The Times of My Life

by Hanna (Prager) Kogosowski

We came a long way from the country of my birth,
my home town Wyszkow on the river Bug, just one hour
by train from the capital Warsaw, in central Poland.

My people lived there for 800 years. Now there are none.
My journey to Australia started on September 1939, at 6 am.
We arrived in Melbourne, Australia on May 31, 1949 after 10 long years.
We love this country which embraced us with freedom and friendship.

Forever grateful,

Hanna Kogosowski

Landing in Sydney 1/5/1949.
Dad in centre, with cap and dark glasses; mum third to his left, in bonnet; next to her 11 year-old Ida, in white summer hat and dark glasses

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for their encouragement, help and enthusiasm.
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Thank you all very much.

For my children Alan and Sally.
Son-in-law Steven. Granddaughters Nicole and Michelle.
Nieces Helen and Karen. Nephews Johnny, Mark and Danny.
To all extended family who might be interested.

I feel the need to put down on paper what I can
still remember about our family and our past.

I am afraid I left it a little late already, and did not make use of
the opportunity while I still had my parents Esther Sura and
Jacov Meier Prager, and Aunt Rywka and Uncle Jacob Ring.

They have all gone now and many items of importance have gone
with them. In those days, soon after World War 2,
it was too painful to talk in detail about what happened to our families
between September 1st, 1939 and May 9th, 1945 plus the aftermath.

Even though we did discuss the events quite often,
to put it down on paper was unthinkable.

So for what it is worth, I am going to try to make up for some lost history.

Hanna (Prager) Kogosowski

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Early Childhood

I was born in a small town in central Poland, just 50 km east of Warsaw - Wyszków, on the river Bug. It was famous for the surrounding pine forests. Many people from the capital, Warsaw, would come there for their summer vacations. They would rent cabins located among the magnificent trees, to breathe the pure pine-scented air and swim in the river, the mighty Bug.

Wyszków was a pleasant, pretty and vibrant business town with a population of approximately 25,000, about a third of which was Jewish. There was a large synagogue, many small prayer shuls, a Yeshivah, Jewish study schools, sports clubs, many Zionist organizations and cultural organizations of every persuasion.

I remember a whole avenue of chestnut trees alongside the park, inside which the beautiful stately high school building was located. On the opposite side of the wide avenue, or Warsaw Road, as it was called, was the shul where my father was a member. I loved to go with him there on Saturday mornings, especially when the chestnuts were in bloom. On Saturday evenings the avenue would come alive with people walking leisurely up and down. The many cafeterias and all kind of sweets shops (cukiernias) were lit up, brimful with socialites.

Tuesdays and Fridays were market days. Peasants from surrounding villages would come to the town square (rynek) in their horse-drawn carts full of produce to sell. They would buy from the local traders clothes, boots, materials, household utensils or anything they needed. There was no shortage of goods whatsoever. Every housewife went to the market on those special days to stock up on all imaginable dairy products, live poultry, fruit and vegetables. Bartering was natural, and the whole place had its own atmosphere and sound.

There was a lot of poverty too in Wyszków. Many people worked very hard the whole week just to feed their families, and saved for one decent meal on Shabbat. Their living conditions were pitiful. Many people, both Polish and Jewish, were so poor that their children were given bread with jam or another spread for lunch at school.

I have two sisters, Chava (Eva) and Itka (Ida), younger than me by four and eleven years. I must say that we were three pretty girls. I was (and still am) the only redhead in the family, with plenty of freckles, especially in the springtime when caught by the early sun.

Eva and I attended State school from 8 am till 1 pm. In the afternoon we attended Hebrew and Yiddish school.

Our childhood was more privileged. My father was a grain merchant. He conducted business in many parts of the country and we had a comfortable lifestyle.

We did not own our home but rented a modern (by those standards) apartment of three rooms. It was beautifully furnished with the latest modern furniture, renewed just one year before the outbreak of the war. A painted portrait of mum and dad hung on the wall over their beds.

At different stages of my growing up my father would say to me on occasions *"Pussycat, don't walk in the mud."* I was told that I said that to a kitten when I was two years old and dad was carrying me across a puddle of mud. He never forgot it and would remind me of it many times in years to come.

When I first tried on my navy blue uniform in preparation for high school, with light blue piping on the collar and cuffs and silver buttons, my father looked me up and down with a smile and said 'Pussycat, don't walk in the mud.'

My mother, a slim, blonde, blue-eyed beauty, reigned supreme in our home, but we were well aware who was the head of our family. Whenever Eva and I would argue (just like I watch our two frisky granddaughters do now) or misbehave, all she would need to say was *"If you don't stop I will tell your father."* That was enough, even though I can say in all honesty that I can not remember him ever laying a hand on either of us.

In his younger years father was a Yeshiva student. He still liked to study a tract from the Talmudic books, especially on Saturday afternoon after his nap. He owned a beautiful set of sforim, religious books bound in red with gold lettering.

He would sit at his round table, which was covered with a green table cloth embroidered by my mother, and read aloud with a singing voice, swaying to and fro. Later we would dress in our Shabbat best and all together go for a walk over the bridge.

In winter we would be warmly dressed and feel the frost pinching our cheeks while we watched kids skating on the frozen river. In the spring we liked to watch the ice breaking up into huge boulders and float down the Bug, then to the Visla (Vistula), which in turn flowed into the Baltic sea.

The sea was a long way away from us, half way again across Poland. We could only imagine what it would look like.

We would always end up visiting my mother's uncle Abe for Havdala (conclusion of Shabbat), or one of her cousins - Abe's daughters - Dvoira Ring and Rachel Sokol, with their families.

We kids loved those visits. After Havdala, we were treated to fruits and sweets from uncle Abe's shop. These were well-to-do business families and we visited each others' homes often. Our grandparents on my father's side lived close by, just a little further up the street, with his three brothers, our adored uncles Mendl, Shloime and Simcha.

Dads only sister Hanna Rajczyk left Poland in the mid- thirties to join her husband already in Argentina, with their three children Mendl, Rachel and Moishke. I still remember being at the train station to see them off on their journey.

Dad would travel to Warsaw at least three times a week on business. To catch the 8 o'clock train he would get up at six in the morning and spend an hour shaving and grooming himself so that not one hair would be out of place. Then he would pull out four or five shirts till he decided which one to wear. Mum would say to him *"You are late again - I can hear the train whistle blowing."* This habit my son Alan inherited from his Zeida. He too, is always chasing aeroplanes in the last minute.

Dad would bring back beautiful things for us from Warsaw. He loved quality, and I can still remember a green overcoat with a grey fur collar for me and a burgundy one for Eva, a lovely turquoise jacket with black buttons and belt for mum.

Once my dad took me with him to Warsaw and spent the day with me at the famous, huge Warsaw Zoo. Afterwards he took me to my first-ever restaurant for dinner (kosher of course). I still remember well that exciting day. We returned home at 9 o'clock in the evening, my exhilaration to last me for years to come.

During harvest time dad would travel to the country by horse and carriage, to the homesteads of the rich landlords to buy their entire crop of wheat and corn. Sometimes he would take me and Eva along. We loved the trips in the open carriage and we were treated royally at the farms.

Ida (Itkele) was born on July 10th, 1937, eleven years my junior and seven Eva's. She was a delight to the family. She looked like Shirley Temple and was dressed alike. I assume that our parents tried for a son to make up for their first born boy, who died when only weeks old.

I tried to compensate them a little by playing sports and riding bikes, I even used to play a game we knew as Palant - I had a bat, three stumps and a ball; together with friends we would hit the ball and make a run, just like what I learned years later in Australia is called cricket. My father would laugh and be philosophical. *"What's the difference?"* he would say, *"These days girls do all the things that boys do anyway."* Ida was like a doll to us, a source of immense joy. To this day I still sometimes call her my baby sister. She gets annoyed with me for it. She cannot understand why, and I cannot explain the lingering feelings I still carry from so long ago.

Mother's Family

Our mother came from Maków Mazowiecki, north-west of Wyszków, about two hours' travel by bus. Her mother, Hinda Hercberg (*pron.* Hertzberg), a widow for many years, raised ten children single-handed - two sons and eight daughters. Her husband Nathan ('Nusn') died a long time before, when the children were all still very small. She had her own shop, of all sorts of barleys and grain.

One of the sons, named Nathan after his father, went to America long ago. He married there and all I know is that he had a son. They lost contact and although my Aunt Rywka tried, and I tried in 1967 to call on the phone several Hercbergs I picked out from the New York phone book, we were not successful in finding any trace of the family.

The other son, Szaike, lived with his family in a small town called Govorovo, about two hours' drive away from us. He had several children; the eldest, a son, Mordechai, was already married with a family of his own, two children.

Then came the daughters. Miriam was the eldest. She had four children; the eldest, Sura Itka, was about twenty years old. Devora lived in Krasnosielc with her bike-repairer husband and four children. Szeina Rachel had two boys and two girls - the eldest one was Yachet, about fifteen. Esther Sura was my mother, with three girls. Basia had a boy and a girl, Nusale and Dvoirele. Rywka had one son, Nathan (all the Nathans were named after their grandfather). Chava was married during the winter of 1938, no children yet. Hanna was married in the spring of 1939.

Every one of the sisters was beautiful, mostly blonde with blue eyes, one redhead and two dark brown. I regret I can't remember the names of all the children except the few mentioned above. Every sister had a vocation. Chava was a wig-maker. I remember watching her, with a wooden model head shape and a special needle-like tool, pulling through single hairs one by one and shaping them into a wig, made to order.

My mother and another sister were seamstresses, mum specializing in bed linen. I remember dad making jokes about her sewing machine being the only dowry she brought with her. Another sister was a corset-maker. Rywka was a teacher, the only professional.

I spent two weeks of my summer vacation, till August 15th, 1939, at my grandmother's home in Makow, and I spent a lot of that time with my cousin Yachet Kolinski, who was packing her bags to leave on the 1st of September to join her father

in Australia. He went there a few years earlier and could not yet afford to bring out the whole family at once. He was sponsoring his eldest daughter first, and his wife and three other children were to follow later. Her bags had gone to the shipping agency, but Yachet never made it.

Nusale Pomeraniec, Basia's son, was about five years old and his sister Dvoirele was three when they came to visit us in Wyszków with their mother. They were on their way to Warsaw to see a well-known teacher and personality in the world of the arts. His name was Kipnes. Nusale was a natural talent, he was also a born actor who mesmerized everyone with his recitations and performances. My father took Nusale with him into town and before dad knew what was happening he was standing in the middle of the square putting on a huge performance, accompanied by a band which had attracted him there in the first place.

Nusale was too young to be left in Warsaw, but he was to go back there when he was a little older.

My Father's Family

My uncle Mendl was a quiet, shy man, a tailor by trade. He married Bronia, one of two sisters, and they had a little girl whom they named Rachel. She was just a baby in the summer of 1939.

My uncle Shloime was a furniture maker by trade, but could not make a living from it. He married Hinda, a friend of my Aunt Hanna. Hinda used to be a frequent visitor to our home whenever Aunt Hanna would come to visit and stay for a couple of months. I think that was how Shloime and Hinda met. Soon after they were married they left for Buenos Aires, Argentina, where his sister Hanna had settled a few years earlier.

My uncle Simcha was the youngest. He was tall, blond and very handsome in his army uniform. He played football with the soccer team, and also played guitar and a mandolin. I remember him in his army uniform when he came on leave. My heart was thumping when he lifted me up over his head, and I adored him when he played his guitar for me.

My grandmother Ita Lea Prager died way back in 1934 and Zeida Isroel was left on his own. When Simcha left after his army service to live in Warsaw, in the suburb of Okencie, zeida moved from the family home to smaller quarters. He would come to us often for meals.

Simcha decided he had had enough of anti-semitic Poland and tried very hard to obtain a permit to go to Palestine. Somehow a permit arrived for him c/o the Jewish Agency. Some crooked official saw an opportunity to make some money, and sold it to someone else before Simcha found out. Simcha eventually perished in the Warsaw Ghetto together with his wife and child.

Since 1935, after the death of the great, and nicest, Polish President, Josef Pilsudski, the situation for Jews deteriorated rapidly. There were two names that struck fear into the heart of every Jew. They were a priest by the name of Father Trzeciak, and his mate, a certain Madame Pristorova. They were stooges of Hitler and would pour the most vitriolic propaganda against Jews in the daily press. I remember hearing my parents, and whoever came to our home, discuss them day in and day out.

The Poles were willing enough listeners. The peasants believed them and even among the intelligentsia it had become fashionable to be a Jew-hater. In a little town nearby, Przytyk, there was a pogrom and many people were killed.

I also remember vividly a certain hot summer afternoon. My mother took the three of us to the river bank. We spread out a blanket and started to play, making sandcastles for Ida with bucket and spade. Nearby sat a group of holiday-makers from Warsaw. They looked very sophisticated and officious and we felt safe in their vicinity. From somewhere appeared a small boy of about six or seven years of age and started throwing stones at us. My mother looked at our neighbours to tell the boy to leave us alone. Instead, they laughed and made encouraging jokes. I could have made him stop. I was big enough to handle him, but mum knew and I knew that this was a provocation they were waiting for, and we could cause a pogrom on the whole town's Jewish population had I laid a hand on him. We packed up and left under a barrage of stones and sand. We never went back to the river bank again.

Jobs for Jews became almost non-existent. Well-educated engineers would joke about themselves - *"We are measuring the streets,"* they would say. There was a quota on Jews entering university, and then we used to read of daily beatings they were given by their 'colleagues'.

Whoever could raise the money went abroad. Many went to study in France; otherwise no country would give them a visa to emigrate.

In our town, the Zionist movement was very active. The Poles kept shouting at us *'Jews to Palestine!'* - but the British would not let anyone in there. Many groups of young people organized themselves in groups of chalutzim (pioneers) and went together to learn farming, in preparation to be eligible for a permit to enter Palestine.

My beautiful Aunt Hanna, mum's youngest sister, went on such a 'kibbutz' in her desperation to get out of Poland. Together with some other young girls, she was stuck in the kitchen all day, while the boys learned to work the land, chop wood, etc., something she was never allowed to do at home, She became ill, had a nervous breakdown, and, as I clearly remember, was brought to our home in a big mess.

I remember Aunt Rywka arriving. Together with my mother they rented a cottage for the rest of the summer, in the pine forest close to our town. They took Hanna there and started bringing the best of fruits and vegetables and all kinds of other foods to build up her strength. She could not be left alone for a moment and I was often left to mind her. I still remember her pinching my arm and saying that she can see dark rings in front of her. Slowly she did recover and the nightmares disappeared, but the thought of going to Palestine was gone too.

A little while later, a very nice man, the son of a well-to-do family of flour-mill owners, fell head-over-heels in love with Hanna. His parents objected to the match because she came from a poor family and had no dowry. His name was Josef Aron Leszcz. One day he arrived on her doorstep and they eloped without telling anyone.

