late in the evening, and there, like thunder on a summer's day, we heard the news.

It turned out that in the morning they had called all those who had stayed behind to roll call and read out the names of more who would stay in the camp and those who would be sent to Stuthof. I, Esther, and all the members of our group had been in the list of prisoners who would stay in the fort, but because we hadn't been there at the time the names were read, we had been taken off the list and others added in our place. Hinda and her sister were in the list of those to be sent to Stuthof, and also Flora's friend Manya. As we hadn't been there, Flora hadn't been able to help us at all. But during the roll call she approached the Hauptsharfuhrer and asked him to let her two relatives, or so she called them, stay behind - Hinda and her sister.

Today it is difficult to appreciate what a daring act that was. At that time, when mothers would deny their children and children would abandon their parents, it took bravery and great resolution to do what Flora did, for the Hauptsharfuhrer could have punished her and sent her to Stuthof. She put her life in danger, relying only on his good will and his whim. He allowed her to have them stay in the camp.

When we heard the news we were struck by fear. I knew very well that I wouldn't live long in Stuthof. I didn't want to leave Tamara, and Esther didn't want to leave Raya. We started considering what we must do. In the end we decided that we would cast lots, and one pair would go and the other would stay. We cast the lots and it came out that Tamara and I were to go to Stuthof.

Neither of us slept all night. In the morning, during the roll call, when the Hauptsharfuhrer came, I suddenly decided to take the risk. The roll call took place in a very long underground corridor in which every noise echoed loudly. The Hauptsharfuhrer paced slowly as he counted us. When he got nearer to us I stepped out and began to speak to him in German as I looked straight into his eyes, which were as black as pitch -- eyes that were distinctly non-Aryan, while my own eyes were blue. I told him that Esther and I were on the list because we had gone to clean

the huts, that it was a misunderstanding, that I wanted to stay with him and work for him. He stood there stunned, for the penalty for addressing a German without permission was death. He gave me two slaps across the face that were heard the length of the corridor, and sent me reeling against the wall. I collapsed, but the wall supported me. And then his voice thundered out, "Also, ir beide beleibt" (so, the two of you will remain).

I don't know who went in our stead and if they died or not. We stayed. A week later they sent the group of Hungarian women and the women chosen from our group. The night before their journey Flora learned that it was the Hauptshefuhrer's birthday on that same day. She went to him and asked him to let her friend Manya stay, as a present. He agreed. It seems to me that he had great respect for her, for she never degraded herself in front of him.

My spirits are low. according to the doctor my heart won't last out much longer. I hope only that I won't be paralyzed. Today I spoke to my friend, a woman who is almost blind, and she said that she can't understand how a woman who went through so much can still take an interest in her fellow man and help so many people. She meant me. But I think that I am not good at all, that I do all this for my own sake. Frequently I feel very bad indeed --

dizzy spells, palpitations in my heart, butterflies in my stomach and fear , a very strong fear of death. And to whom can I tell all this? Who will it interest at all and who can help me? I phone a few people to talk to them. But they are used to my telephone calls, they begin to tell me their own problems, I forget myself and begin to think about them, how to help them and what to do, and in that way I forget my fear of death.

Now they put us into the same huts that we had cleaned. Our group was split up between several huts.

The winter was very hard indeed and our dress was insufficient, only prison clothes. The shoes we had worn when we came had torn long ago and they gave us clogs with soles the snow stuck to. we walked on them as if on stilts. In the hastily erected huts the cold was insufferable. The water was frozen and the stoves hardly heated. Meanwhile, a small group of the women from Riga arrived from Stuthof. Among them was our friend Dofka. She had civilian clothes and a warm coat, which aroused everyone's envy. She told the most terrible things about the journey to Stuthof and the camp itself. Only then did I fully appreciate what would have awaited me there. Here at least we went to work each day and succeeded somehow in surviving.

The new place included two camps. The Latvians -- the work overseers -- were in one, and we were in the second. The Latvians' camp was open, but their lives weren't so pleasant either. It was hard for everyone. We knew that the Russians were approaching and that the Germans were afraid, but we didn't know what they would do with us.

Flora was in charge of a block, but not the block I was in. Each morning when we stood in the roll call the Germans would unleash their wrath on us, making us suffer as much as they could. They looked for potatoes, an extra crumb of bread, anything forbidden. When they found something, there was no end to their beatings.

Every morning I would go up to Flora and ask her "Flora, will everything still be alright." and she would answer me, "Yes, everything will be alright." We continued to work and we thanked God that the engine coils we were making were still important to the Germans. After work we would come back to the hut trembling, dirty, lice-ridden, and hungry, and again we would lie next to each other on the bunks and try to get warm, but under the circumstances it was very difficult. The Latvians were very preoccupied with their own fate, and since they didn't know what awaited them they ceased paying any attention to our output. I missed the Latvian I had worked for before, who had helped me so much by his attitude to me.

Christmas approached. We helped the Latvians make decorations for the Christmas tree from different materials in the factory. On Christmas Eve the Germans got drunk, burst into the huts and began to go wild. They threw all our mattresses and our dirty blankets on the floor, ran over the bunks, cursed us and threatened to shoot us all.

We understood that the end was approaching, but what would become of us we didn't know. The following day rumors spread that some of the women who had been brought from Stutthof had made a run for it during the night. Among them was Dofke. They had civilian clothes, they could do it. We had our heads shaved and wore prison clothes so escape was impossible -- the surrounding Polish population hated us. Flora told us that Dofke had left her a penknife as a farewell gift. Then, that was a very big gift.

The next morning they ordered us to line up for roll call. Germans -- men and women -- surrounded us, and began to march us in the direction of Germany. There were no trains anymore, and the Germans had decided to escape on foot and take us with them.

The walking was deathly tiring. The snow was very deep and our miserable shoes sunk in it. We were very hungry for they had given us only a small portion of bread for the journey. It seems to me that we were some 500 women. We knew that freedom was very close, but the problem was how to

hang on long enough to enjoy it. we all of us wanted so very much to live. I was nineteen and a half, and I still hoped that everything would change for the better. I thought that perhaps father or the doctor were still alive. The feeling was that if we could only manage to stay alive, people would carry us on their shoulders after all the suffering we had gone through.

Anyone who fell during the march would be beaten. If she got up -- good, and if not they left her to freeze to death in the snow. That's how it dragged on till we got to a small town called Fordon. There they put us in to a warehouse and ordered us to rest. We stayed there over night.

Any day now my daughter will give birth. For a week now I have been so worried, so bothered by the thought of it, I pray that everything will go well. When I myself was about to give birth, who was interested? How sad was that first birth that I had so much looked forward to, how miserable and alone I was. How envious I was of all the women with me in the room. It was during the War of Independence. I lay in Beilinson Hospital, and people were scared to come and visit me because of the bombing. They sent me lots of flowers. who needed them? My temperature went up to 40 degrees, and I lay there for eight days and cried. God, how

I hated all the men who came to visit their wives. Next to me lay a young girl whose circumstances were similar to mine: her husband was reported missing. She was sure he'd been killed, and she lay and cried. On the day of the brit milah, the circumcision of her son , the door suddenly opened and a soldier burst in. She saw him and fainted from happiness. It was her husband.

We hardly slept the entire night. We thought about how to stay alive and how things would turn out for us. Suddenly Esther came to me and told me that Raya couldn't move any more, that she didn't know what would happen to her but she had decided not to go out to the morning roll call and to hide, for she no longer had the strength to go on. She asked if Tamara and I would stay behind too. I tried to persuade Tamara to stay but she firmly refused and I didn't want to leave her. We decided to keep going. In the morning they held a roll call and began to count us. My heart beat faster -- would they notice their absence? But the Germans were in such a hurry that nothing interested them at all. The Russians were already very close and the Germans began to move as fast as they could. Our strength was now completely sapped, our bodies and feet like lumps of wood. Our shoes were filled with snow, the cold was terrible, there was neither food nor drink....the column straggled on, the Germans yelling and goading us. Suddenly an SS woman

approached me and gave me her rifle, which was bigger than I was, and ordered me to carry it. I had no more strength in me but I managed to carry it and to keep going. But I felt I couldn't go on any longer. I no longer wanted to live.

We approached some town. Suddenly one of the women came up to me, said that Flora had made a run for it and had ordered us to escape separately, each one going wherever she could, because there was a town ahead of us. I told Tamara that we had to run for it, but she, as always, said that we must make a run for it separately. When we got into the town -- which was Bidgosetz (Bromberg) -- and I saw the small, miserable houses, the idea came into my head that maybe the people who lived there would take us in. I threw down the gun and I ran. No one shot at me. The sound of shots could already be heard from the front and the Germans were panicky. I turned in to the first street I came to, ran to some house and knocked on the door.

A woman stood in front of me. I asked her to hide me. I said that soon the Russians would come, and that I, as a Jew who had been saved from a camp, would help her and make sure she got her reward. She didn't answer. I looked terrible -- no hair, dirty, lice-ridden, thin, and dressed in prison clothes. I added that I had an uncle in America and said that if she were to save me he would send her money. She let me come in and sent me to the attic. I climbed up, she

opened the hatch to the loft and I went in. There were already other women there from my group, but Tamara wasn't among them. I stayed there for a whole week. It was a terrible week.

> Our group from the camp decided to write down all the things that happened to us and to donate it to the museum of Kibbutz Lochamei Hagetaot[1] as a testimony for future generations, so that people would never doubt that we were really in such hell. For me personally it is easier to write about it than to talk or argue.

The whole week we were constantly under fire. Bromberg was full of Folksdeutsche, who so hated the Russians and didn't want them in the town that they fought for every street and every house. It is interesting that no bullet ever hit our loft, although the house itself was completely riddled with bullets. The Polish-German family with whom we had found shelter was very afraid of the Russians. It would seem that their consciences were not completely clear. They were also very afraid of keeping us, for there were still many German soldiers walking around the town. In the loft we almost died with fear at the sound of their footsteps.

We were bothered by the terrible cold. Once a day the

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[1] Literally, Kibbutz of Ghetto Fighters

lady of the house or her daughter would bring us a little food and would take the bucket that served as a toilet. Every day she threatened to turn us out, and we would beg her to let us stay one more day. We knew how dangerous it was to go out in the street looking so terrible and without hair. We told her that when the Russians came they would see that she had saved us and they wouldn't harm her and would repay her.

