

September 22, 1978.

Dear Friends,

I believe in miracles. In the Fall of 1942 we received an order to gather at the Jewish quarters located at Wieliczki #03 and to be sent to a labor camp.

A year and a half before we left Crakow behind and with the help of Mr. P. Dudy from Bierzanow we resettled in Wielicze.

Here we lived in relative peace, nobody bothered us and the days went by smoothly. On a given day at the end of the same year, the Jewish quarters here received an order to build and equip a hospital for people over 65. Obviously everyone participated. I having been a R.N. at the outbreak of the war worked very enthusiastically towards this goal.

Two days after completion many military trucks suddenly pulled up. They started pulling out the elderly people by their feet and hands without a word, loaded them on their trucks and left. I get the chill writing about it.

So many years went by and I still cannot forget (nor should we). How can we expect our youth to comprehend such barbaric acts, when i myself have difficulties going back to those days.

All these people were taken to the outskirts of the city. Here they were forced to dig their own grave and were shot and buried. Two days later our journey started. We were loaded unto open trucks. I was together with my brother Toidek, my mother and my father. We were wearing armbands with the Star of David. Suddenly a Polish policeman appeared, took me by my arm and went straight to the front of the truck, put me into the driver's cab without a word and disappeared. The driver of the truck was a Polack. I have not seen him since and don't know why he did it. We rode for about an hour and the transport was unloaded onto waiting trains. The truck driver drove around until 5 A.M. and stopped then near a forest near Crakow.

"May G-d watch over you" were his words. Noone was allowed to walk the streets (or being outside) till 7 A.M. It was dead quiet. Somehow I managed to reach Zosia Pozniak, who was my former teacher. I rang the bell, she opened the door half asleep and without hesitation she invited me in. Right away she sent her 3 children with her maid to the grandfather who lived in a village nearby. (Her husband was a P.O.W. by the Germans) He was arrested together with other professors from the university of Jagiellonsk.

I recall not having said a single word all week, but kept staring at the ceiling. On a given day Zosia (my teacher) hands me papers. They were a new identity card with a new name, Krystina Banach. One day later on a young person shows up, obviously also with fixed papers. He also had this address. Zosia told us to go to Lvov. Needless to say, I have never been there.

Suddenly we were in Lvov somewhere, in a basement apartment. Stefan told me to wait there until he returns. (We were given a name and address of a professor who might be able to help us.) I kept waiting and waiting until evening. Suddenly I hear steps. Thank G-d, it was Stefan. He was palefaced and scared. He asked me if I had any money. Outside is a policeman and Stefan was going to try to bribe him. I gave Stefan the money which Zosia had sewn into a secret pocket in my lining. The policeman took the money.

The Polish policemen had gone through special training to detect Jews. While Stefan was on his way to look up the professor, this policeman spotted him, took him into an alley and made him drop his pants in order to check if Stefan was Jewish.

We lived here close to a year. Miraculously I found a small room at the home of a widow who happened to be a "Volksdeutsche" meaning a German by heritage who resided in Poland prior to the war. I found a job connected with the government, since my knowledge of the German language was of help. I made myself a skirt from some curtains, and a skirt from another piece of cloth. Life somehow went on.

A certain day I ran into a Crakow acquaintance in the street who quickly told me her location in Warsaw and disappeared.

One day after work, a Ukranian shows up dressed in civilian clothes. He is waiting for me to finish work. He tells me he wants to talk to me. I learned from others that he had caught other Jews a day prior to catching me. This one person told him that I have money.

He knew my real name, who I was, etc. The only valuable item I had was a little ring which my mother gave me when I matured. I offered it to him. He took it and walked away.

Several days later a couple passed me by in the street. He was wearing a German uniform, but she looked like a prostitute. She must have seen me in the past. 5 men arrested me, they searched my possessions. In my cigarettes they found a letter that was written to me which I received through Zosia, which I didn't want to burn up.

In prison I was placed together with prostitutes, thieves, etc. I begged one of the SS men who looked somewhat reasonable to notify my superior where I worked to tell him what prison I was in. He would be rewarded.

One day in prison, a whole day without food, I head my name being called; Krystina Barach. A young SS man questioned me slightly, who I am, where I was from, etc. After several minutes he told me: "Sie sind frei. Das war ein Irrtum." ("You are free. It was a mistake!!")

My superior told me not to return to my room, but to leave and try to resettle in Warsaw, where noone knew me. The Ukranian who detected us lived up to his promise. He got a few zlotys and kept quiet.

A cousin of mine who lived in Lvov together with my supervisor at work gathered some money and bribed a young woman who was known to associate with an SS man.

The underground organization worked superbly. I took off for Warsaw, arrived in Warsaw, but then could not remember the address of my friend who had whispered it to me while in Lvov.

I rented a handdrawn carriage. (A young Pole was the driver). This I did, so that I should not walk around aimlessly in the streets of Warsaw. I was also hoping that I would remember my friend's address.

My mind remained a blank. I could not remember a thing. It was already 6 P.M. and the streets had to be cleared by 7 P.M. or I would be shot. I spent the night sitting in a chair with another acquaintance, who worked for the underground. She was later informed on to the GESTAPO.

The Ghetto was burning and the city was lit up as if it were daylight. Hellish scenes, I saw, but I didn't believe my eyes.

I found work and changed my name again. I sold my coat and figured I would worry about being cold when winter arrives.

I found very small living quarters at the home of a very pleasant widow. She pretended not knowing who I was, otherwise she would be subjected to the death penalty.