They were married under a chupa, and went back together to his parents' place to tell them what they had done, showing them the ring. Being clever people, they knew there was nothing they could do about it, and they welcomed her with open arms.

Hanna and Josef Aron established a beautiful home in Ostrolenka. My sister Eva was sent to visit them, at their invitation, during the school holidays, while I went to my grandmother.

They could have lived happily ever after - but that was not to be.

My Aunt Rywka

She was beautiful. With blonde hair and blue eyes, one only needs to take a look at the photographs from her student days to recognize how exceptional her beauty was.

She was also ambitious and determined to get a higher education to enable her to rise above the everyday struggles. I don't know how she managed to put herself through university - even high school was not free in Poland. For Jews especially it was a very difficult task, starting with entrance exams. Every conceivable obstacle was put in front of them - they had to be 100% better than anybody else in order to get in. Despite all the difficulties Rywka managed to get through and become a teacher.

Teaching in Poland was a very respected and well paid profession. Rywka was held in high esteem by her colleagues, and the family was very proud of her. She had a heart of gold - my mother told me that as soon as Rywka started earning money, she sent a cheque for a certain amount each month to their mother, to help her make ends meet.

Rywka married Jacob (Jankel) Ring from Krasnosielc. In later years, I learned the following from my mother: Jacob was the son of a well-to-do family, owners of a textile business. Jacob and Rywka were romancing for years. She had her own apartment and many intellectuals used to gather there, among them Jacob. As was the practice in those times, someone tried to match-make a lady from another town with Jacob. He came to Rywka and told her about it. He did not have the nerve to tell the matchmaker or his parents that he was in love with Rywka, who had no dowry. Jacob was of a very gentle nature. Rywka wrote a letter to the other woman and told her about herself and Jacob being in love and that he belongs to her. The other lady duly stepped back, and that was when the story reached Jacob's parents.

To her surprise, they did not object and welcomed Rywka with open arms. They knew that Jacob liked the easy life and that Rywka will be assertive; they liked her. They even suggested that Rywka take over the running of their shop instead of teaching, which took her away to distant locations, but this did not appeal to her. Jacob had a brother and sister who were also not business-minded.

When I was about ten or eleven I was sent one summer vacation to my ciocia (aunt) Rywka's home in Krasnosielc. Another aunt, Dvoira, also lived there, with her husband and four children; I vaguely remember them.

Rywka and Jacob had a beautiful home with big rooms, high ceilings, French doors and windows. I recall a portrait of Jacob's father, with a handsome face and

dark beard, dressed in black silk orthodox clothes. I cannot remember any other member of his family but I know that he had a sister and a brother, Baruch. Years later, when I could understand, my mother told me that Uncle Jacob's brother was a Communist from the 'Salon'. It was fashionable at that time amongst the young well-to-do to dabble in that ideology.

Rywka was in Krasnosielc only periodically. After a while she was transferred to other schools, other cities - Kolo and Konin - far away from home. They found a way to make her life difficult. It was a form of persecution, but even that did not break her spirit. She had no choice, and so began their separations and reunions. Holidays together in the Carpathian mountains and many other different resorts, brief periods together at home. Uncle had his business office there.

I remember Aunt Rywka sitting behind a beautiful desk wearing a corn blue angora sweater. The reason it stuck in my mind, I assume, is that it was the most beautiful sight I had seen, or maybe first being conscious of. It was in Makow, they must have still lived there before moving to Krasnosielc. We were on a visit with mum at our grandmother's. Rywka's son, Nathan, was about three or four years old and they had a nanny for him who was taller than both of them. He was the cutest, best dressed child I had ever seen, and between the three of them, the most spoilt.

My mother loved to visit her home town - her mother, sisters, every second shop belonged to a cousin or some other relation. I guess she must have felt lonely sometimes, being the only one who lived in Wyszków.

Their cousin was the owner of the local cinema, so naturally we were invited to attend. I guess mum wanted a little time for herself, so it was suggested that Eva and I go by ourselves. It was Eva's first time in a cinema. I cannot remember the name of the film, but I do remember clearly that as soon as the lights went out, Eva put her head in my lap and nothing would make her lift it up again until we left at half-time to return home.

Sometimes grandmother would come to us for a visit, a tall and handsome woman commanding respect. We would all be on our toes trying to please her, even though she never asked for anything. Occasionally Uncle Shaia would arrive and we felt very honoured. When Aunt Rywka came to visit, she would arrive from the station in an open carriage; we were bursting with pride. Aunties Chawa and Hanna, being single, used to come in winter-time and stay for two months at least. They loved to sing, and would teach me all the latest love songs. They also loved to socialize, and our home was always full of their friends. I loved every minute of it. When it was time for them to go home I became sick with migraines and stomach upsets for days after.

My mother loved to sing songs, the modern songs, same as her sisters, but also many Jewish songs which are still popular today. There was a huge heating oven in our home, from floor to ceiling, in between the kitchen dining room on one side and the bedroom on the other. It was fully tiled in big white tiles. The opening door was on the kitchen side and it was stocked with coal which burned around the clock in winter. On the bedroom side, between the oven wall and her bed, stood Ida's swinging cot. Mum would stand there, warming her back against the oven wall, and push the cot rhythmically while singing lullabies.

My mother belonged to an organization called WIZO. I did not know the meaning of that then but I do remember her being one of the organizers of an annual New Year's ball they called 'Sylvester Night' and me going with her to the hall where she was in charge of organizing the tombola (which meant prizes for winning tickets.)

I did not see my Aunt Hanna in her home after she married Josef Aron. That was the summer of 1939, and I went to my grandmother while Eva was invited to visit them in Ostrolenka. They gave her a lovely holiday. After all that Hanna went through, everyone was filled with joy for her.

I loved meeting my many cousins in Makow. They were of all ages. I regret that I cannot name them all. There is no one left to help me remember. Fifty years has taken its toll on my memory. My Aunt Basia's husband, Moishe Pomeraniec, was so desperate to get out of Poland and send for his wife and children later that he managed somehow to get to Palestine - three times. Each time he became ill (with malaria I think), could not stand the climate and was sent back by the British authorities. The whole family later perished in Auschwitz.

The husband of Sheina Rochel did manage to get out. Moishe Kolinski made his way to Australia, leaving his wife, daughter Yachet, another daughter and two sons to follow him later, when he will have made enough money to pay for their journey. However, he found Australia was not a land of milk and honey, but at a time of depression. After a while, all he could manage was to pay for his eldest daughter, Yachet, aged about sixteen, to be the first to follow him. Yachet was beautiful, at the threshold of womanhood, blonde locks, blue eyes like her mother. She was packing her bags when I visited that summer. We said goodbye on August 15th; she was supposed to sail on September 1st, 1939.

Needless to say, she never did. We never found an eyewitness to tell us exactly what happened to her or any of the family. When Ida went to Israel in the 1960s, some distant acquaintance of the family told her that he has seen my grandmother, her three daughters and their children in Auschwitz.

The Start of World War 2

Friday, September 1939. An uneasy calm has descended on our town. People gathered in the street in little groups, discussing the situation. Rumours were rife that German spies were caught here, an aeroplane was shot at there. Then it came over the radio. The German army had smashed through the border and was advancing into Poland. War has been declared. A little later the news came that England has declared war on Germany in retaliation.

We were told to black out our windows and paste them with strips of paper to prevent them from shattering, and to make sure no ray of light is visible.

It was our custom to go walking up and down Warsaw Road especially on a Saturday evening. It was the first day of autumn but the evening weather was still warm and very calm. Even though all the cafeterias and shops were blacked out, my girlfriend Esther Rubinowicz and I still went for our usual stroll. We could not comprehend what exactly the words *'War was declared'* meant, Being thirteen years old we could not sense the danger. Watching columns of soldiers moving through the town looked like some sort of an adventure. Esther and I walked quietly and wondered what to expect.

We soon found out. All of a sudden we heard a roar, and soon after two bangs like huge thunder, a few rat-a-tats and all went still. We made our way home in a hurry, we saw people standing in doorways looking at the sky. We found our families shivering. These were bombs, they said, and the bridge was their target. They did not hit the target, but some factory beyond (or I wouldn't be here today). Next day, Sunday, September 3rd, army cavalry and infantry move west across the town, obviously towards the front. The soldiers looked handsome in their impressive uniforms, and confident. Their slogan was *'We will not give away one button.'*

The German army smashed through the border guard and started advancing rapidly, burning villages and shooting everyone who stood in their way. They moved at an incredible speed and the first refugees running ahead of them came to Wyszków on Monday, Sept. 4th.

Relatives, friends, my Aunt Hanna, then pregnant, her husband, and a number of acquaintances. Mum and dad opened our home and gave shelter to everyone. Sleeping spaces were made - every spare inch of floor was utilized.

Tuesday, 5am - huge blasts tore everyone out of an uneasy sleep. Bombs were falling around, and what sounded like over, our heads. Then it stopped. Dad went out to investigate - two houses away from us were hit, people and horses were dead, fire was raging.

The people who stayed the night with us picked up their bundles and ran towards the bridge and across. Opposite us, my friend Esther's father, Moishe, was harnessing his two horses to the huge cart he owned. He used to make a living by transporting goods to Warsaw in it. My father owned a brand new transport truck and employed a driver and an assistant to transport grain. This was drafted by the army, taken away, a few days before. My father asked Moishe if he would take us along - he would pay him for it. Moishe already had two families, relations, but he said he would take us too.

There were eight empty sacks at home which dad brought from his store a week earlier - just in case we might need them. Quickly we started throwing clothes and whatever was at hand into the sacks. Ida was sitting on the side crying, calling *"Mama, don't forget the baby."* Half an hour later the sacks and the children were inside the cart, the adults walking beside and encouraging the horses. Suddenly I spotted Zeida with a small bundle in his hand. He joined us and we stayed together from then on. The aim was to get across the bridge, to the other side of the Bug, in case they smash it down and we get cut off. There was panic, fire and rubble. We scrambled past a stalled anti-aircraft gun and eventually made it to the other side.

In his pocket safely, dad had the keys to our home and his warehouse full of wheat, corn and all other sorts of grains. We hoped to go back in the night time when the bombing would be over. After all, what was there in our little town that the Germans could wish to destroy? We could not think of one reason. Most of the population was running into the nearby forest.

The aeroplanes appeared again. Looking back, we saw more fires. Then came the strafing of the carts and the people on the road. Horses were killed, people were killed and injured. Mum did not let me look back. We managed to get off the road and into the forest, concealing the cart and the horses. There we waited for the night and a stop to the bombing, but when night came all we could see was the town enveloped in flames. We knew then that we can not go back. Dad said that for the time being we have to push on ahead of the advancing German army.

Already we heard reports that they were shooting people without reason, on sight. My mother could not believe that. She remembered the Germans who occupied her home town, Makow, during the First World War, and what a relief it was for the Jewish population after the Cossacks. As young girls they used to socialize with them - perfect gentlemen in every way. She refused to believe that these same people could be so cruel.

So our wandering began. After that first day we moved out of the forest at dark and made the slow journey to the next town. On the way, homesteads which were on fire lit up the road. When we got to the next town, Jewish people would open their doors and give us food and shelter. Ten to twenty people would stretch out on the floor to sleep. The next day the bombs started falling on that town too.

So, we continued to get out into the forest at dawn, children in the cart, adults on foot. Sometime we would change and let zeida and mum have a ride. We would stay in the forest all day and travel further to the following town by night.

One early evening, as we were getting ready to move out we heard the sound of two aeroplanes approaching. They passed over our heads and reached the town we had left in the morning. We heard some anti-aircraft shooting. As those planes must have unloaded their bombs already and had no more, they turned back and unloaded their fury on that little forest in which we were hiding, firing machine guns all over the place. I can remember it as vividly as if it were now. There was a small ditch nearby - mum grabbed us and ran towards it; she pushed Ida underneath, Eva and me next, and threw herself on top of us trying to protect us with her body. The shooting eventually stopped; the planes got away. There were casualties but we got out alive and started moving on further - past more villages and little towns on fire.

Sometimes peasants would come to the roadway with food items to exchange for clothing; they did not want to take money. This went on for two weeks, at the end of which we reached a little town called Polonka, near Baranowicz.

The horses were exhausted, and we felt that we could not move any further. We came as far east as we could. Tired, hungry, dirty, we did not care any more - whatever is to happen, so be it, we will not travel any further.

One Jewish woman took pity and took us into her home. We all spread out on her wooden floor and fell into an exhausted sleep. Next day, dad woke up early and went outside to look around. He heard a roaring sound that he could not recognize at all. When he got to the main street he found many local people there constructing a towering gate and decorating it with flowers. He came running back to us, saying that the Russians were coming soon - the roar is from their tanks, not far away now. Sure enough, an hour later the first Russian tanks rolled through the gate, people throwing flowers all over them. They waved and smiled.

They had come to liberate us! Soon we were given bread rations. Little did we know then that Stalin and Hitler had signed a pact to split Poland between them. We had no idea how far into Poland the Russians were going. There were no newspapers, radios or any announcements.

My father looked at my mother and said uneasily - *"What now? How far are they going? Will they occupy Wyszków?"* We had no way of knowing then that this was not the end of the war, but only the beginning. Much, much later, we found out that the Russian army stopped short of the river Bug and would not enter Warsaw because that was the agreement Stalin and Hitler had made to divide Poland between them.

We breathed the clean air - no bombs, no fires - and rested for two weeks. Moishe Rubinowicz took his cart and horses, his wife and three children, and moved on 18 km, to Baranowicz. For him Russia was a long-time dream - Communism! My father the businessman grew more uneasy every day. The iron curtain did not appeal to my parents. They decided we would start making our way back home (we did not know yet that the Russians did not enter Wyszków). By then, the trains had started running again. Two weeks to the day they gathered our sacks of belongings, the three children, zeida, and we made our way to the station. After much scrambling we got on a train to Bialystok. There we were supposed to change trains for further travel towards Warsaw.

We got off the train in Bialystok and had to wait several hours for our connection. While sitting at the station we observed trains coming from the opposite direction almost every half-hour, packed with hundreds of people, most of them getting off here. Dad started asking why? What is going on? The reply came in no uncertain terms: *'Are you crazy? Where are you going? - the Russians stopped before Wyszków and the Germans are killing Jews at random in the streets.'* Stories of horror and humiliation came pouring out of everyone. Dad decided we should stop in Bialystok for a few days until the situation becomes clearer. He went into the city and found a little apartment, one room with a kitchenette. It must have been a janitor's quarters, in the courtyard of a big apartment building on Ciepla street, No. 1. In the front building we got to know a local family by the name of Wagman who had two daughters, the same ages as Eva and me - Lusia and Clara.

With every day that passed, every train that came from the west disgorged thousands of people with horror stories. Bialystok soon became full of refugees. Every synagogue, every communal hall, was overflowing, and people started sleeping in the street, in doorways, wrapped in doonas. Winter had set in, cold and snow taking its toll. People were hungry. Bialystok had a large Jewish population - they tried to help but could not cope with the tens of thousands of people who flooded their city. We were the lucky ones. Our little home was warm, and some relatives and friends managed to find us and come in from the cold to sleep in a corner, on the floor or wherever they could squeeze in.