The days passed and still the Russians didn't come. Despite the harsh conditions the relations between us were good all the time. The closer the day of liberation the more our desire for life and freedom grew. All the time we made ourselves believe that if after this hell we stayed alive, people would treat us like heroes and our future would be secure.

So that the time would pass more quickly we told one another stories we had read. The bullets whistled -- we shook with fear and carried on talking. We feared for Tamara and Flora and we wanted to know what had happened to Esther and Raya. More and more I wanted to know if one of my parents was still alive, and also Gamak. The Polish lady of the house became more and more aggresive. The tenants of the house were wounded and she couldn't understand how not one bullet had hit our loft. She hated us as we hated her. But she was afraid of the Russians and that was what saved us.

Exactly a week after we came the whole town suddenly fell silent, we heard the sound of boots and Russians entered the house. We heard them speaking Russian. We wanted to believe it but we couldn't. Scraggy, dirty, smelly, but very happy we opened the door and began to descend the ladder one after the other.

The sight of us startled the Russians. They had never imagined that living women could look that way. Since several of us, including myself, spoke Russian, we explained to the Russians that the Polish family who lived in the house had saved our lives. We did as we had promised them, but we wanted to get away from them as soon as possible. The Russians told us there were lots of empty flats since many of the Folksdeutsche had fled to Germany, and that we could take over a flat and begin to try to sort ourselves out.

In the beginning we had no inkling of what was going on. Freedom then was such great happiness that one had to get used to it gradually and it wasn't at all simple. Man, like an animal, gets used to things gradually, and it isn't easy to be a person like everyone else again, to eat like a human being, to sleep in a bed.

We went out into the street at a run and began to look for our friends, for the town wasn't particularly large and news traveled fast. By evening we had found Flora and Tamara, and even a flat.

During the week, it seemed, more or less the same thing had happened to all of us.

We moved in to a big apartment in a house in which Flora had been hiding with two Englishmen who had been imprisoned by the Germans. Once again we were all together, except for Raya and Esther. (Raya I met later in Israel, and Esther in America.)

First of all we had to throw away all our belongings, which were full of lice. But we didn't know where to get ourselves other clothes, and we needed a lot of clothes because of the terrible cold. Hinda and I approached a Russian officer and told him we didn't have anything to wear. He was very nice, and as it later turned out that meeting with him was lucky for us. He took us to two flats that were completely empty because their owners had fled to Germany. We opened the cupboards and we took everything we needed. I would add that when we stood in front of the big wardrobe filled with clothes, we weren't greedy and took only what we needed for ourselves and Flora. We ~~used~~ wore those clothes for several months, till Bucharest. Flora even got an imitation fur coat. After we had brought all the booty to our flat, we burned our lice-ridden rags and washed ourselves well.

The hair on our heads had already grown a little, and we could walk around without the head scarves and feel ourselves

human beings. And we were very happy to be walking on the sidewalks and not in the middle of the road with the horses any more. Another novelty for us was having enough food, although those who ate too much found they threw up. Our stomachs had to get used to food. Luckily Tamara and I ate with restraint.

Since Bromberg was near the front, there were Russian soldiers there. We had never imagined that there would be such coarse, animal-like people among them. They weren't all like that but it was clear to us that one had to be careful with them and not to trust them.

The Russians began to rape women, and once again fear crept in to our hearts -- this time, fear of the Russians. Once again we were afraid to go out into the street. We hung a sign outside our door announcing that there was a typhus epidemic in our apartment. This was effective in scaring the Russians, ~~and~~ if anybody at all did come in we immediately got into bed and Manitchka, the oldest one among us, would say we were sick.

The fear didn't leave us until we crossed the Austrian border and left the Russians behind us. Meanwhile our youth and our desire to live had done their bit: we began to recover.

As I have already said, there were also two Englishmen living in the house. One of them fell in love with me. I found this very flattering for I was only nineteen and a half and it was very important to me indeed. I knew a

little English, but people who are in love don't have to know the language very well. My Englishman was always at my side looking after me.

One day we learned that trains had begun and that it was possible to reach central Poland and get far away from the front. Our group met at the railway station to wait for a freight train. We decided to make for Lodz, which was a big city, and from there we hoped to continue on our way. The journey was very difficult. It lasted many days and nights because the train stood more than it moved. There was nothing to eat. When the train stopped the younger ones and the English men would get out and ask the local people for food. All we ever got was bread, onions, and water, but that didn't bother us at all -- we were free and we all shared the same ambition: to find out what had happened to our families.

My Englishman did everything to make me comfortable in the freight car. He didn't touch me, he was a real gentleman. He said that as soon as we reached a city with a British embassy he would go there, and that soon he would take me away from this inferno to England. For that purpose, he said, he was ready to marry me if necessary. I agreed to everything, I wanted only to reach a city.

And so we

arrived at Lodz.

We got off the train and began to ask people the questions that had been bothering us all the time: we learned that Lodz was full of new people, there was nothing to eat; that the best thing to do was to get to Lublin where we would be able to learn what had happened to our families.

I ran with Hinda to look for Kipyatok (boiling water). Suddenly a Russian captain came up to us. It would seem he was a Jew, for he said to us in Yiddish: "Get away from here fast. Whatever you do don't get back on the train, it's going to Siberia, to labor camps." It is impossible to describe what these words meant for us. To return to a camp... a deathly fear fell on us, and since all the girls of the group, including my sister, were in the freight car, we ran like crazy to save them. As the train began to move, A brilliant idea ran through Hinda's head. She started to sing at the top of her voice, " Siberia is also Russian soil." Flora immediately understood what was going on and began to push all of them off the train, which luckily was still going slowly. They all jumped, and with them my Englishman. They were pale and scared. We told them of the meeting with the captain. Only after several months did we learn that many people who

had traveled by those trains had found themselves in camps again -- this time Soviet ones. In this way the Soviets got themselves a free labor force. We began to hate our liberators. We became more careful and didn't run to every train that came along. First we would send the Englishman to sound things out, so we would be sure we got on the right train. And so we reached Lublin.

As soon as we got off the train in Lublin we saw refugees from all over. The Poles stood in the street, nodding their heads and muttering, "So many Jews still alive..." Imagine to go through hell and then to hear, "they haven't killed them all yet..?" I get scared when I think what would have happened to us without Israel. All we wanted was to live in peace.

The first person I met whom I knew was Abrashe Aronson. He and 110 others were saved from a labor camp in Kloga in Estonia. That was where they murdered my father. They burned him alive four hours before the Russians came. The victims themselves arranged the logs and lay themselves down on them: one log, one man; one log, one man. By the time the Russians came, the flames reached to the heart of heaven.

Gamak died before that, of typhus. Before he died he cried out and called for me and asked what would happen to me once he was no longer alive, asked how I would survive. He asked his friend to tell me everything if he lived. I also learned that my mother, like all those who had been sent to the left, had reached the infamous Maidanek near Lublin where she had been gassed to death. Dr. Finkelstein was also killed -- in Stuthof, or so I heard.

That's how my family met their end. All the other women heard similar stories about the fates of their own families.

Everything looked black. I was twenty, I wanted to live but I didn't know how to begin, with what, where. We were half naked, barefoot, hungry. My sister had already begun to show signs of TB. What could we do? All of us were in a sorry state, but we were together, and that was a consolation of sorts. My Englishman went to the consulate, and we began to wander in the streets looking for somewhere to sleep. Unexpectedly we met a group of Zionist partisans from Vilna, among them Abba Kovner, Nissan Reznick, and others who had known my parents. They were busy getting young people together, and they explained to us that there was a way of getting to Palestine. We told them we were

prepared to go, we wanted to get as far as possible from these terrible places and from the Russians, and they answered that the way was hard and long but that it ~~was~~ would be possible to get there.

I personally knew nothing about Palestine. They explained to us that there we could build a land of our own and a life of our own. And the main thing, they said, was that what had happened to us wouldn't happen to our children.

They offered us a place to stay for a few days, and after that we would be sent off gradually and in small groups to start the illegal journey to Palestine. For us the most important thing was to get away quickly from the place where we were, which was close to Maidanek and a reminder of the not-too-distant past. We wanted to bury all our memories, emotions, and thoughts as soon as possible and as deep as possible. The most important thing was to keep our heads and to continue to live, to live!

My Englishman came back very happy and announced that the consul wanted to see me and that we would soon be able to leave for England. I told him I'd already been taken care of, that I had friends, a whole group, and that I would stay with Tamara and all my people. He saw that he would not succeed in persuading me, and that I spoke optimistically of my own land -- and after all, he himself wanted to get to

his own home as quickly as possible. I thanked him very much for the way he had treated me and for caring about me and looking after me, and we parted friends. I stayed among Jews, for it is my destiny to be a Jew. If I had gone with him, would I have been happier? It seems not. In these few years I ~~have~~ had developed a Jewish consciousness, I knew that it was impossible to escape this destiny. That's how it would be to the end of my days.

They brought us to a house where there were many young people. We were divided into groups and I was made a group leader. They told us we would have to wait for a signal to leave. I was very worried about Tamara; her temperature used to ~~would~~ go up in the afternoon, and we wanted to be on our way. The rooms were full to bursting, we all slept together on several beds and on anything else it was possible to sleep on. The cold was terrible, it was the end of February the beginning of March. It was suggested to Flora, who was an architect, that she should go to Warsaw and help to rebuild it, for Warsaw was all in ruins. Flora wanted us all to go with her -- Hinda and her sister, Tamara and me -- but we wouldn't hear of it. We wanted to get away, ~~as~~ to start new lives in our own country and in our own homes. Finally Flora also decided to come with us.

I went to Abba Kovner and asked if Flora could join us.

and he promised me that although she had been a communist he would send her to Romania after us. And that's what in fact happened.

Finally the day came. They told the four of us to wait by the road the next morning for a truck. ~~And so, at the~~ This was the end of March 1945; ~~we set off on a~~ our journey ~~that~~ was to continue till January 1946.

The road to freedom was dangerous and very difficult, but today, I know that because we were all young and believed in a rosy future, we bore all the hardships relatively easily.