A very rare happening took place. One day in the street I see a cousin of mine named Witek hanging on to a trolley. With him was a friend from the Hebrew Gymnasium, a young student (Marcel) from Crakow and his wife. (1944). Suddenly the Warsaw uprising erupted. Marcel came to the office where I worked, so that I could help him select some furniture. (His wife and child remained in the outskirts of Warsaw.) Shots were being fired all around us. We took shelter inside a building and a nice lady asked us in till the shooting would stop.

My cousin Marcel told me how he was shot in the Crakow Ghetto. The bullet went through his throat, but somehow he was not injured. He fell and pretended to be dead. Some of his non-Jewish friends took him to the cemetery from where he later escaped. He got to know his wife and they have a child. "Nothing more can ever happen to me," said Marcel.

Poor Marcel, one day he went downstairs to investigate some disturbance and a stray bullet hit him. I went to see him at the Red Cross hospital, but the area was constantly bombed. When the Germans were the victors, German patients were placed in beds for treatment, and when the Russians came closer, the Russian patients took up beds, and the Germans were placed on the floor.

There was absolutely nothing to eat. We received 2 lumps of sugar as our nourishment for the entire evening while on duty. As the Russians came closer we were rounded up to be evacuated. As it turned out marching to the trains our doctor stepped on a mine. 2000 women were taken to a camp near Berlin (Alten-Grabov). In that camp were Poles, French and English people for all over the world. People had been incarcerated

for years, suddenly 2000 uniformed women arrived, after one week they had to move us and we ended up near Holland in Oberlangen.

I worked in the office until one girl mentioned that I speak German. Our sergeant was a very brutal person. He kept shooting over our heads daily because he wanted us to disperse. Some people worked in the laundry. (as a result we were able to exchange potatoes for cigarettes and chocolate sent over from America).

Children started to be born. The mothers were in bad condition. The older SS guards were somewhat sympathetic and provided some milk, and the babies grew nicely.

Suddenly in 1945 Polish and Canadian brigades were close to us in the forests and we were free, for the first time, we cried. President Roosevelt died the same year, the same day we were free.

I almost forgot to mention one incident. One day they read off about 20 names. My name was among them. They told us that we would be transferred to a certain factory. They put us in a barrack and told us to sign some affidavits that we agree to work as civilians. They would give us good food, etc. But, none of us would sign. So they woke us up every night every hour in order to make us sign or face the consequences. They forced us to carry by hand very filthy underwear (full of lice) to the laundry room where it was very hot, and then go outside where it was very cold and rainy.

They also sent us out on a train as a punishment. My heart was pounding, I thought I would die, but sometimes even dying comes hard. Suddenly we were liberated. The entire camp for sick. We got excellent food, but our stomachs could not take it.

My English lessons in Poland came in very handy. I and another girl were sent to the British headquarters. An English general picked us up daily in a limousine. We visited different camps and I served as a translator.

Poles, Czechs, Yugoslavs, etc. all wanted to go home, and the authorities tried to help. I was, however, faced with a problem. Should I tell them that I was Jewish? Should I return to Poland and look for my family? (I did not know about their whereabouts for years) Should I remain somewhere in Europe? Should I go to Israel?

I gave a letter to the Canadian commandant and asked him to help me get it to the American Family Agency. I remember having family in America.

I received a reply through the agency, and now I was able to become myself again, Felicia Kohn from Krakow instead of Maria Zylinska.

The American consulate required us to produce two witnesses, and that was not easy to find. I just managed to find them at the last minute. (The following day the Polish communists opened a bureau called "E.R.A." ) There were no transports leaving from Belgium (my passport was issued there). I had to wait until a military ship was returning to the U.S. I was the only female among 22 Belgian males waiting for a boat. The consulate promised to let me know (keep me informed). I asked for a pass to go to Antwerp. When I checked with the consulate there, I was told that they had called and that I had already left. One more day and I would have

missed my quota for that year.

I believe in miracles, my daughter Alicia Flessig Magal, Husband Itzhak Magal, their children Avital and Amir (who live in Israel).

Five weeks after I arrived to New York I married Fred Fleissig to whom I was introduced at a doctor's office in Crakow before the war. (Dr. Eder) Fred Fleissig had remained in New York since 1934 when the world's fair took place. Fred had lost his wife and child in Europe. Now we were starting a new life.

Rabbi Schwartz of White Plains, N.Y. told us that a true Jew must believe in miracles.



my early years in Krakow --

The most pleasant place that I remember is Park Krakowski where every nappy hour was filled with delightful activities. Boating on a small lake, swimming with friends and following a champion swimmer, backstroke to get to be as good as she was. Horseback riding and walks - all in the same enchanted place. A vendor was selling italian ices - what delight.

Every morning I got up very early to walk to my school on the other end of town, in Jewish neighborhood, in order to walk via the market place full of surprises. Sometimes I even got an apple from a peasant for nothing, money saved for my return trip around 2 pm. to visit "Słodka Dziurka" a divine bakery.

Krakow was and is very much like Boston - theater, opera and to me then most important - Conservatory of Music where I took piano lessons, theory etc.

All schools saw once a month a good play in the ornate theater - to get us used to good language and inhale the wonderful atmosphere of the theater.

In school we had to learn Latin and I took German. Privately I took French and English. My favorite dancing lessons with Lydia Landsberg were high point once a week - she just introduced rhythmic dances from Vienna. Tap dancing was also taught and performed often.

In Winter my brother Tadek and I left for Zakopane, 1½ hours by train from Krakow - skiing in high mountains, about 3000 Feet high.

The biggest fear and worry was to pass the "Matura" in Polish and half a year before in Hebrew. After that I thought all will be easy and fun.. September 39 the whole world collapsed in one day - bombing of Krakow has begun.. the rest is history. Never did I dream to reach US and live such a happy life, get married, have 2 wonderful children - I must be lucky and am very grateful every day.

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