Eva was sent to state school not far from where we lived. I entered the Hebrew High School on Sienkewicza st., No. 79. It was a beautiful school on the nicest, most prestigious street in Bialystok. The school consisted of three buildings.

One was for nature studies, the other for science studies and the main one for all other studies. The Hebrew 'Gymnasium' (*high school*) was the pride of the Jewish community of Bialystok.

Hebrew studies and language were soon stopped by order of the new authorities and Russian substituted. I loved every minute there. This was a grand and sophisticated city compared to the small town I came from. There was a little girl in my class with a beautiful face, dark hair and black eyes; her name was Shifka Olcha. Around February/March she stopped coming to school. I did not find out why till many years later. Her family - mother, father, Shifka, and brother Chaim were deported into exile somewhere in Russia for being *'Bourgeois'*. After all that happened to her family and ours, we met again in the D.P. camps in Germany after the war, and are best friends to this day here in Australia.

We lived in Bialystok a little less than one year. A few weeks or months after we settled here, quite by chance dad met my aunt (ciocia) Rywka in the street. She and Uncle Jacob with their son Nathan, then five or six years old, ran away to Warsaw when all hell broke loose on their home town Krasnosielc. From Warsaw, they made their way to Bialystok by train. She did not know what happened to her other sister who also lived in Krasnosielc, Dvoire, with her husband and four children, or Chava with her husband. She assumed that her mother and three other sisters with their families stayed put in Makow, not willing to abandon their homes.

From a friend she met somewhere on the way, she learned that brother Shaike and sister Hanna were later joined by Chava and together they fled to Lomzhe, where they felt somewhat safer. Other than that, she could not contact any of them. Still in Bialystok, my father learned from an eyewitness the fate of his grain-stores and the unfortunate Icio (pron. E-cho) treiger (the carrier).

There were many carriers around the stores whose job it was to load or unload sacks of grain from trucks or carts. Each sack must have been 50 - 100 kg. in weight; they were picked up and carried on their backs.

One of the carriers, Icio, made this store his exclusive business. While the others picked up jobs wherever they could get them, Icio would not move away from this doorway for a minute, despite all the encouragement from my father, whenever there was nothing for him to do here.

My father made sure that Icio had enough food for the family, and at Pesach time, when my dad ordered our matzos, as was the custom, well ahead of time, he always ordered a full supply for Icio as well.

When the Germans entered Wyszków, we were no longer there, my father was told that Icio stayed put in his usual spot near the doorway and would not move away. Icio was shot dead right there, the stores were opened by the Germans, and together with the locals, they carted all the grain away.

Bialystok, Oct. 1939 - 1940

To Russia

I already described our school. I loved every minute of mine and so did Eva. Hebrew was soon forbidden to be taught, and Russian commenced. With the Russians here, at the beginning of my teens, their beautiful patriotic songs, not afraid of the anti-semite Poles, I felt free to walk in the streets and in the park with friends in the summer evenings, sometimes flirt with the soldiers and dream of the future.

The booming voice of Win ston Churchill on the radio made us stop anytime and listen *'WE WILL FIGHT THEM ON THE BEACHS, WE WILL FIGHT THEM IN THE AIR'* brought a ray of hope to one and all.

However, those dreams were short-lived.

My dad had to do something to make a living for us. Like many others, he started trading in the market place. From out of town he imported beautiful shorty coats made by the Carpathian mountain people (kojuszki), well known in Poland. They were tannish colour suede-like on the outside and sheepskin-like fur inside, with beautiful embroidery, real artwork. He only got a handful and would take out one or two at a time to the market to sell. It was all legitimate, allowed by the authorities.

One day some person arrived on our doorstep to tell my mother that dad has been arrested and taken to the Commissariat. Mum dropped everything, instructed zeida to look after us and ran as fast as she could. We had heard stories of people disappearing, especially those who used to own industry, businesses, or were rich farmers. It only took someone to point a finger at them and they were deported, disappeared, no one knowing where to. Mum got to the Commissariat to find dad still waiting outside the door to be called in. She stayed with him for many hours.

Finally he was called. The Commissar had another man in the room with him - the very same man my dad employed as assistant to the driver on his transport vehicle. He was saying that my dad was a bourgeois who exploited his workers, that he himself worked for him 24 hours around the clock and was underpaid. Dad could not believe this was happening to him. The Commissar must have been a very smart man

who realized exactly who he was dealing with. He asked the accuser when he managed to sleep, and saw him squirming and stammering.

He dismissed dad, recognizing an honest, gentle man. Dad returned to us together with our mother late in the evening, exhausted and shaking with fear. I can't recall dad ever going to the market again.

A little while later on, my mother's cousin Rachel Sokol (Uncle Abe's daughter) turned up at our place with her only daughter Chavale, my age, in a desperate state. Her father together with his youngest grandson (Dvoire's son), a teenager, were shot dead in front of his shop in Wyszków. She got separated from her husband Moishe, who was still on the German side. She would not rest until she found him. She was looking for a 'macher', a guide to take them back across the border for all the money and jewelry she had. We argued with her to wait - maybe he will get here somehow; how does she know that he is still alive? The Polish guides were treacherous creatures.

No reasoning did any good. She found one man who would take her and her daughter back to the German side. It was bitterly cold when they set out to go. We never heard from either of them again.

One day Aunt Rywka and Uncle Jacob came to see us. The Russians were trying to persuade people to take Russian passports, become citizens and move into Russia proper, at least 100 km. from the current border. Rywka and Jacob declared that they believed the war was not over yet and they expected worse to come. Therefore they decided together with uncle's brother Boruch to move voluntarily to Russia. They would worry about the future when this madness is over. And so they did.

They were assigned to a city called Magnitagorsk, in the Urals, where summer was short and winter bitterly severe. The first letter we received from them was heartbreaking, but that was it. They had no choice in this matter. Auntie got a teaching position, so did Uncle and his brother. He was soon cured of his Communist dream. Many of the 'comrades', who saw a new and wonderful world opening in front of them with the Russians entering Poland, went off smiling to Russia as fast as they could. Soon enough, they were the first to turn up back again on the streets of Bialystok, with only the clothing they had on them, virtually starving, among them the man who pointed the finger at my dad.

Throughout the five years of the war the fact emerged that the former professionals from rich homes were the first to drop their bundle, and die in the streets. They could not manage the extreme struggle for survival. The working class, who were no strangers to bread and water diets, were much sturdier and more likely to survive.

May 1940. Spring is here. Soon the school year will come to an end and I will be on summer vacation. Just then the Russians decided that the thousands of people who fled from the Germans can not be allowed to stay here. They gave us an ultimatum: we must accept Russian passports and become Russian citizens, moving at least 100 km. further into Russia proper, or be returned to the German occupied side of Poland.

This spread fear among the refugees, tens of thousands of people in Bialystok alone. Everyone debated what to do. At that time no one could imagine what Eichmann, Hitler, Himmler or Mengele would think up for us. Many people registered to go back home. *"So I will sweep streets and wash toilets - what else can they do to me?,"* my father argued. *"I cannot go to Russia, we will never get out of there again."* And so he registered for going back to our home, as did many others. In fact, we heard of one train-load of people going back. Then it stopped.

June came and school was out. My first year of this beloved High School completed with good marks. I was happy with myself and with my new friends. Bialystok was a beautiful, lively city at the start of summer, even though I was aware of fears, anxieties and uncertainties of the future, my immediate worries were standing in queues for hours to get food or clothing items.

Somewhere in the middle of June, my mother's cousin Dvoire Ring came to see us. Dvoire was one of Uncle Abe's daughters. Her husband Chaim and handsome 17 year-old son, the youngest of three, were shot dead in the first days the Germans entered Wyszków, together with her father Abe. Another son, Nachman, fled to the forests and joined the partisans. The eldest son managed to get to Palestine shortly before all this started. How Dvoira got to Bialystok with the tide of fleeing refugees I am not sure, but here she was.

On that particular Thursday morning, she came to tell my mother that she had heard from a good authority that the Russians were planning to capture all the refugees in Bialystok tonight, and ship us out to Russia (she called it a *'roundup'*, an *oblawa*). She also said that she was going into hiding and urged mum to do the same. Mum's thoughts were that after all that has happened to Dvoira she certainly is not in her right mind, and dismissed it as a hallucination.

Next day, Friday, was an uneventful day. Mum was busy preparing for Shabbat. She learned to improvise different dishes to make them special, candles were lit, and in our tiny crowded quarters Shabbat was still a holy day. The children enjoying the late day sunshine because of the summer weather, were playing with Ida (Itkele), who looked like Shirley Temple, same dress and curls, just delightful. We had dinner sitting on the bed with the table in front of us, and we knew that we were still better off than people sleeping in halls, synagogues or in the street.

The smaller children were put to bed around 9 o'clock. I stayed up later. Eventually everyone went to sleep close to midnight.

I don't know how long we were asleep. Soon after, we were woken up by a loud banging on the door. It was dark, someone opened the door. There was a soldier outside with a gun in his hand. He told us not to panic, get up the children and collect what belongings we have, we are getting out! He closed the door on us and remained outside with his gun at the ready, not letting anyone out not even to the toilet.

We did as we were told and waited. At dawn an army truck arrived outside the front of the building with some people already on it. The soldier with the gun led us out of our little nest and loaded us all on the truck. There were more soldiers in attendance already. Then we saw the Wagmans (parents of Clara Leventer). They were Bialystok residents. They saw through their front window what was going on and came out with some bread and lollies which they passed on to us. The truck stayed there till more people from the neighbourhood were out and loaded on, till it was full. It drove off, we had no idea where to; we were told nothing at all.

We soon arrived at the train station, where at a side track stood a long train of cargo wagons, high up on each side of the doorway was a tiny window with bars on it. We were loaded into one of those. There were other people already there inside. There were two tiers of wooden benches on either side, and everyone grabbed a little space for themselves.

Throughout this beautiful sunny summer's day the trucks kept coming with more and more cargo till all the wagons were filled. Soldiers guarded each wagon and if someone needed to go to the toilet we were allowed to go underneath the wagon with the guard beside us. There were no other facilities and the same applied for the whole ensuing journey.

At sunset all the doors were locked from the outside and the train started moving. For eight days and nights we travelled on that train. There were stops now and then and we were given rations of bread - I can't recall anything else - and we were allowed out under the wagons to relieve ourselves. Sometimes, at certain stops, peasants from nearby villages would come out with home food items to exchange for a child's dress or scarf, etc. Sometimes the guard would let them come near. They were good people, very poor, they looked at us with pity. They knew where we are going, while we did not.

Somehow we survived the eight days and arrived at a station, where we were offloaded from the train onto trucks for another 90 km. journey. I cannot remember the name of the station, but I can still see the huge forests and scenery we caught

a glimpse of through the tiny windows in turns, all pine forests or all birch trees, fogs and mists; quite breathtaking.

It is still clearly in my mind, strangely enough, when my dad, who always had an eye for growing wheat or corn, remarked that we are passing the most fertile earth in Europe between the borders of Poland and the Ukraine. It was called the *'black earth'*. On the Polish side the growth was thick and lush; on the Russian side it was thin and sparse. It was so clear to see how little interest or pride the peasants on these collective farms (*'kolkhoz'*) took in their farming. Most of the previous owners of this land were exiled to Siberia or other gulags, and nobody was interested in sowing and harvesting on behalf of the new landlords, the State.

After the 90-km. ride, our convoy of trucks arrived at a port city on a lake. At that time we were not sure if it was a lake or the sea, it was so huge. The name of the city was KARGOPOL (*Karny Gorod Politicheski*), meaning PENAL CITY FOR POLITICAL PRISONERS in the state of Archangelsk, parallel with Siberia. We were loaded on to a ferry and sailed for 6 hours on the lake till we arrived at a town called Pojaminka.

This was not the end yet - from here there were no roads to anywhere except a single wooden rail track with one trolley pulled by a horse. We were told to put our bundles on it, as many families as they could squeeze on top. We, the women, children, men, the old and the sick, could only walk behind it within the rail-track, because on each side there was only about one foot of space and underneath there was only swamp; on both sides all along was a dark forbidding forest.

So we marched on. After 6 km. there was a clearing and a number of barracks where one group ahead of us was assigned. After the next 6 km. there appeared another clearing and another group of barracks, and another group of people got off the trolley. We were marched on to the last - the so-called *'18th quartal'* - mum, dad and I carrying Ida in turns, zeida and Eva shuffling along.

As I am writing these lines after fifty-one years I find tears running down my cheeks - yes, it is all so vivid in my memory.

We arrived at a clearing with about ten barracks standing empty in a circle, surrounded by a black thick forest. Some of the trees were uprooted as a result of time and the elements, I guess, the huge formations of the roots creating great animal-like images. We were told that sometimes bears were sighted there, which did not surprise us at all, because in the snow huge imprints were clearly visible.

There was one Russian man with one younger assistant to supervise our settling and assign us to work. There was one watchtower but there was no one in it;

there was no chance that anyone of us could run away. We were told that the forest was 800 km. deep.

Our family was given a barrack together with two other families - about 18 x 22 feet long. One of the families was from our home town, the Postolskis, mother, father, a son and daughter - my father knew them well. The other family was from Warsaw, highly professional lawyers - a father, daughter and son-in-law. They hung up a blanket to divide off their little corner; we and the other family did not bother. The intellectuals were the first to crack up. They were used to a rich cushy existence, and this was unbearable. They started fighting among themselves, each blaming the other without reason and calling each other unrepeatable names. (I can't remember exactly - but I think that their name was Spiewak or Spievakowski). The older man eventually had a heart attack and died, and we were transferred to another barrack.

The Supervisor called everyone together and held a speech. *"This will be your home from now on. You will work clearing the forest with hand-saws and axes. You will cut down trees, trim them and cut them up to be taken out. We will give you cows and pigs. Forget about your former homes in Poland forever. You will build your cemetery here!"* He would call the same meeting every day after work and repeat the same message.

I cannot describe the despair - we knew we are lost here forever.

The men were put to work felling trees so tall we could barely see the tops with the naked eye. The women trimmed branches and cut up trunks of all sizes. We were given daily bread rations made out of some mixed grain, full of water to make it weigh more. Often it was not possible to be eaten, so we put it on a pan, flattened it with a spoon and baked it on top of the fire. Occasionally we were given some chestnut flour, which mum used to mix up with water and form little balls to cook in a pot of water.

No onion, no potato, no vegetable of any kind, not a cat or a dog or a chicken did we see in eighteen months.