We crossed the Czech border in the truck and continued into Roumania. Many things have already escaped my memory. I remember only that Czechoslovakia was very beautiful, the scenery was wonderful and there were fantastic apples. In the small villages along the way they boarded us with Jewish families who had somehow been saved from death. They hadn't got their lives back to normal again yet either. They asked us about the camps and mentioned names of acquaintances, family and friends. They showed these people's photographs and asked if we had seen them. They let us wash and gave us a place to sleep -- in the school house or in their homes, on the floor or anywhere else. Food was scarce. Our group got bigger. We wanted to get to Bucharest as quickly as we could for there they had promised us we would get "certificates" for Palestine.

Everywhere the Germans had been there was terrible poverty and ruin. In the end we got to Cluj, a big town in Roumania. We wanted to get to Palestine as quickly as we could and we were tired of the long journey, so when the Jews asked us to stay for a few more days we refused. I discovered there was a fast train going straight to Bucharest that one could board only with the permission of the Russian commander.

We were very tired. Although I had been warned that the Russian commander might send me and all the others to Siberia (for our presence there was illegal), I decided to take the

risk and go to see him. I was afraid to talk Russian, for we were travelling as Greeks returning to Greece (in order to justify the fact that we were travelling in the opposite direction). And once again I was lucky, as I had been in the past: I spoke broken Russian but he understood everything, he was Jewish.

Half an hour later, at his orders, they put the whole of our group on to the train. We were put into a very comfortable car with his officers and twenty-four hours later we were in Bucharest. I don't know how we would have got there any other way, how much time and effort it would have taken us.

There for the first time we saw a city that hadn't suffered in the war. Everything was there in quantity, but not for us. We looked at it all with hungry eyes.

In Bucharest everything was ready for us. They put us up in a big house on a nice street, by a large public park. This was the first "kibbutz" I found myself in. There were many people there. They divided us up into political parties. We belonged to the General Zionists; I didn't have any idea what sort of a party it was, but without belonging to a party the certificates we dreamed of would remain a dream and we wouldn't be able to continue on our way. Our lives there were very happy. We slept on two-storey bunks, there was almost no food, but even so luck shined on me -- the sympathetic nurse who had looked after father when he had his heart attack was there,

and she began to look after Tamara and to feed us from morning to night. I don't know where she ~~took~~ got all that food from, but Tamara began to get better. Before we set off for Palestine she was completely recovered and my happiness knew no end.

Meanwhile we waited for permission to leave for Constanzia, which took about a half a year. There was reason to fear that the Russians, whose number was great and who had already started to interfere in Roumania's internal affairs, would notice ~~pay attention to us~~ our presence and imprison us. We had nothing to do, and of course I fell in love with some boy and he fell in love with me. But I didn't want to get involved with anyone, I dreamed of a free country and of a boy from Palestine who hadn't been through all the things I had.

The town hadn't seen war, and the public parks were large and very beautiful. There was even a large Jewish community, but after all the terror we had been through while they had continued to lead carefree lives, we hated them. We were three or four "kibbutzim" there, and we had neither food nor clothes, but for the entire half year we were there none of the Jews came to visit us or to invite us to dinner or on Jewish holidays! They lived their lives as if nothing at all had happened.

We got a little money from the Joint to buy clothes.

We went with the money to the Jewish shops in Lipskani street. They cheated us there, they took our money and gave us almost nothing in return. But we didn't care about it too much, we were a group of gay young girls who wanted to live and not to think about the past.

In a neighboring kibbutz Hinda found a boyfriend and a piano. In the ghetto she had been considered a child prodigy with a great future as a pianist. Twice I sold my clothes to buy cherries -- I loved both red and white cherries With the money left over I bought tickets for Hinda and me to the opera Carmen. I will never forget the singer who sang Carmen, and the whole atmosphere at the opera. We sat in the gallery but it didn't matter at all, we felt we were like everyone else. We enjoyed it immensely.

Every day brought new rumors about the continuation of our journey. Flora, who arrived after us, was in a kibbutz on another street, but we kept in touch. We had great respect for her opinion. She was working in the Jewish Agency, I think, and at that time she started being courted by her husband to be. Her first husband had been killed with my father in Kloge.

As a result of the conversations we had, we became idealists. The history of Zionism held little interest for us but we wanted our own home and children in our own country. I still hoped to find Uncle Yasha and get our money back so

that Tamara and I would be able to study in Tel Aviv.

One evening they told us we wouldn't get certificates as we had thought, and that our group that same night would have to return to central Roumania. From there we would get to Palestine via Hungary, Austria, and Italy. The journey would be done through the framework of Aliya Bet -- the illegal immigration organization. But they told us that Tamara and Hinda's sister, who were younger, would receive certificates that would enable them to travel with Aliyat Hanoar straight from Constanza to Palestine. They were therefore to remain in Bucharest. This put me and Hinda in a terrible mood. We didn't know how we would leave them or what would happen to us. The man who told us said that Flora would also get a certificate because she worked for the Jewish Agency. We phoned her and spent a long hour making our farewells. She told us not to worry, she would look after Tamara and Esther (Hinda's sister). We would all meet again in Tel Aviv, she said.

That night we again set out on a journey. That was to take more than half a year. Flora and Hinda's younger sister reached Palestine within a week, without any problems.

They brought us to a small town called Ujvora in Rumania. It had only one street and a very beautiful park that I remember very well, and they put us up in the school. We slept on boards, on the floor, and on tables. For Hinda, we began to look for a house with a piano.

I found a piano in the house of a very nice Jewish family. They had a daughter, a student of medicine who came with her fiance and his friend for a vacation. The friend was an assimilated Jew, very handsome, and Palestine had almost no interest for him. But I fell in love with him and he with me. We were in love, we swore to meet in Palestine

after he finished his studies. We would sit holding hands and listen to Hinda playing Chopin, or we would go for walks in that beautiful park. We stayed two months with them, and for the first time in a very long time I felt good. The family fed us well. There was a very nice grandmother there, and once again I believed in the future and in love, ~~and~~

One evening they called us and said that the next day we would be going to Budapest. Even though I was pleased that we were continuing on our way, it hurt me that we had to leave the company of such good people, especially the student. (Interestingly, some four years ago I met the former medical student with her husband and children. She and her husband are both doctors. I met them at the house of mutual acquaintances. She told me that the same young man, the friend of her husband with whom I was in love, is now a doctor, lives in Sweden, and denies his Judaism. To my great sorrow, I found no common language with them here.)

Our train got us to Budapest before dawn. The never-ending checks were a real torture for us, for we were afraid of the Russians and did not have the necessary papers. Our saviours now put the fear of death into us.

Budapest had suffered greatly in the bombing. In fact it was Buda that had suffered -- it was completely destroyed.

They lodged us in Pest where we met many friends and lots of groups from Vilna.

I should add that we came across many friends and relatives on that journey. There were meetings I cannot forget. One friend suddenly met her mother, who was sure that her daughter had been killed; another friend suddenly met her father, then her brother, and in one of the next journeys she met her mother. I was very jealous of them and each time I cried for a few days afterward. On the way couples began to form -- the main thing was not to be alone, to have someone with you who would give you affection. These couples are together to this day.

I had success with the boys, they always tried to help me, to give me love and affection. But instinctively I refused to get involved with anyone, because after Gamak I had no interest in anyone. Of course it made me very happy that the boys courted me and helped me, but I got it into my head that I wanted someone normal, someone who hadn't been through all the terrible things, someone who would help me forget the past, help me to get over everything.

We stayed in Budapest two weeks. I remember that we went to the movies -- the first time since the war. They were showing an American movie with a ~~review~~ revue dancing, songs

and some silly romance. I sat and thought how such movies were being produced at the same time we were being destroyed in the camps. For the first time I felt that in fact our fate had been of interest to no one, that in the whole world no one moved a finger for us. And I, who still understood very little of what Israel meant, decided firmly that I wanted only one thing -- a country of my own and a house of my own.

In Budapest meanwhile, whole groups began to organize themselves to go to America, to Canada, or to Australia. I couldn't understand it at all, even though people explained to me that they had simply had enough. They wanted to rest and they wanted money, and neither were to be found in Palestine.

From Budapest we were sent to Austria, where we were finally rid of the Russians. To get there our organization had bribed the Russians -- who were prepared to sell their mothers for wrist watches -- to take us across the border. We carried packs on our backs and I of course made my way with great difficulty, they almost had to carry me. After a few kilometers we finally reached Graetz. I remember how happy I was when I learned there were no more Russians!

For four days we stayed in the most luxurious hotel. It

shocked me to hear German again. We hated the Germans and they hated us. We used to leave our torn shoes outside the door and they would have to polish them. Here too there were Jews who decided to stay behind and wait for visas to other countries. I got annoyed because I didn't understand how they could sit in Austria and look at those Austrian faces.

On the fourth night we had to leave all our belongings behind and they took us to a refugee camp that belonged to the British. Another camp, more huts, everything was reminiscent of the past -- this time without threat, but still a camp.

One evening they told us to go into town as if for an outing, singing along with a guitar. Our group, some fifteen young people, got to the forest and there, under the trees, were five trucks covered with canvas and loaded with people from other groups. By them stood British soldiers wearing the Star of David and speaking among themselves in a language I didn't understand. They helped us get on the trucks, covered us with canvas and we were on our way. We felt sure we were in good hands and that but a single step lay between us and the future.

We traveled for many hours, even though it was already completely dark. Several times the trucks stopped. There

would be conversation in English, and then we would be on our way again.

When we stopped it was morning. We got off the trucks and saw that once again we were in a camp with huts, but this time in the most beautiful place I had ever seen. All around there were montains, greenery, flowers, and wonderful air. It turned out that they had taken us across the Austrian Alps and that we were in Italy, near the town of Pontebbe in Trevis. That was where the headquarters of the Brigade was, and it was they who had set up the transit camp for us. Generally people stayed there only for a few days before being sent off to different places in Italy from where they left for Israel. Everything was very well organized. The director of the camp was Sourkis and when he learned that Hinda knew how to play the piano and sing he left us there for two months, and Hinda used to organize singing by the campfire in the evenings. These were two very interesting months. It was a wonderful place, hidden in a valley between mountains and little streams so we ~~wouldn't~~ wouldn't be discovered.

The soldiers from the Brigade gave us khaki shirts, skirts, trousers, shoes, and socks, for we had nothing at all. At that time my appearance still interested me very little, but my hair had already grown and I looked good. I was in good spirits, we went for long walks, and in the evening we sat

around the fire and sang, like in the story books. Once again I became calmer. I thought less of my family and of the past.