During the summer the forest was full of big wild raspberries, and we let ourselves loose on those. The untamed forest was also full of bees, attracted by the raspberries. We were stung everywhere - legs, arms, faces full of sores, plus diarrhoea. During this time it never got dark at night - we were in the vicinity of the White Sea. The sun would set but it remained light (*'white nights'*, they were called) throughout the night. That meant heaven for the mosquitos - they reigned unrestrained. Some people decided that they could protect themselves better from the mosquitos rather than the bees, so they went out to work during the night rather than the day, from ten in the evening till 6 o'clock in the morning. Dad and I tried it a few times and did not like it. The misery of one or the other did not make much of a difference.

Desperate for something to eat, most of the younger men, about twelve or fourteen of them, got together one summer evening after work and decided to go into the forest, just near the edge, to pick mushrooms. They were meant to be gone one hour. By 9 o'clock their families realized that something was wrong (our dad was one of them). We lit a huge bonfire in the middle of the clearing in the hope that they would see the light from it. A group of women and a youth of about seventeen, Fishl Gingold, got permission to take the trolley with the horse, and started down the track, stopping every few meters and shouting all together into the forest, hoping the sound or the echo will reach them. Not until 11 o'clock that night did they hear a sound and made contact. They were lost without getting far at all - it was just the wild denseness of the forest, which looked the same whichever way they turned. What a relief! We were starting to doubt if we would ever see them again. They too, were not sure if they will ever get out of that quagmire alive.

Summer was short and winter soon set in. Snow covered the earth and the trees, temperatures dropped far below zero. The sight was awesome, eerie. The only way to get a little water was to gather snow in buckets and melt it.

We were in the next barrack now. It was a long wooden structure divided into narrow cubicles. We had two such cubicles, open at one end, and an iron stove linking the two, burning day and night to keep warm and to boil a kettle with water on top. I can't remember anything else being cooked.

One day Eva was standing on top of a bench (or was it the bunk) warming herself against the stove. Zeida Isroel asked me to make him a cup of hot water. I put the kettle on and asked Eva to move so I could pour the water into a cup. She jumped off the bench in the wrong direction, caught the spout of the kettle with her dress and pulled the boiling kettle with her, spilling the water onto her leg, mostly behind the knee.

I can hardly describe the scene that followed. The screams, mum running to her - I still shiver writing this today. There was no doctor - the nearest aid station with a nurse was 6 km. away at the middle settlement, and there was no way she would travel in the blizzard. Mum and I sat through the night blowing on the leg with our mouths and trying to calm her. I can't remember what mum put on the wound, if anything.

Some time went by, maybe weeks. We tried everything possible, but the agony was still great. Eva kept the leg half bent. It must have comforted her a little that way, so we did not interfere. The raw flesh behind the knee started to knead together like wild flesh when we noticed the danger. Still the nursing sister would not come to us. Dad managed to persuade our manager to let him take the horse and trolley, and we made a bed on it with soft bedding and whatever blankets we had, somehow

got Eva onto that, covered her up to her nose so she could breathe, and started the 6 km. journey to the aid station. Six kilometers may not sound much, but try to imagine a horse-drawn trolley on a track covered with snow and ice, in well-below freezing temperatures! It took many hours indeed.

The sister looked at this beautiful child in agony and could not help but feel pity. She looked at the bent leg and without uttering a word of warning grabbed it by the toes and pulled it straight. Mum told me later that the screams must have been heard in heaven. She bathed the affected area with an antiseptic, then spread a thick cream on - it could have been vaseline - on a strip of gauze and put it over the affected area. Then she said *"let us hope there will be no infection or she might lose the leg."* The sister gave mum some mercurochrome and instructed that we make Eva soak the leg in warm water once a day and reapply a fresh dressing with the cream. We returned to our cubicle in the barrack and the struggle started to save Eva's leg.

Imagine if you can - how many buckets of snow it takes to melt into a trough full of water; the pain and screams every time we lowered her into it, and later moved her out to put the dressing on, is indescribable. It took months until we dared hope that we were winning the battle.

To this day Eva bears the scars of that episode. I guess youth was on her side. Our zeida was not so lucky. He developed a boil on an ankle of one leg; it had a little pus in it. It was such an ordinary little sore. We tried to do everything we could think of, like soaking with mercurochrome we had left over, etc. - we had no medicine. When the sister came to our place we asked her to look at it. First thing she asked how old he was. At 62, 63, she said he is an old man and she has nothing for him anyway. A strong man with bright eyes and a grey beard, all that was wrong with him was this miserable little sore on the ankle.

Winter changed into spring. Zeida's leg was getting worse. Our precious Zeida Isroel died. He is buried in a little cemetery on the 12th Quartal (middle settlement), beside a few other unlucky people from our community.

One of those was a woman, the mother of two little children - she was on our quartal with a spinster sister and her children, a beautiful girl and boy. Her husband migrated to Australia before the madness started in Europe; his family was to join him soon. She had all their papers ready but did not manage to get away in time. Here she became sick with pneumonia and was dead within days. She too is buried near my zeida in Archangelakaja Oblast, Kargopolski Rayon, Pojaminka, 12th Quartal. The woman's sister took care of the children, assumed her sister's identity, and brought them to Australia after the war. I was told that she later married their father. I have not met the children here but I have seen their names on occasions in the 'Jewish News'.

What would happen to us now? We were weak and hungry.

Dad had developed a blindness disease from lack of vitamins. He could see well in the morning and through the day, but after sunset he could no longer see anything. The rest of us suffered with Shkorbut - a disease of the gums (wobbly teeth).

One day we received a parcel from auntie Rywka. We never thought that a letter we asked our supervisor to mail for us months ago would reach her, but evidently it did. Rywka managed to collect a little food stuff, standing nights in the queues in Magnitagorsk - dried onions, dried potatoes and a few other things - a treasure greater than diamonds. She wrote of a letter that got through to her from their brother Shaia, telling her how he and sisters Chawa and Hanna have settled in the Ukraine, in Baranowicz, and are making a good living. Hanna had a little daughter. Only our dad tried to be too smart, not wanting to take Russian passports, that landed us in this situation.

How could they imagine that soon after, all the Jews from Baranowicz would be driven out of the town to dig their own mass graves and be shot into them to oblivion? We found no trace of anyone.

June 22nd 1941

The Germans invade Russia. We did not hear of it for some time - we were completely cut off. I can't remember how much later, but it must have been before the onset of winter, because the lake in Kargopol was not yet frozen - our supervisor called everyone to a meeting and told us that we were going to be sent out of here. We were to become free citizens but we could not go back towards the war zone, only in the opposite direction, to middle Asia - Uzbekistan, Tadzhikistan, Bukhara, etc. We were praying maybe there is hope for us yet. Anywhere near civilization, so long as we get out of here.

The story that unfolded that the Polish Provisional Government in London, General Sikorsky and General Anders, have established Polish army divisions from soldiers who escaped the Nazis and had them ready to fight. They signed an agreement with the Russians, who were in trouble and needed help, that they will fight on their side provided Russia will free all Polish citizens from exile in the concentrations camps. Actually, we were not their prime concern. During the two years of Russian rule in Poland they have sent into exile tens of thousands of rich farmers, estate owners, industrialists, business owners, as well as peasants, confiscating their properties. As Polish citizens, we too came to benefit from that agreement.

So it was that we were taken out of Pojaminka, back across the lake, to another camp nearer to civilization and a railway. There we would wait till a train could be made available to take us to middle Asia, specifically to Kazakhstan, the capital of which was Turkestan.

We were given a big barn-like space together with a few hundred others. Every family huddled together in a little group, sitting and sleeping on our bundles of belongings. The train station was 6 km. away. We must have been given bread rations; I can't recall what else.

One day, word got around that we must get to the train station on our own. All transportation is needed for the war effort, and being free people, we must get ourselves there. Dad managed to exchange something for a small sled. Being the eldest, I and dad packed some of our belongings onto it and we walked to the station pulling the sled behind. Dad would remain there looking after our possessions and I would walk back by myself to get mum and the kids.

It was heavy going. Dad and I pulling the heavy sled got to the station late in the afternoon, later than the others. We unloaded, and found a little space inside the station hall which was well-heated. I left dad and set out on my way back along

the edge of the forest, pulling my sled along and expecting to find others on the way too. Before long I realized that I am on my own, the only one. The others started earlier and I could not catch up. There was no turning back. I was too far gone and it was getting dark fast. It was a bright winter's night, a moon, a frost and glistening stars. I hummed a tune and prayed quietly, moving on as rapidly as I could. It was 11 o'clock at night when I opened the barn door; everyone started cheering. I guess they felt a little guilty having left me behind. Mum was in tears. Me not yet fifteen.

I have made it, 6 km. alone through the forest at night pulling my little sled. I was very cold. I was given a hot drink, mum covered me up, gave me the best seat and I fell asleep in my coat. In the morning, we started on our journey back to join dad. The two children on the sled, mum and I pulling them.

We sat inside the station for several days. We were given bread coupons and there was always hot water. Every station in Russia had a hot water tap (*kipiatok*). We were not told when our train would come. In the station there was a rule: we were not allowed to fall asleep. Every time one of us fell asleep some official would come along and wake us up, even during the long nights. Mum would plead with them - these are small children, how can you wake them up? But they did anyway. When they turned their backs we dropped off to sleep again - it was impossible to keep awake.

At dawn, when it was coldest, they would get us out of the hall for cleaning time. Again the pleading, crying children, moving. It went on for several nights. One morning, at pre-dawn, they managed to get us all out into the bitter cold and locked the doors. As we were sitting miserable on the platform, shivering, a train arrived with some military personnel. One of them, obviously a senior officer, took one look at the scene and asked *"What are you doing here outside?"* We told him that we have been here several night already, waiting for a train to take us to Kazakhstan, and that we were thrown out of the hall.

He went inside and ordered the staff to open the doors and let us in. He was very angry, told us that he will get a train for us soon. Sure enough, a few hours later a part-empty wagon train pulled into the station and we were told to pack ourselves in. Our wagon had eleven families, double tiers of sleeping space on both sides, and a little iron stove in the middle for warmth and to boil something on top in turns.

Thus began our journey to Turkestan in Kazakhstan.

The journey lasted a long time, how long I can't remember, but I am sure of two weeks. We were given bread coupons and had to find food for ourselves. This we could manage if we would know for how long the train would stop at certain stations, where bread could be obtained. But we were never told how much time we have. We always had to take a risk leaving the train to obtain our bread, or we would starve. Even if the guards would tell us a certain time they could not be trusted. So the journey itself became a struggle for survival.

One day we arrived at a certain station where we were told this will be a long stop. One person of each family, mostly the men, got off and made for the station building, where the bread shop was open, and with the coupons they could obtain our rations. My mother asked me to take the kettle and bring hot water from the tap so she could boil some potatoes she had (it would take hours to boil on our little stove). I told her I did not want to go, at which she retorted *"If you don't go we don't eat."* I grabbed the kettle angrily and jumped off the wagon.

As soon as I reached the platform a passenger train pulled in on the empty line in front of ours. I filled the kettle and started back to climb across the train in front of me. I looked beyond and saw our train moving out. I banged the kettle on the ground and walked back inside the station to look for my father. He was the last one in the queue; the others had gone before him and got back. We ran outside and started asking some employees how to get to our train. They pointed to one which will be leaving in a few minutes in the same direction. A sigh of relief. We got on it and soon enough started moving.

About fifteen minutes later, we spotted our train standing on a tiny unmarked siding; the train we were on passed at full speed without stopping. Disappointed, we went on to the next bigger station, where all trains stop. It took a long time, but we had our bread and we would wait for our train here. We were told it is due at 9 o'clock at night. There we stood on the platform in freezing temperature, watching our train come in, slow down, then suddenly gather speed and move off without stopping.

I burst into tears. I was very cold and tired. We were worried what mum and the kids might do. Dad comforted me saying that we will catch up at Kuibishev, where all trains must stop to exchange crews. We caught the next train that was moving in that direction. We could not get into any wagon but managed to squeeze into a narrow guard's compartment which happened to be empty. I can remember the icicles forming on dad's mouth, coming from his breath. It was a freezing cold night, stars were glistening brightly and dad kept talking non-stop, saying *"Jump Hanna, don't stand still, keep jumping Hannale."* He knew that if I were to stop moving and doze off I would freeze to death.

It took all night and the next day till we pulled in to Kuibishev at dusk. There was our train standing on the next line ready to move out. The people pulled me and helped dad get into the wagon. They made room for us on the top bench, mum covered me up with whatever she had and I slept for twenty-four hours.

Later we found out that mum was preparing to take our possessions and the children off the train and stay behind in Kuibishev to wait for us. Had she done that we would have nothing left in no time. The thieves there were great experts - they could take your boots off your feet and you wouldn't know a thing. Not that we could wear any of the things we had from our home, but we used them to exchange for food items, which helped us all along to survive in the darkest hours.

Thus we travelled on, past endless forests heavily covered with snow. The sights were magnificent - if only we were not so cold and hungry we might have thought of poetry, let the imagination go wild. We were afraid to leave the train again, so we could not obtain any bread. Sometimes peasants would come to the station with potatoes or other things to exchange. A piece of cloth, a child's dress or a scarf was a luxury to them.

Days later we were crossing the Ural mountains and we pulled into one very big station. It was late in the evening, we were all starved of bread, the train driver and his guard told us that we would be here for many hours, as they must carry out some service.

All the men from the eleven families confidently left the train in search of a bread shop. Sometimes they would open late at night, especially for the incoming trains. Soon after they were gone, perhaps within half an hour, we felt the train moving. At first we thought it is being shunted to another line, but when it started gathering speed the shock and disbelief was unreal. What was to become of us? There was no sign of the men next day, no one to talk to or ask questions, the train was speeding without a stop, for twenty-four hours. When it eventually did stop and the door was pushed open, miracle of miracles! Here they were, waiting for us, all ten of them except our father. He got separated in the chase after our train, and no one knew where he got to.

Everybody advised my mother not to leave the train; they would share their bread with us as we had no ration cards. They consoled us by saying that in one more week we would reach our destination. They will help us store the luggage in the Turkestan station. Dad knew where we were going, so he must be heading there as well. Mum had no choice. We cried silently and went on, hopeful that these strangers-turned-family in our mutual predicament will not abandon us to our fate.

During this last leg of our journey, one more episode stands out in my mind as vividly as if it were yesterday. Our train stopped at a small station at a siding. My mother must have needed to relieve herself desperately. The only way, as usual, was under the train. She got off for a minute, in her cardigan only, and was on her way back to the wagon when the train started to move rapidly. We stretched out our hands to her and almost touched her but could not pull her in. The train was gaining speed and she was running alongside it like a tigress, while we were screaming to heaven. We watched in horror, sure she was going to drop any second. It lasted what seemed to us like an eternity, but it must have been a kilometre or two.

For some unexplained reason it stopped as suddenly as it had started (maybe the driver saw what was happening?). The people pulled mum in by her arms. She was in the greatest distress that I have ever seen her. Our tears and hers mingled together. We comforted her and made her rest.

We finally arrived at Turkestan station. As promised, the others helped us off the train and left us on the platform. Everyone was busy with their own.

I went into the station master's office and explained why I need to store our luggage - that we can not move away from here. He was sympathetic and made room for us. I pulled our bundles one by one to the room where I was given a little space, while mum watched the rest and the children. Finally I got everything into storage and there we stayed, close to the platform, watching every train that arrived, eating bits and pieces wherever we could find them.

I remember our mother begging a Russian woman for a piece of bread for Ida. The woman looked at our miserable, hungry faces, broke off a chunk of bread and gave it to her.

Three days later, after watching many trains pass, one finally arrived and we saw our beloved father getting off and looking around. He looked haggard and exhausted. Even though he had the bread coupons on him, he gave up trying to obtain bread. He preferred to fast rather than leave the train he was on, which was taking him in the direction (never for sure) where he might find us. We huddled together inside the station room till the next morning.

Turkestan - Kazakhstan

There were two Turkestans. One was smaller - the Turkestan Station. The main town of Turkestan was seven kms. away. Most of the refugees, or newcomers, settled in Turkestan Station. I guess it was psychological. Everyone was afraid to move too far away from the train, just in case. Not that we could move anywhere without a written permit from the authorities.

Dad found a room with a kitchenette, all in one for us. All the houses were built from mud bricks and we soon settled in as best we could. It took us a long time to get the sound of rumbling trains out of our system. This was Kazakhstan country with the Capital city Turkestan. The population consisted of Kazakhs, Uzbeks and Tartars. Where we lived in Turkestan Station there were no pavements; mud footpaths, camels and donkeys were the main transport used by the local people. We did not require any of those, just our legs.

There were many tea houses all over the place where Kazakh men, who came from all over the surrounding areas to trade and deal in the market place, would congregate. In their kaftans and colourful skullcaps they could sit down anywhere by just lowering their upper body on bent knees and feet, be it on the footpath, in the middle of the road or in the teahouse.

In their houses they slept on colourful divans spread out on the floor. On special occasions dinner was a large wok-like dish full of rice and lamb, cooked, or steamed, in their own special way; it smelled delicious. This was placed in the middle of the floor. The family and friends would sit in a circle around it with their legs crossed over (I could never muster that), each had a little bowl (piala) in front of them for drinking tea, and they would pick up the food between the three forefingers and the thumb of the right hand with a skill I tried to learn but never quite managed.

Dad got a job in Zagod Zerno, the State-owned (naturally) huge grain concern. The pay was negligible, but the perks made it well worthwhile. They would be given a little rice or wheat occasionally and everyone that worked there often smuggled out a little more in their shoes or long johns. This was worth its weight in gold, keeping hunger away sometimes. We had coupons for bread rations, and whenever the bakery would have a day off we received two days' rations at once.

This created a problem. No way could we have the bread in the house and make it last till the second day. Hunger is an unimaginable curse. The only way to overcome this was to cut the bread in half, and Eva, who became an expert on the black market would take it there and sell it, so we could buy back another piece the next day to ration out between the family.

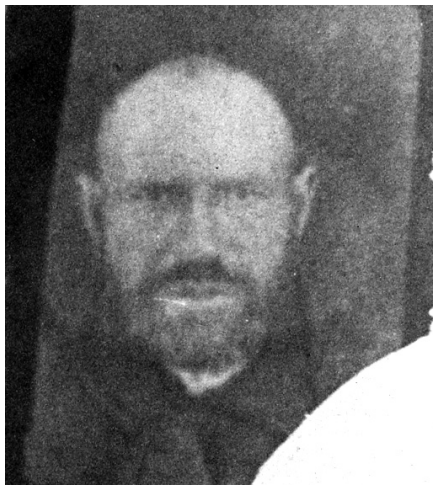
Hana

Chawa

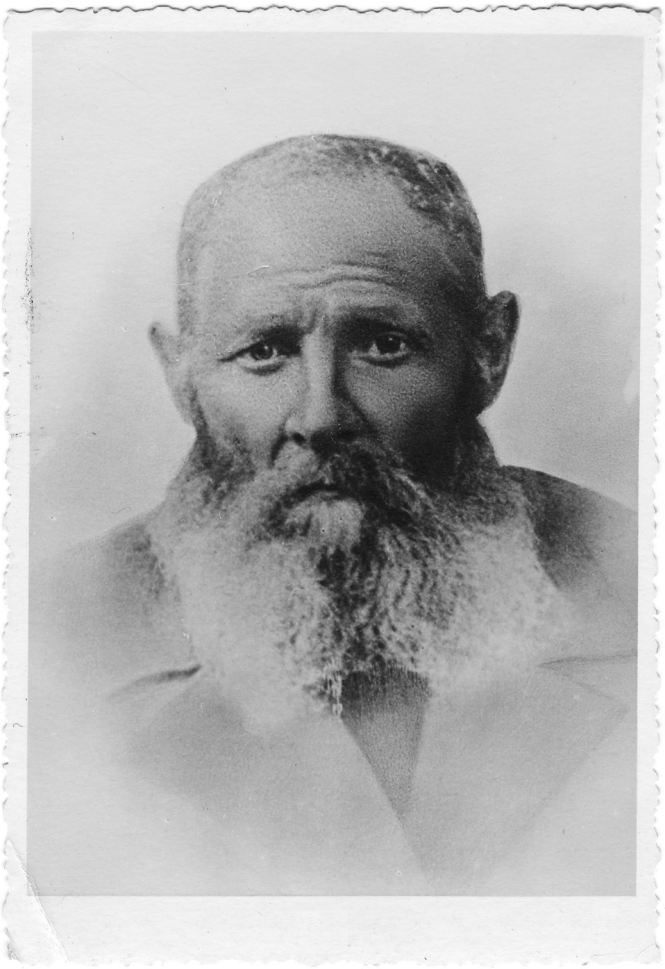
Itka

Itkele 1939

Ester Sura *1945* *Jacob Meier*



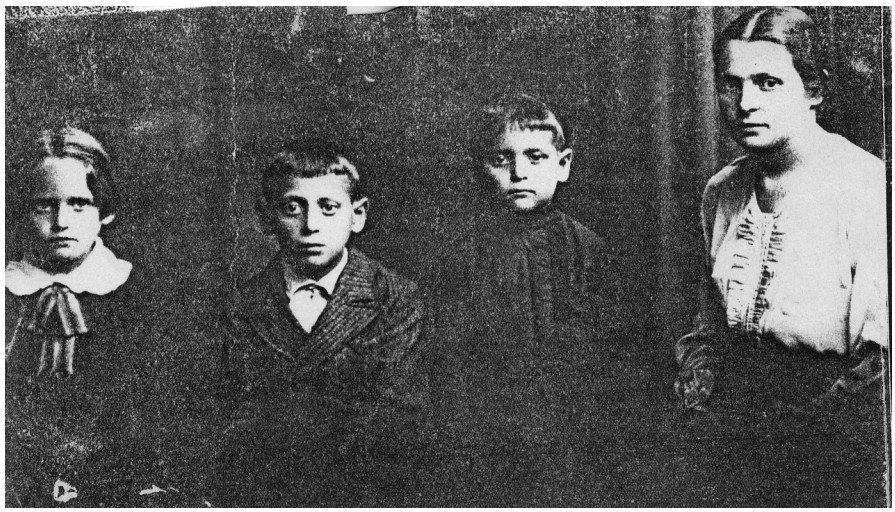
Meier Prager
1941 - 1944



Grandfather Isroel Prager - 1939

Esther Sura and Jakov Meier Prager - 1960

Mendl Prager - 1942



Hanna Rajczyk with her children - Ruchel, Mendl, Moiszke

L-R (above) Mum's sister Chava and her brother Shaia's daughter Miriam.
(front) Chava's husband, mum's sister Hanna, with her baby daughter and husband Josef-Aron.
(photo came with the letter to Magnitagorsk in 1941, just before the German invasion of Russia).
All perished.

Mum's sister Dvoira and two of her children. Krasnosielc.
All perished.

Nathan Hercberg.
Only photo grandmother had of her grandson in America.
We tried to contact this family after the war without success.

At the market-place a Tartar boy used to roam around. He looked about sixteen and specialized in grabbing chunks of bread out of people's arms and running away like a sprinter. He liked Eva and would tell her not to be afraid of him - he would not do that to her. In broken Russian he told her *"Moja, twoja, hapai nie nada"* with a smile, meaning literally *"Yours, mine, grab no needed."* He kept his word, but did it to me once.

Even though the climate in Kazakhstan is semi-tropical the winter was cold and severe. Snow everywhere, the muddy footpaths froze. Many refugees, especially single people without any family, from good backgrounds, were the most miserable. They could not take the hunger, did not keep themselves clean, wrapped in rags; they were the first to succumb to illness and death. Every morning a little horse-drawn wagon would go around the streets and collect the corpses.

One day, dad came face to face with the man who got him arrested in Bialystok. He looked destitute; dad gave him a piece of bread. We never saw him again. We received only scanty reports about the war. Shocking battles were raging in Stalingrad. Moscow was surrounded and the government fled to Kuibishev; only Stalin remained in Moscow. The siege of Leningrad was devastating. We started thinking that maybe, in a way, we were lucky to be here.

As the fighting became more desperate, they needed people to work in the mines. Instead of recruiting, the police would close off the market-place, or certain sections of the town, without warning, and grab whoever they could lay their hands on. Once they caught someone and sent them away to one of the coal mines you could be sure you would never see that person again.

Our dad was grabbed in one of those raids and someone happened to see it - it could have been Eva (I'm not sure) - and came running to tell mother. Mum and I ran to the place where they were being held. I was a pretty girl, with long red hair made incredibly shiny by the kerosene I used in order to keep it clear of lice. While I engaged the soldier who guarded them in a conversation pleading to let dad go - *"He is an old man"* - mum got inside to plead with another official (dad had grown a beard and looked very old indeed). While the guard, who was a young man, was admiring my hair, Eva and mum helped dad slip out of there before he got registered. I still can't believe that he was unnoticed. I am fairly sure that the guard turned a blind eye.

Saved by a hair this time.

On one other occasion we heard a rumour that on this night there was going to be a raid on every house for every available man. We were shaking with fear, trying to think how to hide him. We had a lot of soft bedding from our home, and

we decided to make a cocoon inside the bed; when there will be a knock on the door, dad will slip into this and we will put the two kids on top of him and cover them with a fluffy doona.

In the middle of the darkest night, we did not sleep anyway. We had no electricity, only a candle. There was a knock on the window. We proceeded with dad and the kids as planned, in dead silence. When the second knock came, mum had no choice but to ask who it was. Through the window came the thin voice of an Uzbek boy we knew from next door saying *"Sara, my mother is working nightshift and my baby brother has shit himself; I have no matches."* Mum wiped the sweat off her brow handed him a few matches through a crack in the door. A big sigh of relief.

And so it went on for two and a half years, during which time mum exchanged every item of clothing and household linen we had for a loaf of bread, a bunch of carrots, a couple of potatoes or a little milk. Towards the end, I saw my mother take off her wedding ring and give it away for a bag of peas, about 1 kg.

One day I came home to find Eva shivering on an unbelievably hot day, a 'hamsin'. Mum kept putting blankets and doonas over her but could not stop her shaking. It turned out to be an attack of malaria. I can't recall how, or if, mum obtained any medicine for her; certainly no doctor came to see her.

Next, I became sick with an inflamed sciatic nerve. From the waist down the buttock to my toes, I was in agony. No one could touch my right leg; not even a thin sheet could I bear. It took a while, with hot compresses and me unmovable.

Eventually it got better, and soon after I started to walk again I decided to visit a friend one early evening. It was still daylight. There were unusually few people in the street and I was too far along to turn back. Suddenly, I was grabbed by the hand by an Uzbek, and he started pulling me along. I was pleading with him and crying to let me go but he would not listen.

We were now in front of a house where I knew Jewish people lived. I started to struggle and wedged myself in the doorway. The people inside saw through their window what was going on - he was trying to pull me away from the doorway. Suddenly the door opened and I was pulled in from behind. The Uzbek was stunned and let go of me; the door slammed shut in his face. In his anger he smashed a window with his knife and ran away. I stayed with these people for several hours, and was later taken home.

Talking to Eva she reminded me of several episodes that slipped my memory:

One night while I lay in agony with my leg, Eva stepped on a scorpion with her bare foot in the middle of the night. Her screams must have been heard for miles - her leg became like paralyzed. Somehow we survived till morning. Mum went to see a pharmacist she knew - I can't tell what he gave her but he must have helped ease the pain. In time the feeling in the leg came back.

At one stage, Eva was sent to school together with an Uzbek boy who lived in a house right in front of ours. His name was Jahub. He liked to come in to our place, stretch out full length on the floor and do his homework lying on his stomach. He had white flashing teeth and he took a liking to Eva. But Eva had no head for school, because she was so hungry all the time. Mum would say to her *"You must go to school, there at least you would get a piece of bread and a drink of milk every day. If I could I would cut a piece out of my chest and give it to you; what can I do?"*

Eva went, but did not last very long. She managed to convince mum and dad that she could do better dealing on the black market. Many people did. They obtained from obscure sources bread, sugar, matches, newspapers for rolling tobacco into cigarettes, and sold it for a profit. She would only bring out single items at a time so that if caught she could claim it was hers from home. If dad were to do that he could get five years in jail if caught, but Eva was a child, and she learned a few tricks. She was confident she would not get caught.

The teenager whom I described earlier (the one who grabbed bread) was very protective of her. To this market would come the villagers on their camels and donkeys to bring their leftover produce - grain, fruit, etc., to sell legitimately. At the end of the day their pockets would bulge with roubles. One late afternoon, Eva watched in horror one such Uzbek having his whole pocket cut out by a thief. The thief saw her watching, put a finger to his mouth and made a sign across his throat to let her know what would happen to her if she said anything. She did not. When the man realized what happened to him he went berserk; the thief got away.

Another time, a tall, well-dressed Russian, obviously some big-shot official, bought a packet of matches from her, and a piece of newspaper, and started rolling a cigarette on the spot. Then he asked where she got the matches from. She told him this was our ration, saved up to buy bread. He saw the fear in her eyes and told her quietly not to be afraid, he had some matches he would like her to sell for him - would she follow him at a distance.

Dad happened to be nearby and saw what was going on. Eva followed the man and dad followed her. He walked into an important looking building, opened a drawer full of boxes with matches, pieces of soap and other small items. Eva made quite a tidy sum of money from this deal.

One very hot day a sandstorm was blowing. Mum came back from somewhere in the sack-cloth dress she made for herself and one for me; she was unrecognizable. Her face, hair, everything was covered in white sand from head to toe.

On another day, mum, Eva and I were carrying an iron bed from the other side of town. I can't recall how we came to have it but it was very heavy and we were struggling with it. Three men approached us; one had a sack on his shoulder. They offered to carry the bed to our place if mum would cook a chicken for them. She agreed instantly. When we got home and they opened the sack they shook out thirteen chickens on the floor. It was a shock. We spent the whole night cooking chickens in a huge container that Mum used for boiling our laundry in. The men collected the chickens and left, leaving for us the necks, giblets, livers, feet and, of course, the soup. We had a feast and did not dare ask where the chickens came from.