I started trying to find Uncle Yasha in America through soldiers from the Brigade. They wrote down all our names and published them, for all over the world Jews began looking for their relatives. I learned that Flora, Tamara, and Hinda's sister had all arrived in Israel and were at the Mikve Yisrael school.

And then once again, as always, they ordered us on our way. We had no time to take leave of anyone. They sent us to Venice and from there to a well-organized kibbutz in Mestra near Venice, where we stayed almost till the end. Life there was organized very differently. In the beginning we lived in huts, afterward in a house.

> We are getting older and soon the generation that experienced Nazi Germany will disappear. And when we are no more, the world will forget it all, or so it seems. Even I didn't -- couldn't -- tell it all to my children, so I can't complain about the others. I feel guilty for my parent's sake, and my conscience won't let me be. If my children ever read what I write here and understand it, this will be the greatest consolation.

As I have already said, in Mestra we lived a more or less normal kibbutz life. They ~~allocated~~ assigned us to different jobs, and I was sent to work in the laundry. It was very hard work for me. I had never been able to do physical work, and I never will be able to. But I worked nevertheless. The conditions under which we worked were very hard. I worked with several girls and they mocked the way I worked, but the time passed quickly.

We ~~lived~~ were nine girls in one large room. Each girl had her own story, and all the stories were very interesting. We were almost all of the same age, and all of us had gone through hell. Now what interested us was our future and boys. Almost all of us had some big love. When someone went off on a date, or to Venice, we would lend her our best clothes so she would look nice. In the evening we would wait impatiently for her return, for her stories. We wanted to give ourselves back the youth that the Germans had robbed us of.

I remember that a young "Mussulman" suddenly appeared, looking exhausted, as if life barely flickered in him. One of the girls fainted at the sight. It turned out that the young man had been her lover in the ghetto. God knows what he had been through until he found her. We put a screen up to divide the room, and they began

to live together. She took care of him as if he were a sick child, and he began to blossom. After that they transferred us from the hut to a house and we no longer lived with them.

One day a soldier from the Brigade came and invited me and Hinda to supper with a Jewish Italian family he was friendly with. We were very excited, after so many years of inhuman existence, to suddenly be invited to a formal dinner. They got us dressed in the finest clothes and we went there in his jeep. On the way the soldier surveyed us and began to explain how to behave at the table. I thought to myself, "What does he take us for, do we really look so wild?"

We arrived at a large old house. The family had hidden themselves in a monastery during the war, and after that had returned home. These were very rich assimilated Jews who knew almost nothing about Jews and camps. When they heard about our kibbutz they decided to invite us in order to see these wild Ost Juden (Jews of Eastern Europe).

The interior of the house was very nice. There was a father, a mother, and two young daughters a little younger than us. Only the father spoke German well. I did the talking. Hinda couldn't take her eyes off the beautiful piano. After a little conversation they called us to supper. The last time I had seen a properly layed table was on my mother's

birthday on the 31 December 1939. This was actually only a normal family, normal furniture, and normal conversation, but for a moment it brought the past ~~came~~ to life for me. ~~in my imagination.~~ That evening left a strong impression on me. The servants stood behind the chairs, everything was served in silence, one thing after another. I swallowed my tears and my pain and I began to make small talk. When we got up from the table, I suggested that they hear Hinda play. Once again we went into the lounge, Hinda sat down by the piano and began her wonderful playing. They were simply enchanted, they marveled at our ability to go through such hell and remain [redacted] cultured human beings. Our host lent us a hundred dollars as I told him I soon hoped to find my uncle. In addition he hired Hinda as a piano teacher for his daughter. They invited us to come and visit them whenever we wanted. The soldier who brought us was absolutely speechless. He said they were very rich and tremendous snobs and that until then they hadn't wanted anything to do with anyone.

We went back to our house. All the girls were waiting for us, we told them everything in great detail. And then I received a cable and two hundred dollars from Uncle Yasha. That day was a great holiday for me. I immediately gave Hinda fifty dollars, and one hundred dollars to the Italian, and we decided we were the richest girls in the world. The next day the Italian sent us nine wonderful mattresses to take

the place of our miserable straw palliasses. We slept like daughters of kings.

Life continued. We bought some clothes with Uncle Yasha's money, we ran around Venice, we went to the opera and to the movies. The money disappeared, but we got a lot of pleasure during the short period in which we were "rich." We visited the Italian family regularly. They gave us bicycles and we used to go out on trips. When Hinda got jaundice, the Italian made sure that a doctor came and that there was good food, and Hinda got well in no time at all.

Meanwhile the different political parties did what they could to get us to join them. The political wars didn't interest me at all. I wanted to be on my way, to see myself in Tel Aviv. In the meantime a long letter arrived from Uncle Yasha in which he offered an "affidavit" so I could go to America. I firmly refused. Hinda and I wrote a letter full of Zionism, eight pages long, in which we explained that Israel is my home and I wouldn't go anywhere else. From getting to know him later it seems my refusal delighted him.

We waited each day for our departure. One night they came to take us, told us to dress quickly and to take only our most essential clothes. They took us in a closed car to a closed camp. Then we knew that we were about to board the ship.

They taught us various things like how to climb up and down a rope ladder. All this clandestine activity was very interesting. We didn't feel afraid, our only thought was that soon we would reach Palestine. I don't know why, but we were positive we would make it, so great was our belief in the Brigade. We knew that they finished everything they began. After a few days they brought us by night to the coast by La Speccia. We were a thousand people and they ordered us to board the small boat that was waiting. I remember I said to Hinda that the little boat would take us to the ship. We didn't hurry and we were the last to board. Then we realized that this was the ship that would take us to Palestine.

Today I know how silly and naive we were to have left Italy so quickly without traveling and seeing more; Milan, for example, I only visited once. Or Venice....such a fantastic city, I still remember St. Mark's Square. I stood there like a statue, enchanted, unable to pull myself together. The Lido...! We sailed in gondolas and I remembered my mother's stories of her visits there.

And Yom Kippur in the synagogue! That I will never forget. The choir sang, the organ played, and men and women sat together on the benches, like in a concert. I had never seen or heard anything like it before.

When I remember the past, I think that we really were like a flock of sheep. They told us what to do and we did it. They ordered us to go and we went. We were in the underground and we imagined that when we got to Palestine a big Jewish family would be waiting for us there. We were such naive, silly girls. We felt that the most important thing was to go home quickly to the people who loved us, and then we would be able to become normal people, to stop having nightmares, to live normal lives. I was sure that Uncle Yasha was delighted to have found me and would send me and Tamara to study, would set us on our feet, would be like a father or grandfather to us, and would compensate us for all we had been through. We thought that we would visit Italy again later -- more than once -- and then we would see everything.

The ship we sailed on was called the Enzo Sereni. When we got on the deck everything was quiet. They made me a group leader, told us to go below deck, and the ship set sail. When I went below I was stunned at what I saw: hammocks had been tied nine tiers deep, and someone lay in each hammock. It was frighteningly crowded. Our friends began to call out to us, they asked where we had got to, they had saved us

two hammocks and we lay down in them, I in the top one and Hinda beneath me. Interestingly I never gave a thought to the possibility that the ship could sink. Nor did I bother to think who would take to sea in such a miserable vessel with a thousand people on board apart from the crew. We sailed for two weeks. Three times a day they would call me as the group leader to go up on deck to fetch food. The food was dry and there was only a little water to drink.

The journey was terrible. We were badly battered and everyone threw up unceasingly. We had to lie in one position the whole time and it was impossible to move. Only a few people were allowed to go out on deck at any one time for fear that the British would discover that this was a ship with illegal immigrants. By my side lay a girl who was pregnant. She felt awful but no one could do anything to help. I didn't throw up even once, and I must say that I bore these conditions bravely. Most of the others didn't.

Underneath me lay Hinda and next to her lay our friend Shimon Lusky, now my husband. I knew him from the ghetto. His family had lived in the same building, in the apartment opposite ours. I remember his father and his elder brother, a bright and talented boy who had been a good friend of mine and a friend of Gamzu, and had belonged to the FPU. As he had worked for the police he had stood guard at the entrance to the ghetto and had helped to smuggle in weapons. He was killed among the

ranks of the Partisans. Shimon I hardly knew, he seemed very young to me and I couldn't understand what Hinda saw in him.

We approached the shores of Palestine. The British spotted us, surrounded us and ordered us to sail for Haifa. Once again we were struck by terrible fear. Was there no end to the tortures that awaited us? Would we really have to sail back to Europe? We so hoped to get to some small settlement where Jews would be waiting to transfer us secretly to somewhere else. This was the first time that so many people had been sent together from Italy and now we had all been caught.

We had left on December 20. The New Year was celebrated on board, and on 6 January 1946 we got to Haifa under British guard. On the way they asked us to throw away all letters and pictures. Yet again we were asked to cast off part of our former lives, of our experiences in the past. But the memories no one could take from us.

We looked like mad women, unwashed and uncombed. I was then twenty years old, my youth was all I had left. The British stood around us, arms linked, and did not let the many people waiting there approach us. We were completely unknown but hundreds of people stood on the quay and threw oranges at us. They called out and waved to us.

But I was in such a state of shock that I had no comprehension of what was going on around me or inside me. They quickly got us on to buses. All the way we ate oranges and tried to guess where they were taking us. Soon enough we knew: a camp in Atlit. Yet more huts and roll calls and abuse. At any event, they let us wash.

The huts were a hive of constant activity. All sorts of political activists were allowed in and each of them tried to get us to join his party or to go to his kibbutz. They all promised wonders but their promises and words of persuasion seemed very superficial, and Hinda and I didn't know what to do. We had made our way to Palestine in the company of people from Hanoar Hatzioni. Nissan Reznick, who knew my father and worked for him in the ghetto, had persuaded us to join them while we were still in Lublin. That was the reason Hinda and I decided to go first to one of their kibbutzim, and then to decide there about the future. Hinda dreamed of continuing to study the piano, and I hoped that my Uncle Yasha would help me to study and set me on my feet. I was sure that he had father's money and that he would return it to us immediately. For this reason we therefore decided to postpone any long-term decisions at this stage.