Once someone came to us with a load of wursts and asked if we would sell them for him. We knew the man vaguely, and again, could only guess where these came from. This was a very risky job. Wursts were rarely seen in the market and we could get ten years in jail if caught. But when your stomach hurts from hunger, all you can think of is how to get something to put in your mouth. We would take one at a time each day, and they were soon snapped up. It took a couple of weeks to get rid of the wursts. Without refrigeration they were beginning to go off at the end; that was how we got to taste them.

The following story Eva reminded me of. She was approached by an Uzbek who wanted to sell 10 kg. of sugar; he offered her a good deal. Sugar was much sought-after and was being sold at the market by the cup. He asked that she follow him to his house, not very far, and she agreed. She started walking behind him, on and on, and it seemed like a long way already when she realized that the houses were getting more and more distant from one another. She became frightened, stopped, told him she changed her mind and turned back. When she came through the door, mum and dad burst out crying with relief. They had become agitated after she left, and felt guilty for not stopping her. When they saw her again they were overwhelmed with relief and pride that she had so much common sense to turn back. I call it an instinct for survival!

During that year a letter arrived. Aunt Rywka announced she had given birth to a little girl, Halinka. We also receive a letter from Aunt Bronia Prager, Mendl's wife, that our dear uncle, dad's brother, died of pneumonia in Magnitagorsk, where they also lived. Aunt and Uncle Ring and her sister were the only relations to attend his funeral. I remember Dad wrapping himself in his tallith and praying, moving back and forth - I assumed he was saying kaddish.

I cannot miss the story of a young boy - he must have been about fifteen years old. He was all alone, having lost his parents somewhere along the way. He was very sweet and attached himself to me.

One day a rumour got around that a unit of General Anders' Army is about to cross to Iran via the Afghan border, and they will take a group of children, orphans, with them to Teheran. This young fellow - I wish I could remember his name - managed to alter his document and lower his age by a couple of years. He went along to register, and the rumour became truth.

He came to say goodbye - he was leaving for Tashkent, where they were being collected. I know he made it to Teheran because I received just one, very loving, letter from him. He hoped we would meet again. We never did - it was like finding a needle in a haystack. I assume, though, that he made it to the U.S. because about eight months later we received a very welcome food parcel from an agency called CARE. I am sure that only he could have given them our name and location at that time.

Once Eva and I got a job delivering coal for a black marketeer to eager customers. Each load was 16 kg. (a pud), which we carried on our shoulders. To this day I blame that for my huge back problem.

Then I became ill - I had temperature every day, and had to go to hospital. It was suspected that I had typhoid. I was isolated and my head was shaven. I was in hospital for weeks. My temperature would go down in the morning and up again in the afternoon. My family were not allowed to come inside but looked at me through the window.

I remember one particularly bad night. I fell asleep at dawn, to be woken up soon after by a woman who had wandered into my room looking for her lost child. She was one of a group who were brought in during the night. They were from the Caucasus, near the Black Sea, people called Chechency ('Chechens'). They were accused of welcoming the Germans and co-operating when they occupied their part of the country. Now, when the Germans were driven out, the Russian authorities rounded up the entire population and transported them into far-away exile. This woman got separated from her child when it became ill and was taken away to hospital.

Eventually I got better. The temperature stayed down. I overheard two nurses talking about me; I spoke an excellent Russian without a trace of an accent, and they could not work out where I came from.

After weeks in hospital I was allowed to join the family. I wore a scarf on my head till my hair grew enough to cover me. Mum tried to build up my strength; I know for a fact that she went begging for a piece of meat and a loaf of sugar for me.

Spring 1944, and I was getting to be quite grown-up. In the park, a band played some evenings, and I went along in my sack-cloth dress to watch people dance.

In the market place, more and more young well-built men would appear without arms or legs, with their crutches, victims of the war battles. Their tortured faces told a story of scars which were not visible. Very often, one would go berserk and start hitting people in their vicinity whom they could reach with their crutches. No one would hit back, and soon he was subdued by his fellow soldiers. It was pitiful to watch.

We listened to every report concerning the war battles. The defeat of the German army in the siege of Stalingrad, after hand-to-hand fighting in the streets, was a turning point of the war. We were shown newsreels of the devastated city and the mighty German generals being flushed out of their bunkers and holes with their arms in the air, as well as columns of their soldiers. Once again they were no match for the Russian winter bear. However, not until the Americans joined the war and together with their Allies opened the long awaited second front did we dare hope that this could be the beginning of the end for Hitler, his henchmen and their 1000-year-rule dream.

May the 9th, 1945, was a bright sunny morning. I started out to the market but did not get very far. Someone shouted *The War Is Over!* The Germans have surrendered unconditionally after massive bombings and storming of their cities by the Allies right in the heart of their Reich.

I ran back to my mother and father. There was a stunning silence, everyone was wiping tears away. We looked at each other, wondering what comes next? When, how and if we will get back where we came from, what will we find?

Soon after, horror stories started circulating about what happened in Poland, Russia and in every other European country, particularly to the Jewish people.

A postcard arrived from Aunt Rywka saying that she heard no one of the family had survived. We could not believe that! (We had not yet then heard of Auschwitz, Treblinka, Maidanek or the many other death camps). Surely some of the children or young adults must be somewhere, and we will find them if ever we get out of here.

There were thousands of people like us all over this region, in all the little towns and big cities, like Tashkent, Bokhara, Fergana, Alma-Ata, Andizhan, Turkestan, etc. We were asked to register and provide whatever documents we had to prove where we came from. These registrations were carried out over and over again throughout the coming year.

My father had a beautiful coat that he'd had made for himself early in 1939. It was of dark grey wool cloth with a brown fur lining (I always thought it was beaver) and a grey Persian lamb collar. It was of great value in Russia. Throughout our hungry days and nights when the only dream was to one day have a loaf of bread on the table with a knife next to it and cut slices to our hearts' desire, dad resisted selling that coat. He insisted that this coat will help us get back to Poland. Sure enough, he was right: it gave us the means to pay bribery and help us on our way.

Sisters Chawa & Rywka

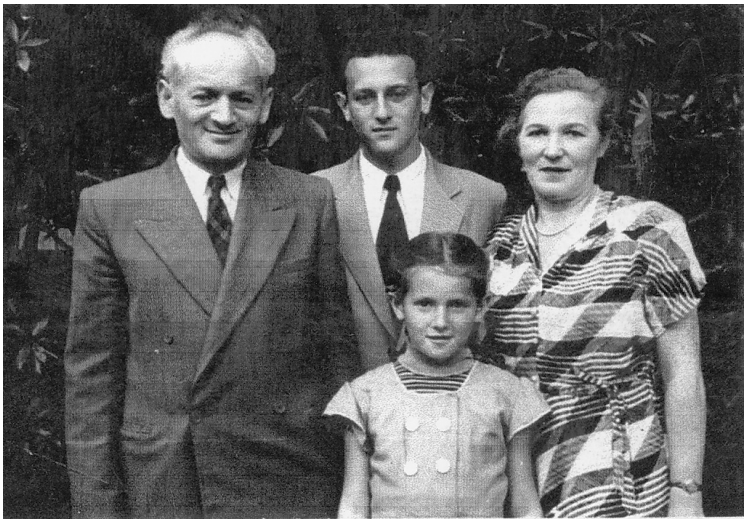
Rywka Hercberg Ring

Jankel Ring

Sister Dvoira's children, 1939

Halinka 1944

Nathan 1935



Jacob, Nathan, Rywka & Halinka in Australia

The Journey Back

It was in summer of 1946 that the authorities finally provided us with a wagon train, gathered people from the whole region, many families in each wagon again - and thus started our long road back.

The journey lasted four weeks. We had very little food but no one complained. We exchanged our last possessions for food items the peasants brought to the stops. This time the doors of the wagons were kept open and no one chased the poor peasants away. Most of the journey was uneventful, in silence and full of fear. We passed many battered cities and burnt-out villages without a soul being seen. We still could not imagine the full horror that awaited us in Poland. We did not know yet that six million Jews - men, women and children - were systematically put to death in specially built death camps by the Germans with the co-operation of locals among whom we had lived for generations, about seven hundred years. From all over Europe, Jews were transported to Poland to be exterminated.

We traveled on, day and night, fearing the unknown, glad to have survived. Families like ours were unique. I guess we survived because we looked after each other. Cleanliness was our top priority. We were grateful to be together. I was a young woman of eighteen now.

We were not sure where we should stop once we got to Poland, or what to do; we would play it by ear. This decision was soon solved for us by our country brethren. It appeared that the Russians have taken for themselves parts of eastern Poland: the Ukraine, Byelorussia, Wolin and Galicia - the most fertile land, capable of feeding the whole of Europe. They gave the Poles part of what was Germany before, on their western side right up to and including the city of Szczecin, or Stettin (*pron*. Shtettin).

When we arrived at a town (I can't recall its name) that marked the border between Russia and Poland, there was a barrier right across the main street, similar to the train crossings in Melbourne. The train stopped for a little while to complete formalities, then the barrier was raised and the train was allowed to cross to the Polish side. As soon as we found ourselves on the other side, the train stopped again. Our friends the Poles, who stood watching, started throwing stones into the open wagon doors and yelling *'The Jews are back'*, making signs across their throats, indicating that we too will be slaughtered.

I can't describe the bewilderment and fear that struck us. We found out that this train is going as far as the occupied German territories, now part of Poland.

We decided, there and then, that we are not leaving this train until the last stop of its destination, wherever it may be.

Thus we arrived in Szczecin (Stettin) a huge, beautiful city much bombed, linked by a small waterway to the Baltic Sea. It was right on the border of what was now Poland and Germany, divided into three zones: English, American and Russian. We went looking for an apartment building that was not in danger of collapse. It was obvious that the once beautiful city was extensively damaged. The local population had either fled before the onslaught or was kicked out of the buildings that were inhabitable.

We found one building where several Jewish families have made their home already, and found room for one more. The streets were full of rubble and we saw groups of Germans, mostly women and older men, being put to work to clear it away from the footpaths. All over the city one could see their work gangs digging and shoveling in silence, like doomed dogs. They avoided lifting their heads to look at us.

Poland was in ruins all over, and many moved to this city, which belonged to them now. We had nothing to fear from the Germans: they feared us; but the Poles and their administration - that was another story. We tried to avoid them wherever possible. The electricity in our building was on, but the water was a problem, the pipes were damaged and it could take an hour to fill a bucket from the tap. More and more people drifted into Szczecin every day. People looked at one another, searching always for a familiar face, maybe a relative.

Someone told me and Eva about a certain building where there were people from Wyszków, and we went looking for it immediately. Approaching the building we saw two men standing in an upstairs window. One was blond and the other, younger looking, was dark. As we came closer we heard a long wolf-whistle. We looked up and walked inside. Sure enough, we knew the family or what was left of them. Shortly after the wolf-whistler walked in the door and introduced himself to us as Izio Kogosowski from Rovno. He shared a room up stairs with his brother-in-law's brother, Jankel Perczuk (the blond one), whom he had met by co-incidence.

We found out from the family that all the Jews from Wyszków were killed in Treblinka, about two hours' drive from home. They did not dare go back to look at our town or properties. They knew of two men who survived the death camps and went back after to see what happened to their former homes; the locals killed them on sight (my father knew both of them well by their names).

Next Izzy informed us that here, in Szczecin, there were representatives from the Jewish Ishuv in Palestine - the Bricha. They had funds and Izzy was approached to form a Kibbutz with the view of getting groups of people out of here to Palestine.

He already had a villa house and was collecting Jewish kids wherever he could find them, in the streets, in the market, or just roaming around aimless.

We also learned that the former Partisans who came out of the forests established what they called the Country's Army (Armja Krajowa). Their inborn anti-semitism, however, did not diminish, despite the many Jewish Partisans who fought beside them and died with them throughout the occupation. These people did not think twice when they had the opportunity to kill a Jew, and I remember well how often we heard about it happening. They were not afraid of the law - there was still plenty of chaos; the government did not yet function properly.

Izio invited Eva and me to join the Kibbutz, sharing the daily chores and food, also protecting ourselves by standing on four-hourly guard around the clock, with sticks, stones and bottles. There was one gun hidden inside, known only to Izzy and one other boy, just in case. What about our parents and Ida? They would have to stay where they were for the time being. We talked it over with them. We had no money, and no clothes except what we had on us. We had no future here whatsoever. It was clear that the Bricha was our only hope of getting out of this country.

Eva and I came to live in this house, 'Kibbutz Ichud', together with about seventy other boys and girls. Some were sole survivors of their families, some had come out of the death camps and did not know what to do with themselves, others came out of the forests where they were hiding in holes in the ground, some from the Russian concentration camps like us. We observed Shabbat as best we could, we sang Hebrew songs which Izzy taught us. He could speak Hebrew fluently and he knew many Hebrew songs that the Chalucim (pioneers) made famous. Izzy was educated in a Hebrew High School in Rovno, which was the pride of the Jewish community.

We did not tell many personal stories because each one had a more gruesome tale than the next. We lived and waited, keeping busy trying to survive, finding food during the day and standing guard in twos around our house. We heard of raids being carried out on houses like ours where they knew there was a concentration of Jewish kids, with bitter results. Once the authorities came looking for guns. They searched the place thoroughly but did not find ours, it was well hidden up the fireplace.

Almost every day I would take a trip, walking with Eva to see our parents and Ida, just to make sure they were OK. Even in the daytime we would look over our shoulder and cross the road when we spotted a face we did not like. One gets to recognize, or sense, in our situation, an enemy that makes you feel endangered. The Germans kept out of our way. The poor elite-looking German ladies did not know a thing their husbands, lovers, fathers and brothers had been up to in the death camps. 'Not one little thing.'

After about three weeks in the Kibbutz, we heard of a new order by the authorities: all eligible young men are going to be drafted into the army. A shiver went through our bodies. The last thing on earth was for a Jewish boy willing to serve in the Polish army right now. Izzy and his committee went to the Bricha office to discuss the new development. They agreed that a group of boys most at risk to be drafted should be sent out together with a number of girls immediately.

They came back with an official right away and started to register who must go now and who can stay on till the next transport. Izzy told the Bricha official that he wants me to go as well because I am his girlfriend, after he requested passage for one other girlfriend earlier. The man gave him a sharp look but accepted. I argued that I can not go without my parents and my sisters. There was no way, they said, that they could take everyone; some people must remain.

This was no time to argue and we came to a compromise - I will be allowed to take mum, dad and Ida, but Eva must remain till the next group departure. She is younger and therefore in no danger.

I had a good friend who was very sweet to me; his name was Ele (Eli). He was a mature young man, a leader with leanings towards Betar (this meant nothing to me at that time, I did not understand the difference between the party politics). Ele promised me that he will take good care of Eva, as he would of his own, and will bring her to us wherever we will be. We had no other choice. This was our chance of getting out to the American Zone of Germany and we had to take it.