We waited to be released from the camp. We knew that they were trying to prepare papers for us, and in the meantime

we underwent medical tests. I learned that I had high blood pressure and I was advised to see a doctor as soon as I was released. They found that two of the girls had contracted venereal disease after they were raped by the Russians. But by this time there was already penicillin, thank God.

I got a huge parcel from Haifa from a boy who had been in love with me in Bucharest. In the letter inside it he wrote that he was waiting for me. There was a lot of food in the parcel and all the girls in the hut ate till they were full. I also received a letter from Valia Vitkind (Braynin) in which she wrote that she invited me to her house for a few weeks to rest up after all I had been through. Valia's parents had been friends of my parents. Her grandmother had been in love with my grandfather and had established him when he first came to Kovno from ~~the small~~ his home town. It was nice to see that someone remembered me from my childhood at home. I think there is great importance to someone knowing you and remembering you, then you don't feel so forsaken and alone in the world.

The weather was terrible. Sometimes at night the roof would fly off because of the strong winds and we would have to drag ourselves and our belongings to other huts that were already full to capacity. In addition they

would count us endlessly, for before we had come a big group had escaped from the camp and the British were afraid ~~that~~ could happen again. During the day we would talk about our plans for the future. Many of my friends from Lithuania intended to go to Kibbutz Beit Zera and they very much wanted us to join them. In an effort to persuade me to go with them the boys in the group tried to start up with me, but I refused. I wanted to start a new life, without the endless conversations about the camps, our parents, and the ghetto. I felt I wanted as far as possible to forget the past, otherwise I wouldn't be able to ~~last out~~ carry on. But I didn't know how.

> I didn't yet know that I would never succeed in forgetting it, not my past and not my high blood pressure. From these two things I have never succeeded in escaping. And the more time passes the more these things influence me.

In the meantime we began to lose our patience, we began to get fed up with the camp, we wanted the nightmare to be over. I was dying to do exactly what I wanted for a change, to sleep and to eat when I wanted, not to have to stand in line for the shower and not to have to report to anyone. I dreamed of an independent life but I haven't achieved it to this day; it would seem I ~~was~~ am of weak character.

Since I was a child I had been accustomed to people thinking for me and helping me, to having to report everything I did. Someone always helped me physically, and I on my part was dependent on the people around me.

Finally the Jewish Agency got papers for us and the gates were opened. We went out to freedom. Each of us could go where ever we wanted. I was twenty years old, without a penny to my name, I didn't speak Hebrew, but in my pocket I had papers and I had to start a new life. This was the second most important moment in my life. The most important had been the liberation from Bavadgoshatz.

Hinda and I agreed to go to Kibbutz Nitzan. There we thought we would decide what we would do next. They brought us to the kibbutz, it was raining and seas of mud separated the tiny houses. They showed us to our room and then took us to eat in the communal dining hall. No one looked at us, no one said a single warm word. It was very depressing. The people of the kibbutz talked among themselves in a language I didn't understand. We had hoped they would give us a warm welcome, would treat us as one treats guests, would ask us about our past, and most important -- show us the warmth and tenderness we needed so much, but we saw that we interested no one.

Evening came. The first evening of freedom. One of

visit.
the couples invited us to ~~their room.~~ The room was pleasantly furnished, ~~the young couple sat and listened to~~ a Chopin concert was on the radio. They invited us to sit down, gave us coffee and continued talking between themselves. Hinda and I exchanged looks, and for the first time in a long while I burst into tears. And how we cried! I had never known it was possible to cry like that. Now ~~Then~~ we finally understood that we were of interest to no one at all and of no use to anyone. While we were in the camp and the ghetto we thought that the Jews cared about us, were doing everything possible to save us, and if they didn't succeed it wasn't their fault. When we met the coldness and the cruel treatment on the part of the Jews of Bucharest we thought it was the exception to the rule. But to get such a response here? In the home our souls had yearned for...? no one paid any attention to us, no one said a warm word, only cruel indifference and rudeness.

We left the house and ran off crying.

The following morning, without taking leave of anyone, we got on a bus. We told the driver we were new immigrants, that we had no money, and wanted to get to Tel Aviv. Flora was with her uncles, Israel Shochat, and Tamara and Hinda's sister were at Mikve Yisrael, so I went to Valia and Hinda went to a girlfriend who had arrived from Vilna in 1938.

When more of my friends came from Russia many years later I tried to help them as much as I could, for I will never forget how the Jews of Palestine ignored us then. We were particularly surprised by the young people. They didn't understand anything; it seemed that the Yishuv in Palestine hadn't got accurate information about the Holocaust, and the young people despised us for having gone like lambs to the slaughter. The only ones to get a good word from them were the Partisans.

I got to the address I had for Valia and rang the door. Valia opened it. She was dressed nicely in a blouse and regular skirt. She hugged and kissed me, made me take off my clothes and threw them and everything in my small case into the garbage, and gave me new clothes. She introduced me to her husband and daughter and didn't ask anything about the past. She only said she would write to Uncle Yasha, and that then we would decide about everything. Meanwhile she gave me pocket money and said I should do whatever I wanted, that I should rest after everything I had been through. I stayed with them for two months. I felt as if I were with close family. They spoke a language I understood. Valia bought me the essential clothes, I slept in the same room as their daughter, and in my eyes it was a Garden of Eden.

Valia wrote to Uncle Yasha and met with Flora to discuss my future. I waited impatiently for an answer from Yasha, for in my letter I had asked about our money. In the meantime I tried to enjoy everything. I went with Valia to see Tamara, who was studying agriculture. She hardly had a word to say to us.

Despite everything, I derived great satisfaction from the feeling of freedom. Valia and her husband did everything they could to make me feel welcome in their home and give me warmth. I also found a friend from Kovno who had come to Palestine in 1938. In her house I met many young local people. Even though I wasn't dressed as well as the other girls were -- I had almost no money other than the pocket money that Valia used to give me, the boys invited me and courted me. Valia and Flora decided the most important thing was to get me married, but I looked for love -- money and status were of little interest to me. I felt good. I began to sleep well and I was very happy. In the morning I would get up, go out for a walk, look in the shop windows, go to cafes. In the evenings I would meet with different people.

Tamara, Valia, and I all waited anxiously for Uncle Yasha's reply. In the ghetto our parents had told us many

times that if we managed to stay alive our future would be assured, that they and my grandfather had sent money to Uncle Yasha for safekeeping in 1938. So far $200 had reached me in Italy from Uncle Yasha, but since then nothing had been mentioned. A great deal now depended on Yasha's reply. Eventually his long-awaited letter arrived. As we read it over and over again all our hopes evaporated. He had been sent some money, he said, but only small amounts. Since that time we exchange letters and even see each other from time to time. We cherish Uncle Yasha as our most meaningful link with the past.

After Yasha's letter, Flora and Valia decided I must become a nurse. They didn't hold out too much hope for my success in this career, but they hoped that during the three years I would study I would meet a good person, a doctor, and get married -- as far as they were concerned this was the most important thing. From childhood on I was accustomed to other people making decisions for me and worrying about me. That's how it was now too. In a general way I was interested in medicine and the idea pleased me. I was sure I would manage with the studies and the work.

They registered me for courses in Hadassah and rented me a room in Gruzenberg Street. Hadassah was nearby on Balfour Street. Valia still had hopes that I would be able to recover our money from Yasha.

Flora registered Hinda for the Conservatory. While she studied she supported herself by taking care of small children.

Three weeks before I was to move to my new flat a girlfriend invited me to her party. She said that ~~all~~ the whole crowd I had made the journey with (who were now in Kibbutz Beit Zera) would be meeting in her house.

At six in the evening I went with Hinda to meet our friends. The meeting was very warm, everyone recounted their memories and experiences. They all spoke good Hebrew, and talking ~~and they talked~~ about the kibbutz. They all seemed very satisfied. They all pleaded with me to come and spend a few days with them before I began to study. As we talked I suddenly noticed a boy who was sitting in the corner talking to my friend. His two black eyes glowed ~~burning~~ like hot coals. I looked at him and he looked at me, he got up and came over. He was taller than me and very manly. I felt he was entirely different from the others, somehow more distinguished ~~from them, so~~ it seemed to me. He was dressed like a kibbutznik. He asked me in Hebrew if I would go to the movies with him to see Dorian Gray. I wanted to tell him that I was ready to go with him even to the end of the world.... We went to the movies. He knew a little Yiddish, but not very well. In the movies he sat next to me and I felt an electric current flowing from him to me. I couldn't speak, I hardly saw the movie, my head was somewhere

in the clouds and I didn't know why. He merely smiled at me and looked in to my eyes. After the movie he took me back to Valia's and said that he would be waiting for me at Beit Zera, and that I would be his guest there. I went in to the house, went up the steps and told Valia I was going to kibbutz for a week. They were very pleased about it, they said I would see something new and that I would begin to get used to the language.

All that night I didn't sleep and I thought only of him. The next day I packed a tiny suitcase, put on a white shirt that belonged to Valia's husband, and was on my way. The journey was very hard, it took several hours. The bus was full and in the beginning there was no place to sit. I sat on the stairs leading to the door of the bus and thought that I must have gone out of my mind -- where was I going and why? I got to Beit Zera intending to stay a week but it was a fateful step for me and I stayed much longer.

I returned to Tel Aviv as a married woman, the wife of Maikel Levin -- that was what his friends called him.

Today my daughter is twenty-nine. How much I have been through in those years! And only God and I know how tired it has made me. With every day that passes it gets harder. Nevertheless, I hope I will yet see my daughter independent. But who knows how long

it will take -- perhaps a year, a year and a half.

In the kibbutz I was made very welcome. They gave me a room with two other people. It was the practice there that a girl would share a room with two boys so that they would be tidier and so the atmosphere would be more homely.

In the first days I was considered a guest and didn't work. I went on lots of walks. The kibbutz was on the banks of the Jordan not far from the Sea of Galilee. Although it was very hot in the beginning it didn't bother me particularly, and in the afternoon it got cooler. I felt good there. I searched for Maikel unceasingly but it took several days till we met. When he saw me he was very surprised. It seemed he hadn't believed I would come at all -- he even said as much, he never thought that such a refined city girl would come to the kibbutz.

It was hard to talk but it didn't matter to me, the main thing was to be beside him. I started making enquiries about him and I learned that he was a sort of legend on the kibbutz, that all the girls were in love with him and that he would spend only a short time with them. People said he was a very interesting person, very gifted, excellent at work. knew about everything, cheerful, an accomplished folk dancer, and a good singer. I also learned that he was very brave, that he had a dog and a horse of his own, that he liked nature

and animals, had been all over the country by vehicle and on foot, knew every corner, spoke Arabic well, had a common language with the Arabs and knew how to be with them because he was like them. People said he was undisciplined and played all sorts of tricks but they forgave him for his charm was so great that no one could withstand it. In general he was a central figure. All the girls went after him and he after them.

When I learned all this, I realized with sorrow that my hopes were in vain. There was no reason for me to wait for some move from his side. I didn't know Hebrew, didn't know how to swim, didn't play sport, and was unable to do hard physical work. Except for my blue eyes I didn't have anything. But one thing I knew: he was the only one who attracted me. Although I had known many boys I hadn't really been close to anyone except Gamak. I always remembered what my mother had said to me, "Don't cheapen yourself. Wait for a big love that will give you the strength to live." These words proved to be true.

Even though there were no organized Hebrew lessons, I began to learn the language. I was interested in nobody and nothing other than him. I wrote to Valia, and said she should give up the room, cancel my application to Hadassah, and write to Uncle Yasha that I didn't need his money because I was staying on the kibbutz. She was shocked.

Valia answered me that I would never stick it out; neither physically nor emotionally. But I stuck to my guns and even went and told the kibbutz I was prepared to stay. They were very pleased. The atmosphere there was very congenial, the boys courted me a lot and each hoped I would belong to him. But it was only Maikel who interested me, and he hardly noticed me. His group (there were two groups in Beit Zera at the time, one of Lithuanians and one of native-born Sabras) were already members of the kibbutz. Among them was a boy called Nahum who shared a room with Maikel and was his friend. He wasn't married and spoke Yiddish well. I decided that through him I would get to Maikel -- otherwise I had no choice. I led him on till he fell in love with me and invited me to go everywhere with him -- and sometimes Maikel would be there too. And so, gradually, he began to notice me.

Between noon and four o'clock everyone was in their rooms for the heat was unbearable. Nahum invited me to rest in their room -- the house they lived in was cooler than our huts. I agreed, of course, and started going to their room. I noticed that Michael began to look at me increasingly attentively.

I found the work very hard. I didn't know how to work well and quickly. The heat was particularly bad in the fields, and I started suffering from terrible headaches. One

morning we were gathering potatoes, ~~that the machine had taken out;~~ our job was to throw them into crates, and each of us had his own row. I was the last, all the others worked ahead of me. I fell behind them by a long way and I felt very miserable, my head hurt me a lot and my eyes were full of tears. Suddenly I lifted my head and saw Maikell standing in front of me. He looked at me, smiled, and told me to sit down in the shade. In a flash he caught up with the others. All the old timers looked at him as if he were crazy. Maikel came up to me and asked me how I felt. I answered that my head hurt a lot. He told me to rest and finished my work in my place. Then he went over to his horse, which was tied to one of the trees, jumped up on him and rode off.

When we assembled by the truck that was supposed to take us back to the kibbutz everyone made fun of me. I climbed up on the truck and we went back to the kibbutz. My heart was pounding like a hammer. When we got there I saw Maikel. He saw me, picked me up in his arms, and carried me down. Everyone asked him where he had learned such manners but he didn't answer them. He asked me how my headache was, told me to go and lie down, and that in the evening he would come to take me to supper. He came. He had a lovely way of walking, full of confidence. I went with him to the dining hall and after supper we went for a walk by the Jordan.

So began the happiest and most beautiful period in my life; it lasted all in all two years, but every minute of it was full of happiness -- everything that was good, interesting and beautiful in my life happened in those two years.

Maikel began asking me about my past: he knew how to listen, and he understood. His family -- his mother and three brothers -- had been exiled to Siberia, and his father had been murdered by the Germans. Even today I don't understand how we were able to talk; we didn't have enough words, we didn't have a language in which we could converse. Instead there were emotions. Our emotions unfolded like a flower, it was as if we grew to become a single beautiful being.

We spent all twenty-four hours of the day together. At a glance we each of us understood what the other one wanted or needed. For him I was like a being from another planet, completely different from anything he had ever met, ~~until then~~. He had come to Palestine when he was sixteen as a member of Hashomer Hatzair. He was a real man of the earth, he loved nature and knew all about it and was blessed with sound common sense. Even though he was not educated he had charisma and personality stronger than anyone I had ever met. He was then twenty-three years old, healthy in spirit and body, fearless and without complexes. He considered Palestine

the most beautiful of countries, his home. He was the moving spirit of the kibbutz and organized picnics, get-togethers, and hikes. He enjoyed the hikes ~~better~~ more than anything. We sailed on the Jordon in little boats, we rode bicycles, we walked. He knew all the places nearby and wanted me to know them too, and if there was a place I couldn't climb over he would lift me up like a feather and carry me.

At that time we were given soap for our personal use. One day Maikel disappeared and came back in the evening with Adin soap -- a ~~gentler~~ milder soap -- as a gift for me. It was a subject of conversation for the whole kibbutz -- my being so much better than the other girls that I needed perfumed soap. They began to be more and more envious of me. He hung a net around my bed to protect me from mosquitos and on the top ~~he~~ put a flower

God, how good I felt, I felt as if I had been born again, I felt as if I was forgetting all the terror. I began to understand that there was still good in the world, not only bad. I knew that with him my whole life would be good, because he knew all of me, understood me, and loved me as I was, and didn't want me to be any different; and he would protect me from all evil.

One night when we were together as usual, Maikel, his dog Buki and I, he said that we would make a party and move into a "family room," that there was no need to put it off

any longer. I agreed, of course. I wanted nothing else except to be with him for ever.

The kibbutz fixed the date. I invited Flora Eisman ~~and her husband~~, Tamara, Hinda, and her sister and they all came. The members of the kibbutz liked Michael Kel alot, children as well as adults because he had made them an amusement park and built them a dovecote. The children never left him alone, they were always running after him. The party was set for the evening, on the grass, with a special program; he himself built the machine to make the icecream, and prepared it ~~so~~ from his own recipe, vanilla flavor like in Kovno, and everyone proclaimed it delicious. ℇ In the morning my guests arrived and I went with Hinda and Maikel to bathe in the Jordan. Hinda swam some distance away, Michael Kel wasn't far from me. Suddenly I was in a whirlpool and I ~~starting~~ started to sink. Maikel caught me, slapped my face twice -- my being unconscious made things more difficult for him -- and brought me to the land. Hinda became hysterical. All Maikel could do was kiss me. Tears ran from his eyes and he said that now I belonged to him forever because he had saved my life.

We didn't tell anyone what had happened so as not to spoil the atmosphere. The party in the evening was wonderful and I was ecstatic. I thought to myself, is all this really happening? After all, we were so different, from different backgrounds, almost without a common language. What was I

doing? But the doubts didn't last more than a few minutes.

We were given a nice room, in a house, and [Maikel] arranged everything perfectly. He even made the furniture himself. I got a large radio as a present, also an iron and a kettle. In the opinion of the kibbutzniks this made me a member of the bourgeoisie and different from everyone else.

The next morning the guests left and we decided to go away for a honeymoon with Tamara and Hinda's sister. We had accumulated rest days beforehand, so there was no problem. The trip was simply unforgettable. How well Maikel knew everything, how he explained and showed us things! He tried to teach me how to see, how to understand and to love nature, but I had eyes only for him and I didn't see anything else.

After we came back from the Galilee I had to say goodbye to my Lithuanian friends who were going to another kibbutz. That was a sad experience for me.

At that time I was working as a fill-in for other people, always in different places, and as always I worked poorly and slowly. The older women made fun of me. In the kitchen they purposely gave me a kilogram of onions to peel, and my eyes would be red from crying. Then the doctor discovered I had an eye infection. I worked on the harvest but it turned out I didn't have enough strength to lift the pitchfork. In the

poultry house I felt bad and threw up. Everywhere a different problem. But after work I felt good: people always came to visit us, there was a pleasant atmosphere, I would make turkish coffee and Maikel would bring or make all sorts of good things -- and he was an expert at it! The nights belonged to us alone.

I tried to hide my problems with work from Maikel but as always he felt everything. After my group had left the situation got worse, but I kept quiet; I knew how much Maikel was tied to the land and to the kibbutz. He had lived there for eight years.

On the 23 August 1946, Maikel said to me that the next day we would go to the rabbi of Moshava Kinneret to get married.

The next day we went to the Rabbi. I held on to one post and Maikel to the other, the rabbi muttered something, lent me a ring and immediately took it back -- and that's how I was married. All that it gave me was a marriage certificate!

The ceremony left me in a bad mood. Maikel bought me an icecream soda in a kiosk opposite the rabbi's house. We didn't have enought money for the bus so we had to go back to Beit Zera on foot.

For me life on the kibbutz was split into two parts: work, in the unbearable heat; and the evening. The evenings were wonderful. Maikel did everything he could for me. He helped me at work, tidied the room and brought all sorts of good things to eat. On Shabbat we would go out on trips, hitch-hiking.

I didn't give a thought to the high blood pressure that they had warned me about in Atlit, but Maikel saw that my headaches were getting worse. One day he came home from work and told me he had decided to leave the kibbutz. I was stunned. I knew how much he loved the kibbutz and how wretched he had been when we had gone to Tel Aviv for a few days. He hated the city and all the noise and bustle.

I asked him what he would do in town, for neither of us had money or a profession. If he were to be miserable there how would I feel? I'd feel guilty all my life! But Maikel answered that his decision was final: this was no life for me, he could see that the other girls in the kibbutz were making my life a misery; he had a pair of hands and a head. Somehow we would manage.

Maikel's announcement that we were leaving put the whole kibbutz in an uproar -- they all loved him so much, and he loved all the children and his work. They avoided my

eyes; they hated me, they stopped talking to me. I felt very alone and miserable. Today, it seems to me that if they had given me other work -- with children, for example -- and taught me Hebrew, and if the people around me had been nicer to me and less envious, I would have stayed. I knew I was being unfair to Maikel.