Very early the next morning Eva and I turned up at our parents' place without warning. We told them to throw together whatever possessions they had; we had one hour only to be at the gathering point at a certain square. They did.

With heavy hearts, we said farewell to Eva and Eli. At the gathering point there were hundreds of people from all the houses that were established in this city. There appeared one man in a Polish uniform (army) swishing a stick like a baton in his hand. With him were another man and a woman in civilian clothes, both tall and slender, very officious looking and acting. We were under their command, they announced.

We were told not to utter one word in Polish, Russian or Yiddish - we are Greeks and do not understand when spoken to. We are to leave the talking to our leaders. Once again we were inside a train, leaving behind a piece of our flesh and blood, our Chavale, leaving Poland, without any regret, forever. Our leaders paid a hefty bribe on our behalf and we were not bothered much except for a control at the border. We pretended not to understand any questions and they left us alone.

Late at night we arrived in Luebeck, a city in the English Zone of Germany. We were met by representatives from the American Jewish Joint. We were given food, drink and clothing. To us they were angels sent from heaven. For the first time we tasted cracker biscuits as I know them today. For the first time we also dared hope that maybe we will not go hungry again.

From there we traveled southward to Hanover. After that we were transported across another border to the American Zone of Germany. On the way we learned that the very same day that we traveled from Szczecin to Luebeck the Poles of Kielce carried out a pogrom on the few remnants of Jews who drifted back from the death camps to their home town. The miserable people that came back from the camps and forests have congregated in two buildings that belonged to Jews anyway; they have stuck together for comfort. On that day forty-two men, women and children were killed.

When Izzy and I visited London in June 1989 we turned on the television in our hotel room one evening, and there it was, a full account of that tragedy. The programme, a documentary, started with the forty-two coffins being driven on army trucks to the cemetery, and it followed with interviews of prominent Poles, and those who witnessed it all, giving a detailed account of what happened that day. It was horrible.

Our exodus was mixed with bitter tears and depression. We were frightened for the kids we left behind in Szczecin and our own beloved Chava.

Goldkop - Germany

We were taken to Hess Lichtenau, by Kassel, in central Germany. Hess Lichtenau is a pleasant little town about one hour by train from Kassel, which was a very big city in the past, now in complete ruins.

About 1 km, or a little more, out of Hess Lichtenau, the American military authorities established four D.P. (Displaced Person's) camps: Herzog, Taihoff, Goldkop and Rochell. All were between two, three or four kilometers from each other. Our family was assigned to Goldkop, which consisted of three large double-storey blocks, surrounded by a fence, a football field just outside it, and beautiful woodland beyond. It used to be a holiday place for high officers ('kaserne'). Each block had many rooms and one had two huge halls at opposite ends.

These became our Kibbutz Ichud Habonim. One hall for the boys, the other for the girls. The idea was to be organized so that when the opportunity came, we would be ready to go to Palestine together.

Our parents and Ida got a room on the lower floor but had to share it with one young man who claimed it first (my mum or dad were not the pushy types). I went straight to the upper floor and got a bed in the girl's dormitory. I had one expectation only: to go to Palestine. I did not wish to go anywhere else but to a Jewish homeland.

Here we were cared for by the UNRRA (United Nations Refugee Relief Association) and the IRO (International Refugee Organization). We were given food, clothing, and toiletries as they arrived. At the moment our main concern was to find Eva. We had lost all contact - we did not know how, where, if indeed they managed to get out of Szczecin.

It took some months till word got to us that their group did get out - not the way we did, however, but through Austria. In fact they walked across the Czechoslovakian border on foot during the night. She remembers being in a big barn together with many people - there was hardly any room to sit down, very cold and hungry. Soon after, they were transported to Vienna where she had her first bath in years in a wonderfully heated room.

From there they were taken to a camp in Ebenze, some distance from Vienna. Ebenze was surrounded by mountains from all sides. Eva remembers being taken with a group of people to see the first death camp, where thousands of human beings have perished. She still remembers clearly looking at the crematoria, and many

photographs scattered on the floor. She does not know why she could not pick some up, I guess the shock was too great to comprehend.

From Ebenze, they were moved to a camp consisting of tents, a whole city of tents. This was close to the border of Austria and the American Zone of Germany. By word-of-mouth she learned of our whereabouts. My friend Ele then put her on a train for Munich on her way to Kassel and Goldkop. Ele did not come; he and his sister decided to go to Italy and board an illegal vessel from there to Palestine.

In the meantime we too have found out about the tent city where she was supposed to be. Immediately it was decided that I will make the long journey by train and try to find her.

I was not afraid to travel alone in Germany - the mighty warriors have fallen like tame pussycats now, frightened of their own shadow. When I arrived at the tent camp, hundreds of kilometres across the American Zone, I was informed that Eva had left the day before for Bundaberg, another camp. When I arrived in Bundaberg I learned that she left that morning for Munich. I arrived in Munich, a huge station with countless train tracks going in all directions, and hundreds of people milling around. I looked everyone in the face but could not see Eva.

I eventually boarded the train for Kassel, disappointed that I could not find her. I learned later that Eva, too, was feeling lost and frightened at the Munich train station. A skinny girl, tall for her fifteen years, and all alone also searching for a familiar face. Her prayer was answered when she stumbled on a couple from our D.P. camp. They knew her from Szczecin; they too were traveling looking for relatives and were on their way back to Goldkop. We were all on the same train and did not know it till we stepped off the train at opposite ends.

And so, our family was reunited. Eva hardly recognized mum at first. When she last saw her she was skin and bone; now she was rounded and had full cheeks. She too came to live with me at the kibbutz dormitory. From here the only traveling we would do is to Palestine, or so we intended.

The administrators of our camps were all in military uniforms. Some were American, one Dutch, one from the Jewish Agency in Palestine and one from the American Jewish Joint. They looked after the four camps, plus another one located 30 km. away, called Eszweige. The administration building was a beautiful villa in the center of Hess Lichtenau - about two km. from our camp, Goldkop. It had beautiful furniture, including a magnificent black piano. I guess it all belonged to the former owners. All the officers had rooms under the one roof, and naturally, they needed secretaries.

The most senior executive was a tall Norwegian officer; he got a German girl, Margot, who was a trained secretary with a good knowledge of English. I got a job in the transport office. I had no training whatsoever, but I could manage this one. Margot was blonde, frail and gentle, and we could not help but become friends. One day I arrived in the office to find Margot crying. Her boss, a married family man, had got her pregnant.

Hanna and Izzy - Goldkop 1946

Goldkop 1946/8

On Kibbutz - Goldkop 1947
Hanna in centre

Aunt Bronia in Israel with daughter and grandchildren
Menahem, Ronit, Orit & Rachel Shamir

Arolsen

The Americans, realizing that they have many young people who lost their formative years, their education, and have no training for anything, have established a school teaching short courses, in English, shorthand, typing, and different vocations for young men. AROLSEN was a beautiful small town, full of magnificent castles and rolling estates. Several of these were requisitioned and a school established there, with dormitories for boarding, magnificent lawns for relaxation, and a swimming pool. From each camp, all over the country, a small group of six was selected and sent there to live for ten weeks of intensive study.

I was the only girl among all boys from our camps to be in the first group to go there. Eva was in the second ten-week course. It took many hours to get to Arolsen by train. We would return home every Friday night and take the 12 noon train back on Sunday.

We had a lovely time there among hundreds of young people from all over the American Zone. The course was intensive and we were eager to learn. We socialized a lot. I regretted not being able to swim. I am sorry that I still can't to this day.

After ten weeks, I came back to the office quite capable of carrying out the work that was required. The military personnel would change often, replaced by others, but I would stay with the office providing stability for the newcomers. In fact I became quite in demand, and was moved from the UNNRA to the IRO to the AMERICAN JEWISH JOINT.

The woman officer took a liking to me and eventually got me to work with her exclusively. Adele Greenberg and I got on well together. She was assigned a jeep with a driver and together we would travel visiting all the camps on various business. I remember one such trip to Eszweige, when a young woman, a survivor of one of the death camps, strangled her crying baby. This woman was broken in mind as well as body. Adele moved quickly to prevent the woman being taken into custody by the German Police. Somehow she managed to get her out of Eszweige, and later, out of the country, I think to Italy. After a few very trying days we returned to our office in Hess Lichtenau and both of us spent the whole night writing a suitable report for the local authorities.

I loved my work at the office, and being among the Americans I was learning English fast and absorbing everything possible; I even remember the first American song I learned: *Please Give me Land, Lots of Land, Under Starry Skies Above,*

Don't Fence me In. There were many privileges for me too. I was not being paid in money but in rations containing cartons of American cigarettes. They were of great value - I could get anything in exchange for American cigarettes. My rations came from a special store - the military PX. I also received gifts from Adele of cosmetics, creams to soften my skin, scarves, etc. To me they were the height of luxury. However, because I was a member of the kibbutz, my rations went there and not to my family.

There was jealousy of me having such a job while the other girls were doing the cooking and cleaning and all the other jobs that were needed for the welfare of us all. This resulted in me doing those duties on weekends. I considered this a small sacrifice, and did my equal share happily. I just loved getting out to my office all week.

Once Adele had to go to an army camp outside Kassel. She had some social activity to organize - a concert, if I remember correctly - and she was after their orchestra and choir. She asked me to go with her. When we drove through the gates I was dumbstruck. It was a unit of all-black American soldiers, very tall, very handsome every one of them, in their smart uniforms. It was my first experience among all black people and I was uncomfortable. I stuck close by Adele all the time.

After that I did not wonder any more when I used to see a very, very blonde girl wheeling a brown baby in a pram - I knew where they came from. (If Hitler could have seen what happened to his pure Aryan race he would have asked to be buried ten feet deeper.)

In the early days in Goldkop we used to take the train to Kassel, only one hour away from Fuerstenhagen - the train station of Goldkop, just five minutes' walk from us. Kassel used to be a very big industrial city which, for some strategic reason was bombed by the Allies non-stop. We were told that the final bombing was carried out by a thousand planes in one night alone. Naturally the city was in complete ruins with part-structures visible here and there only. The local population, or what was left of it, was put to work in groups to clear the streets and pile up the rubble in tidy mountains.

After that, one tram started to operate from one end of the city to the other. We would go on this tram, all the way, just to look at the sight and be grateful for the small revenge it represented for the pain and genocide of six million Jews and many millions of people from all over Europe.

This was still 1946. It did not take the resourceful Germans very long to start rebuilding. Among the first to be restored was the Kassel Opera House. A year later we had our first taste of Opera. For half a kilogram of oats and a packet of cigarettes we would obtain tickets and leave on the midday train for Kassel on a Saturday,

returning at midnight. We would go in a group of about ten, Izzy and I, sometimes Eva among them.

Looking Ahead

Once we settled into some routine in Goldkop our urgent thoughts turned to what next? We were after all Stateless Refugees. Many people made contact with relatives overseas, who tried to help by sending food and clothing parcels. Others tried to get permits to go to the U. S., Canada, Argentina, or wherever a relative could be found. All over Germany in every D.P. (Displaced Person's) camp there were lists of survivors circulated regularly, or pasted on walls, for people searching for relatives - mothers, fathers, children - in the hope of finding someone that might have been liberated from one camp or another. Every one of us had to register many times over and the lists were circulated everywhere. Overseas relatives who were searching for family members via the UNRRA, IRO or the AMERICAN JEWISH JOINT would all consult these lists.

My dad knew of an uncle in New York - zeida's brother Benny Prager and his sister Mary Simons. He wrote to them and discovered a lovely family, including aunt and uncle, and cousins Bea, Anne and Max. Soon after, we received parcels of clothing - lovely dresses Eva and I fought over, an English dictionary I am still using today. Permits to go to the USA were out of the question. There was a quota and we were not eligible. We would have to wait years for permission to enter the U.S. Neither did we wish to go there. We wanted to go to Palestine.

Izzy, on the other hand, was all alone and he made early contact with his mother's sister Elka and Uncle Benzion in Boston and several of their daughters, among them Mollie and her husband Murray Goldstein. Mollie is a unique person, one in a million. She tried to move heaven and earth to bring Izzy to Boston. She bombarded senators, congressmen, etc., and finally obtained application papers for him. Izzy then moved out of the kibbutz. If he were to go to America he had no business here. His sister Ethel and her family remained in Szczecin; he did not know the whereabouts of his brother Szmuel and wife Vusia.

Izzy's History

As I discovered on our walks around Goldkop, Izzy was born in Rovno, a city of about 60,000 people in the southeast of Poland, in the district of Wolyn, in the Ukraine. Half of Rovno's population was Jewish. There were two Jewish soccer teams, Hasmonea and Hakoah, with their own playing fields, a Jewish hospital and a Jewish volunteer fire brigade with its own band of musicians - the only one, I believe, in Poland. Izzy was educated in a Hebrew High School which was the pride of the Jewish community. It was established and totally supported by affluent Rovno Jews, whose children were the first to study there. His brother Szmuel was one of its first graduates. After that Izzy went to a business college and graduated as an accountant.

His sister Ethel received a university education in Warsaw and worked for a while with Janusz Korczak in his children's orphanage before returning home to marry David Perczuk, also a university graduate, and a tutor at a high school. Izzy's brother Szmuel is also a university graduate - he became a pharmacist.

Their father, Avrom Kogosowski, came from the most famous Jewish city in Russia - Berdichev. Their mother Sara (Surke) came from Kamien Koszirsk, north of Rovno. She was one of six sisters and two brothers. Hers was a well-to-do family who owned a distillery and also dealt in providing cattle for the abattoirs.

Sura Kaufman fell in love on first sight of the well groomed dandy Avrom. Their wedding lasted seven days, and he received a huge dowry.

Avrom went back to work at his uncle's textile goods business, and the dowry was invested with a certain well-known businessman at interest. A short time later this individual went bankrupt and all of the Kogosowski investment was gone with the wind.

Too proud to let his wife go back to her father for help, he struggled on his own for some time. Later he established a business of his own, just after the First World War. It flourished and he became quite prosperous.

In 1917/18 the Bolsheviks invaded Rovno. Avrom was arrested for being a 'bourgeois', his store was looted, and he was thrown into prison. For three days he was tortured by being kept in water up to his neck; then he was released. His health and spirit broken, he began to suffer with ulcers. When the Poles returned to Rovno, he tried to establish another business, but it was struggling. Izzy was born on the 31st of December, 1921, but by then his father was no longer the man he used to be.

According to Szmuel, their father loved to sing, dance, bring gifts for his wife and children, and be involved in the welfare affairs of the Jewish community. Izzy is the only one of his children to bear resemblance to him. Regrettably, there is no photograph of him left.

In 1929, Avrom established a very small grocery shop for his wife to run, and went to South America to look for his fortune there. He landed in Curacao, opened a business with a partner, and it started to look very good. But Avrom became ill with the ulcers and had to go into hospital. When he came out, the shop was empty and his partner had disappeared. Disillusioned, ill and exhausted, he returned to his family in Rovno in 1930.