A year ago, a some wedding, a woman came up to me and asked if I was Irena, Maikel's wife. She said she had been one of the group of young Israelis in the kibbutz when I had arrived for the week. The people of the kibbutz hadn't been able to take their eyes off me and Maikel, she said; for everything had happened just like in a film. No one could understand how a weakling like me had managed to catch the best man on the kibbutz, nor how he could have fallen in love with me when any girl there was prepared to give him anything. I didn't know what to answer.

We left the kibbutz in the morning in low spirits. My conscience bothered me. No one came to say goodbye to us. We left without a penny in our pockets. We had only a little money for the bus journey. We went to Givatayim to the house of a good friend of my husband who had married a rich sabra. They gave us a meal and after that we started going from house to house looking for somewhere to live -- a room whose

owners would be willing to waive payment of rent till after first salary. They asked us where we were working. We answered that as yet nowhere but we would be starting soon. They asked us if we had any belongings and we answered that we didn't. We had only a bed that Maikel had made himself. Understandably, as we had no work, no money, and no possessions, no one wanted to rent us a room. But Maikel reassured me and was so cheerful that I believed that everything would sort itself out, that he would find a solution. I believed in him as in God.

One day we knocked on the door of a small house. An old woman opened the door. She took one look at Maikel and asked if he was from Beit Zera. He answered that he was, and she said that one day she had taken the bus to Moshav Kinneret and he had sat next to her. She was carrying a large suitcase with her, and when she stood up to get off, without saying a word he had taken the suitcase from her and walked with her right to her daughter's room. She had asked him where he was going and he answered, "To Beit Zera, aunty, but it doesn't matter, I'm young, I'll go on foot!" And he had simply put the suitcase down and walked off. "I haven't forgotten you," she said, "and you can have a room in my house until you find something better."

And so we found ourselves a room. Valia bought me some pots and pans and other things. Flora's husband found Maikel work in construction. As I was a "certified" laundrywoman, I went to do washing in people's houses.

~~in town~~

The beginning was difficult. Luckily, the woman we lived with taught me to cook. I had never cooked before and I knew nothing about it. My first soup had almost more salt than vegetables! I was very miserable about not knowing how to cook and giving Maikel unappetizing meals. He took it all with good humor and encouraged me and said I mustn't let things ~~get on top of~~ depress me, I would just have to learn. Our room was very comfortable, or so it seemed to me, and when he came back from work I was very happy and would forget all the little unpleasant ~~passes~~ incidents. We already had several couples we were friendly with and we used to visit Flora and Eisman, who had got married a little while after us. They both liked Maikel very much, especially Flora. Maikel worked very hard at his construction job and after that would work overtime picking potatoes or painting apartments. The first time he painted an apartment they threw him out because the whitewash wouldn't take! But he wasn't put off, he simply learned to work better.

There were days when there wasn't any work, and although every penny was important to us, I was delighted if Maikel didn't go out to work. Then we would go off on a hitch-hiking trip. How good these careless moments were -- without them we would have lost the best times of our lives.

After a few months Maikel met a neighbor who let him build us a tiny house -- in fact, a hut -- on his lot. The neighbor's house stood on the front of the lot while our house stood in the garden. Maikel was thrilled.

I don't know where he got hold of the construction materials. He worked on the house in his every free moment and in a short time a framework of scaffolding had sprung up for a room with a tiny kitchen and a place for a shower and toilet. We were very happy. Every day I went to see how my "castle" was growing.

I even tried to work, in the Assis factory, but I couldn't carry on because I started having severe nosebleeds. I found work doing housework. I wasn't a good worker but they didn't fire me so it was okay. I remember that when they paid me after a hard day's work, I liked to spend all my money on Eau de Cologne, a blouse, or trousers for Maikel. He put on weight, he was properly dressed, and he looked very handsome.

Within a short time I learned to speak Hebrew fluently, and in the evenings Maikel would read me the newspaper and explain what was going on. The situation in the country was getting worse and worse, and since Maikel belonged to the Hagana and was a skilled marksman he frequently went out to different places to teach people how to shoot, or on

guard duty. His stints of guard duty disturbed me terribly, I never fell asleep until he came home. I began to be afraid again. My past rose up before me. Although I didn't talk about it very much I was scared that once again I would lose what was dearest to me. But Maikel knew me so well that he understood what was going on inside me. As soon as he came back home in a cheerful mood I would again forget everything.

Once Maikel went to work and forgot to take his food, and I brought it to where he was working. Afterwards he told me that all his friends had laughed at him and asked what a simple worker like him was doing with a princess like me. He had answered ~~them~~ that with time living with a princess makes you a prince too.

Slowly Maikel began behaving completely differently, both at home and with other people. He stopped being wild, and even Flora said his manners were superb... he no longer took his shoes off everywhere, and he learned what a knife and fork were for. He even started liking it all, and we began buying things for the house. He bought a bicycle for getting to work and I was very proud of it. We liked going to movies but could only afford to go every other Saturday.

Maikel was sure we would have a lot of children. I said I wasn't sure I would have enough strength,

to which he would answer that he would help me so much that I wouldn't find it hard.

Then our "castle" was finished, and I was pregnant. We moved in even though there was no electricity yet and no glass in the windows. But at last we had a corner of our own, in the midst of a garden. We got ourselves a dog, an aquarium and rabbits, and I waited to see what would come next...

Our house was in a neighborhood inhabited almost entirely by Yemenites, although our landlord was Ashkenazi -- that is, of Polish origin like us. And here again I saw ~~how great was~~ Maikel's charm -- the whole neighborhood knew him and loved him. He spoke like them and ate like them, he knew how to adapt quickly.

One day I went to Jerusalem to visit my grandmother's sister. I left on Thursday and agreed with Maikel that I would come back on Saturday night. But on Thursday night I so missed Maikel that I hardly slept. On Friday I wanted to go home, for I knew he wouldn't be able to come after work on Friday as there were no buses. It was a very unsettled time. But my aunt insisted I stay. On Friday at five o'clock there was a sudden ring at the door. I knew it was Maikel! He came in dressed as an Arab. I asked him how he had come and he answered that he hadn't been able to last out any longer; he had dressed himself as an Arab (he looked like a real Arab),

gone to Jaffa, and taken an Arab bus to Jerusalem. It was a very dangerous thing to do, even though he spoke Arabic.

The next day we took ourselves on a long trip in the Jerusalem area, we visited Hebron and Bethlehem and didn't go home until Monday.

Soon I was pregnant, but everything seemed to go well and I didn't go to the doctor. When I eventually went in the fifth month he was very alarmed by my high blood pressure, but it was already too late to do anything about the pregnancy. Maikel went to see my doctor. He sat and waited his turn among all the women, then went into the doctor and had a long conversation with him. Then he sent me to him again. Maikel had convinced the doctor that I should continue to live a normal life. The tests showed that everything was alright and we stopped thinking about the blood pressure. Maikel treated me like a queen. His dream was that I would have a little girl who would be like me. He would bring me special apples -- the Yemenites said that this would give the baby good skin. He would get up early and light the stove so that it would be warm when I got up, he would go to Givat Napoleon in Ramat Gan and bring me forget-me-nots the color of my eyes. He would come home whistling, and as soon as he entered the neighborhood he would call out to the first neighbor he saw and ask "How's my wife?"

One night when we were in bed, tears started to roll from his eyes. I was alarmed and asked him what was wrong.

Maikel's family had already left Russia. One brother was in Germany, two others and the mother were in Paris. They wanted to come to Palestine but because the situation was very unsettled and his mother was worried about her sons' well-being they stayed in Europe for the time being. Maikel couldn't understand it, he so much wanted to see them -- after all, he hadn't seen them for many years. He had been a child when he had left them and now he was already a man and awaiting a child of his own. But they decided to wait in Europe.

Fighting had already broken out in several places. Maikel had so far only been called up for hours at a time because of my condition. On May 18 was his proper call-up day. Meanwhile he worked day and night, and the rest of the time he was a soldier. He took part in ~~taking~~ the capture of Salame and Sheikh Munis. My spirits were very low, and so were his. Once he said to me, "If I die, I'm sure you'll find someone to look after you." I answered that he must have gone out of his mind. When we were together he would hold me and wouldn't let go of me even for a moment.

One day Hinda came and told me Shimon had lost a leg. This information had a terrible effect on me. We went to visit him. I thought the world had come to an end. I remembered Shimon as a cheerful boy who loved dancing and sport, and now here he was without a leg.

Shimon kept his spirits up, he matured. He had lost his leg in Beit Dagon, near Mikve Yisrael. I remember thinking

He answered that these were tears of happiness and said: "I am so happy that I don't know what's happening with me: Always be with me, always."

Even then I didn't know how to save money. Other couples in a similar situation to ours managed better than we did. Maikell tried to teach me how to put some money aside for a rainy days but never succeeded, even though in some things I was now more practical -- I already knew how to cook and I went to people's houses to wash and to iron. But despite my tendency to waste money I gradually managed to buy things for the house.

Sometimes I would meet Hinda. Once when she was with me we went into town together, where she was supposed to be meeting a boy. From a distance I saw that it was Shimon Lusky and I said to Maikell "What does she see in such a baby? He's still a child."

One day Maikell came home with a headache. Nothing like that had ever happened to him. I touched him, he was all on fire. He lay in bed and I sat next to him for long hours until his temperature went down.

Tamara, who had meanwhile finished Mikve Yisrael, went to Kibbutz Masuot Yitschak in Gush Etzion. The situation in the country got worse and worse. Michael would work by day and do guard duty by night, and I was very nervous.

that for him the war was already over -- what lay in store for Maikel?. Then we learned that there was fighting in Gush Etzion. I was panic stricken, I had to know what was happening with Tamara. We didn't sleep a wink waiting for news until we learned that Tamara had been taken prisoner by the Arabs. I imagined how she felt after all that had happened to her! I thought about her nonstop. Maikell liked her very much despite ~~the crazy things she had in her head,~~ her crazy ideas she wouldn't come to visit me because she only ate food that was kasher.

Now it was May 14 and the declaration of Israel's independence. I knew that our greatest dream had been realized and that legend and dream had become reality. From now on, I thought, we Jews would be like everyone else, we would have an official state and home of our own, and Auschwitz would never happen again. My child would be born with full rights, like the children of other nations. We went out to the street. Everyone was singing and dancing. Maikell was very happy, but he said to me that all these people who were celebrating still didn't know how much blood this happiness would cost them. I didn't want to think about it. The next day there was fighting again and Maikel didn't come home until dawn. On May 18 he was supposed to be going.

I received a letter from my aunt in Jerusalem, asking me to send a little food -- there was nothing to eat because of the siege. I could send her a parcel via Egged in the

Central Bus Station. ~~With~~ Maikel and I packed a large parcel of barley, rice, and sugar, and he promised he would send it to her before he left for the army on May 18. On the 17th he went to say goodbye to Flora -- I learned that the following day -- and asked her to look after me. He brought her a Parker pen that he had chosen to match the color of her hair, or so he told her. Flora has kept that Parker to this day.

On the 18th of the month in the morning Maikel set off for work and said that straight from work he would go to Egged to send the parcel. After that he would go to the recruiting center to join up and then he would let me know where he was. He still hoped he would be able to sleep at home and said I should wait for him.

On the ~~1 June~~ 18 May I was restless all morning. At 12 o'clock there was the wail of a siren and I heard a loud noise. Later the neighbors said that there had been an explosion at the Central Bus Station. I still didn't suspect anything, but my fear increased. I stood and waited by the bus stop from 4 o'clock in the afternoon till 8 o'clock in the evening. Instinctively I felt that something had happened. One after the other the men came home but Maikel was nowhere to be seen. I will never forget those four hours at the bus stop. How envious I was of all those whose husbands returned. I knew very well that he would have notified me of where he was, wherever he was. He always found ways of notifying me.

everything had finished. The next morning I said I couldn't decide whether to go to Kiryat Meir to look for Maikel or to Hadassah Hospital to look for his body. Flora ~~shouted~~ yelled at me ~~that I should~~ to stop talking nonsense.

At 8 o'clock in the morning we turned on the radio. I sat on a chair next to it. They started reading out the surnames of the people who had been killed at the Central Bus Station. ~~Michael's~~ Kel's surname was the third. I heard it distinctly. The next thing I knew I woke up on the floor. How I fell I don't remember. I remember that I didn't scream and I didn't cry but I felt a terrible emptiness. There was a doctor next to me who gave me a shot of some sort. Outside there was an explosion. When I woke up the next day they told me that the funeral was to take place ~~t~~thatam day in Nahalat Yitzchak. Other than Hinda and myself no one came. Everyone was occupied with the explosion and with themselves. We went on foot because there were no buses. I remember nothing at all. I imagined that it wasn't me but someone else who was going in my place. We got to the cemetery. All the time I saw Maikel in front of my eyes, I couldn't believe it was him they were burying. The explosion had been bad, and we were the only ones who walked after the coffin. By the place they were to bury him I felt I wouldn't be able to bear it when they threw earth over him.

He will always remain before my eyes, smiling and loved.

* * *

I could hardly stand on my feet, my belly weighed a ton. I had ceased any interest in the thing inside me -- the thing that was supposed to have been my most precious gift of all to him. I quickly dragged Hinda away and started to leave.

I was in the cemetry only once more -- when they put up the tombstone.

To this day I cannot imagine him lying there beneath the ground.

I went back to Flora and there I stayed for the week, living on sleeping pills. I would wake up at all hours of the day and night without understanding what was going on around me. After a week I got up -- I understood that after all it wasn't my house or my parents' house, each person was busy with his own affairs and no one liked having a creature of tragedy in the house.

I began to feel the baby. It had probably moved around before but I hadn't noticed. Once again I slowly began to get my life back to normal. I slept with friends of Flora's who lived not far from her in a large apartment. During the day I was at Flora's. Her husband was called up, he was hardly at home, ~~and~~ with Hinda there we were all three of us together again. ~~there~~. Hinda started looking for a room for me. I firmly refused to go back to my own home.

At 8 o'clock in the evening I locked our little house and went to Flora. She was living not far from Kiryat Meir which was where they always took the men who had been called up. I told myself that if he was there, he would at least have told Flora. I went there, eight months pregnant, alone, and I cried the whole way.

I never went back to our house, The most beautiful period in my life was over.

Flora and her husband lived in a one-and-a-half room flat with their little daughter, a baby of four and a half months whom I loved very much. Flora and her husband began to calm me down, saying that everything would be alright and that Kel must be at Kiryat Meir since the situation was very bad, and all the time there was fighting and explosions. I didn't believe them, I felt that something had happened but they talked to me about all sorts of things and particularly about Maikel's future and the partnership he wanted to go into with several other people to make brieze blocks. They were supposed to be putting up the money and he would invest his know-how and labor and organize it all. Eizman liked the idea very much; he assured me we would be very rich after the war. But I heard hardly anything. They put me to sleep together with them in the big bed. I didn't sleep all night. I was afraid to turn over or walk around or to cry. I knew that for me

One day they announced on the radio the names of the women prisoners whom the Arabs were releasing, and Tamara's name was among them. I waited for her impatiently, I hoped she would return and be a warm sister to me. An acquaintance of mine waited for her and told her everything that had happened and that I was with Flora. Tamara came. She was pretty cool toward me; it is possible that she was expecting warmth from me, but I was completely empty inside. Tamara began to look for a room for the two of us.

On July 26, almost two months after Maikel's death, I had labor pains and Eizman took me to Beilinson Hospital. At 10 o'clock in the morning Michal was born. As Maikel had dreamed, the baby was like me.

The birth was easy but part of the afterbirth was left and there was hemorraging. I had to be taken to the operating room ~~theater~~ where I was operated on under anaesthetic. I woke up on the way back to the maternity ward. Because of the war and all the casualties there were more than twenty women in the ward. I stayed in the hospital for two weeks and most of the time my temperature was around 40°C. I was envious of the women around me, I couldn't look at anyone and I cried unceasingly. They gave me sleeping pills the whole time.

I called the child Michal, but I hardly saw her. I had

no feeling toward her then, I wanted only Maikel. I received lots of flowers but no one came to visit me except Hinda and Tamara. Tamara meanwhile found a room and moved everything from my house. Whenever she asked me what to do about anything I would tell her to do whatever she wanted. Since my physical condition was very bad, I was sent with Michal to the Neve Em Nursing Home. I didn't breast-feed her at all. In Neve Em I lay in the garden the whole time, I didn't speak to anyone and I didn't see Michal. Here too I was envious of all the other women and I thought only of Mi~~chael~~ el. There was a very nice nurse there who liked me and who used to call me every evening to wash the baby. She assured me that Michal was the most beautiful baby there. Gradually I began to get used to Michal, to feel that she belonged to me, I came to realize that I would have to take care of her and play the part of her father too.

After a week Tamara came and took me to Givat Rambam to the room she had found. In the beginning I was very depressed. Nothing interested me except Michal. I was twenty-three and motherhood was a new experience for me. Luckily a pediatrician lived opposite, a very nice woman who gave me emotional support. I was very proud when she said Michal was the best looked-after baby. But for the most part my life was bad. I was sorely in need of Maikell, I suffered very greatly mentally and physically. Tamara did all the work for me and

it was very difficult for her. To my sorrow there was still no closeness between us. We had no money, the money that I had got from the life insurance was finished and Tamara had to work in an ammunition factory. She would go out early in the morning and come back late at night, and then she would still help me with everything there was to do. For both of us it was difficult.

One day I heard a loud explosion. I was very scared, and with good reason: the factory in which Tamara worked had exploded. Miraculously all the workers were saved, although nothing was left of the factory. Because I didn't want to live from her money, Tamara suggested she take Michal to the kibbutz, which had then begun to reorganize, and that I should find work of some sort. It seemed to us then the best solution. So Tamara took Michal and went to kibbutz.

Today I am convinced that it was a terrible mistake to have done that to Michal. But I was twenty-three then and I knew nothing at all about babies, and Tamara was eighteen and had a difficult personality. In any case, that's what happened.

I wasn't able to think logically then. In fact, I was barely alive during this period. They went to the kibbutz and I went to work for Flora as a mother's helper.

I was convinced I was unsuited to better work. I worked very hard at Flora's, I loved ~~Dina~~ Flora and her

and their daughter Dina,
husband and I thought everything was okay. I don't think I was good at housework but I looked after Dina very well. They could rely on me completely. Flora was working in the Ministry of Housing in Tel Aviv, and when her work obliged her to go away for a few days she could go ~~with an easy heart~~ without fear knowing I was with Dina. Three times a week after work I would go to the kibbutz to Tamara. I felt that Michal didn't get the attention there that she would have got if she had been with me, but Tamara reassured me that everything was alright. Michal was lacking two things at that time: food and love. After having had all my attention, she was now looked after by a woman who had to look after six other children too. Tamara wasn't married and wasn't yet able to give Michal the feeling of home and daily motherly love after work. ~~For~~ The kibbutz was young and poor. By chance I learned that the doctor who looked after Dina was also the doctor in the kibbutz where Tamara was, and from her I heard that Michal was developing rickets and a skin disease. I knew I had to take Michal away from there fast.

The war ended and all Maikel's brothers arrived with their mother. One of them was married, the others were not. I waited for them anxiously, I was sure they would help me and Michal. They settled in Haifa, and from time to time they would come and visit. As regards Michal they suggested I put her in a Wizo Baby Home. But I had been there and I knew the

my grandmother that I didn't do more. I also hope that when what I have written is translated into Hebrew my children and grandchildren will read it and treat me with greater understanding.

As an epilogue I want to tell ~~another~~ a story.

Some four years ago my son was in Europe and I heard from him only rarely. One day my husband and I came home in the afternoon and saw a tall, thin boy on the stairs of our apartment house. He was very dirty and covered with sweat. We asked him who he was. He said his name was Reinhold, he had met Haim at the Acropolis and spent a week with him. They had talked a lot and played chess. I invited him in and he gave me a letter from Haim. Haim wrote that the boy was a German Christian, seventeen years old, who wanted to convert; he asked that we help him as much as we could, for he was in need of a warm home. [To get the boat to Israel] He had traveled overland from Germany ~~to Tel Aviv (except across the sea)~~ by bicycle.

In the first minute I wanted to throw him out. I thought: "A German boy in my house! How can I breathe the same air as him!" After that I looked at him and saw that he was very tired, dirty, and hungry. My heart contracted and I thought that maybe my son would chance on someone else's house in the same state, so I agreed to let him stay the night. He had