He entered hospital in Lvov for an ulcers operation. His heart was strong but he got pneumonia and died in March 1933, at the age of fifty-two. Szmuel and Ethel (Izzy's seniors by ten and thirteen years) attended his funeral, and one year later they put up a matzeiva. The Janover cemetery is no longer in existence; the Nazis destroyed even that, completely.

Izzy was eleven years old when his father died. All the above we learned from Szmuel, who lives in Israel now. Izzy lived with his mother in a very nice apartment, and she carried on managing her little shop. Ethel and her husband, with their little girl, Aviva, lived close by. Szmuel lived away from Rovno in a small town because that was where he found a job as pharmacist. Szmuel married Vusia Bery after the Russians occupied Rovno in 1939; it was a small subdued ceremony.

Surka and Izzy's home came to be shared with a Russian Commandant. By that time Izzy was a young man already. He found a job in his profession as an accountant and learned quickly how to survive under the new administration.

After the Russians had transported all the refugees like us into exile, Izzy still lived in peace, but not for very long.

For them all hell broke loose on the 22nd of June 1941, when Hitler invaded Russia and his armies started advancing rapidly. Panic broke out. Rumours were rife that young men were being killed, or castrated, or sent away somewhere unknown. Soon after, the Russian Commander started packing in a hurry. The Germans were getting close. His mother told Izzy that he must run away to their relatives in Kharkov, in Russia proper, until the situation will stabilize and become clearer; then he could come back. There was no transport of any kind - there was complete chaos.

People took whatever they could carry and walked out of the city on foot towards the formerly Russian frontier.

Izzy's mother persuaded the Commander who had shared their apartment for more than a year to take Izzy with him, on his army truck across the border. Izzy would make his way from there to Kharkov on his own.

She was still a beautiful woman, forty-nine years of age. Out of pity for her, the Russian promised he would look after her son as best he could. Izzy packed a bag with his best suits, underwear, shoes, etc. His mother took one look and objected, saying that he was only going away for one week and wouldn't need all this. She took half of the things out, leaving him with just essentials. She insisted she will be all right here. *"What could they do to me?"*

The Commander and his mates loaded their truck with much loot they had acquired during their time here. The others objected to Izzy being allowed to travel with them. He pulled out a gun and declared, *"He stays with me."* Izzy was seated in a tight corner on top of the vehicle, his mother was standing beside him. She decided to go to a nearby stall where pastries (piroshki) were being sold, to buy some for Izzy to eat on the way.

Without warning the truck moved off and Izzy saw his mother running after it, waving in the distance. They did not say goodbye; that was the last he saw of her. On the road there were many army vehicles running away and German planes attacking with bombing raids. Most of the occupants jumped to the roadside for cover. Izzy remained seated; he could not move from his tight spot. They were not hit and when the bombing was over they continued onwards.

Further on, he saw heartbreaking scenes, the people who walked and ran towards the former Russian border were stopped at the guard posts, not allowed to cross, and there was nothing they could do but turn back. Disillusioned, exhausted, hopeless, many were walking back while others stayed, just sitting in the open near the border. Two days later, the Germans got very close and all the guards ran away leaving their posts; the people ran after them.

At the end of the war, Izzy learned that three months after the Germans marched into Rovno they gathered most of the Jewish people, 24,000 men, women and children, including his mother, marched them outside the city to the very same forest they used to call Sosenkes ('little Pine trees') where they used to go for picnics to celebrate Lag B'omer, and shot them all into a mass grave dug by their Ukrainian neighbours. The remaining 5,000 Jews were driven into a ghetto and destroyed eight months later.

I have known Izzy for about two years when he first told me the above. I also learned that he met with his sister and brother with their families in Asia but did not stay with them. He moved to another town, also in central Asia, and on his own struggled for survival.

Izzy's mother Surka with sister Taiba

Chaim Ber and Shifra Kaufman - Izzy's maternal grandparents
photo c. 1870

On The Kibbutz

In our kibbutz there were young people from just about everywhere. Many were remnants from large families who perished. Some survived in the forests with the partisans. Others came out of their holes in the ground, where they were hiding for one or two years, coming out only at night to raid nearby villages for food. One lived in a tree for months. Others survived like rats in various barns and haystacks around the villages.

From the boys' dormitory we could hear screams every night; these were nightmares. One would make noises like gun shots, another would call out names, or scream a warning.

I had several such friends with whom I used to go for walks within the perimeter of our camp and just listen to them talk. I was unique to them: I was in their age group and yet I had a family. There were few families, whole like ours, in the camp. I guess they needed someone to talk to - it was soothing for them and I was a good listener.

From time to time, many groups of boys and girls were sent out to Palestine - illegally of course, because the British authorities would not let them in otherwise.

Their rotten, unseaworthy ships would be intercepted by the British navy and made to go to camps in Cyprus, behind barbed wire again. One group included a girl who used to live in the room next to ours. She married a man from one of the camps, and together they set out to make their way to Palestine. Their ship was the EXODUS. I remember the day they were brought back to Hamburg, Germany, in wire cages. I remember the full-page pictures in the newspapers. That was British justice at it's lowest, in its most shameful episode.

This couple had nowhere else to go and eventually made another attempt to get to Palestine on another illegal ship, this time ending up in Cyprus, where she died in childbirth.

Another story filtered back to us about a girl who used to have her bed next to mine in our kibbutz dormitory. She, together with her father, made it to Jerusalem. She met a horrible death soon after at the hands of an Arab. Her name was Shulamit.

A few certificates for legal passage did filter in to our camp. One family - mother, father and two sons - somehow managed to obtain these. I could never find out exactly how. However, I am sure that knowing someone in the right places, or plain

greasing of certain palms, could produce results. They did go, and before long the two boys were at the top in the army and government of Israel. They helped build the State in a very constructive way. I am very proud to have them as friends. Whenever we come to Israel we are always invited to visit them. To this day they are still holding high positions.

Every so often, people were leaving the camp for various destinations. We could not see any way out for ourselves. Eva and I kept asking our leaders for certificates for our parents and Ida to go to Palestine the legal way, and the two of us would gladly go any other way, with Aliyah Beit. We did not get them.

One day my dad received a letter from his brother Szloime in Argentina. He never mentioned their sister Hanna at all. We assumed they were not on speaking terms with each other. Szloime informed us that he managed to get entry permits for us, but not directly to Argentina, only to Paraguay. From there, it would be easier to get to Argentina by some non-kosher way. We thanked Szloime but politely declined the offer. We never heard from him again, even though dad has written to him, and later we sent invitations to our weddings, but there was no response.

Strangely enough, it puzzles me to this day why their sister Hanna never contacted us at all after the war, nor did any of her children - our cousins we used to play with. Mendl would be my age and Rochel would be the same as Eva's. I can not understand why they never enquired about her father - their grandfather - if not us? I would love to tell my cousins one day how much they have missed not knowing their cousins in Australia. It is entirely their loss. I know that dad did write to them.*

Some time later we received a message that my mother's brother-in-law from Australia was looking for his family - wife Sheina-Rachel and four children (I described earlier how his daughter Yachet was to leave on September 1st, 1939, to join him.) We informed him that we could not find them; we heard they had perished in Auschwitz.

He offered to help us come to Australia and we accepted. I asked if he could apply for a permit for one other refugee - Izzy Kogosowski - and he agreed. We received our papers in 1948. As for Izzy, the idea was that whichever comes first he will accept. If it will be the American permit (for which he was still waiting) then he will try to take me with him, otherwise he will go to Australia with me.

**Never giving up, I finally tracked them down, and in November 1998, Rachel, called 'Raquel', whom I last saw in the mid-thirties, waving her and her family off at the station on their long journey, came from Argentina to visit us for a simcha. We've kept happily in touch ever since.*

The Youth of Goldkop

There were many lovely girls in Goldkop. One was Esterke, a teenager, the only survivor of her family. There was a brown-haired, dark-eyed beauty named Feigale, another was Shifra, sisters Betty and Eva, Sara and Hanka and quite a few more. There were also some very handsome young men, and romances did flourish. Shimon loved Feigale; Arie loved Esterke; Bolek was in love with Betty; and Ele was in love with a little blonde whose name escapes me, etc., etc. Sometimes things would change and so would the love affairs, leaving some broken hearts.

I had a number of boyfriends, but in the back of my mind there was always Izio. He liked romancing too, and had several girlfriends. One was especially serious. She was a pretty girl who came to live with her parents in Eszweige. Her father became the leader of their camp committee. They were also formerly from Rovno - Izzy's home city. She was Sania Lipiec. Her parents were very keen on Izzy; they knew his background and the family he came from. Izio was good looking, in his sparkling white shirts, always neat and tidy (a habit he still has).

Once Sania and her father came to visit him in Goldkop and I was introduced as his friend. Mr. Lipiec knew me from my visits to Eszweige with my boss, Adele. Izzy would go to visit them often for weekends, take Sania dancing or to the pictures, without saying anything to me. Somehow I would always find out or guess where he was. I did get upset and mope about it, but not for very long. We were both free to do as we liked; we had no commitment really - and nothing to offer to each other. There was always someone around the corner who was keen on me.

Izzy enjoyed himself as long as he knew I was not attached to anyone. But, he and his deputy Ele Solc, also a friend of mine (now living in New York), were jointly in charge of a unit of young men whose job it was to guard our camp. These men were Izzy's devoted friends and would inform him of my every move and activities. Once Eva and I went out with two young men who were visiting here from Munich. They were well dressed in long leather coats, very prosperous looking. We were introduced by a mutual friend from Hercog.

We went to the pictures in Hess Lichtenau and supper. When they brought us back to Goldkop and walked through the gate to our building the guards called them over for a talk. We found out after that they were told not to date me or Eva - we had boyfriends in this camp and they were not welcome. It looked like the reply was fitting too. I was furious.

There was a special tune Izzy would whistle in the corridor or under my window, which I would recognize, and come out to meet him. When he was informed where I had gone and with whom, Izzy became jealous. This he could not take. The tune he could whistle was *In a Quaint Caravan there's a Lady they call the Gypsy, etc…* I would come out and we would have a big argument, end up not talking to each other for a week, then he would write me a love letter (I still have some) or wait for me somewhere he knew I must come by, and we would make up. After each such episode our relationship would grow stronger than before.

We became friends with Keila and Fishl Flicker from Rochell. Keila, with her dark hair and dark brown eyes and creamy complexion, was a beautiful girl. Fishl used to visit my sister Eva. We would all go together to dancing evenings, to the opera, or make our own fun.

Sania later went to Israel with her parents. She married a diplomat, had two children, and became an internationally famous opera singer. She came on a concert tour for the ABC to Australia in 1968/69. She was now Netania Davrat. She stayed with us in Melbourne and we enjoyed each other's company immensely. Netania was divorced from her husband and later remarried. She later received us in Israel very graciously on several occasions. We have several of her recordings. They are a joy to listen to. Sania, or Netania, Davrat passed away a few years ago from cancer.

One fine day, three strangers arrived in our camp. One was the guy who was wearing the Polish officer's uniform when he led us out of Szczecin. The others were his two mates, a handsome man and woman. We found out then that he was not the Pole we thought he was, but David Landau, and his co-workers from the Bricha. Their job was getting Jews out of Poland any way they could. When the ground became too hot for them, and the consequences too dangerous, they themselves were smuggled out quick and sharp.

It did not take David long to fall in love with Feigale and sweep her off her feet. Within weeks we all attended their wedding. Soon after, David and Feigale left for Palestine. They ended up once again under barbed wire in Cyprus. Their first child, a daughter was born there. Later they went to Australia, and we are the best of friends to this day.

Esterke and Feigale survived the death camps. They both came from small towns near Vilno (Vilnius). Esterke was a little younger. She and Feigale happened to meet in one of the death camps; later on fate brought them together again in Goldkop. Feigale had two sisters with her, Esterke had no one. All her family perished early, and she was dragged around several camps. Her story is particularly gruesome - I could not do it justice if I tried.

Esterke fell in love with Arie Lewinstein, also a lone survivor. Arie was a little older, cultured - he was born and educated in Warsaw. He too was employed by the UNRRA and looked very handsome in uniform. He was fascinated by the lively, cheeky and clever Esterke.

Esterke and Arie were married in the Registry office in Hess Lichtenau. They migrated to the United States and we lost touch. When I was in the U.S. with Alan in 1967 (when he won a trip around the world and appeared on the Ed Sullivan show in New York), I learned that they had settled in Los Angeles, have established a business, and had three children. They were now called Livingstone. It was too late for me to contact them then; we had just arrived in Boston from Los Angeles. We did establish contact by mail, and on a later visit Izzy and I stayed with them for several days, after which we went to Las Vegas together and enjoyed each other's company all over again.

We visited them again in 1989, when we were on our way to see Alan in Florida. Esterke and Arie live in a luxurious home in the Hollywood Hills. Both have remained the same friendly, outgoing couple we used to know. Leon is not in the best of health - a spine problem has put him on crutches. Still, he drives a van and they travel a lot. They have a lovely family with grandchildren and we still write to each other occasionally.

David Landau
in uniform as we knew him

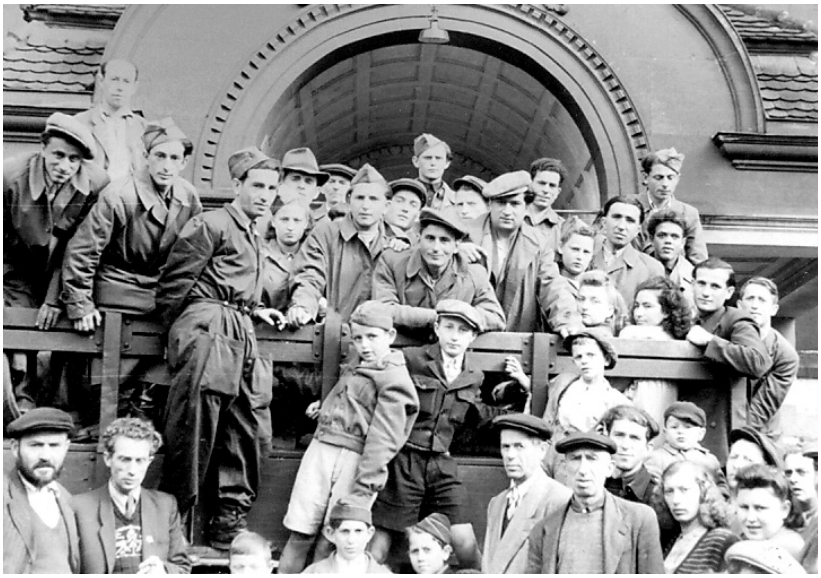
Feigale

David Landau leading a group of refugees on their way out of Stettin. In the front row I can see Esterke. In much the same way we also were led to the train for the trip out of Poland. Our belongings were only what we could carry. Late 1946.

Arie

Esterke

Our family Prager in Goldkop, Germany 1948



Farewelling the first group to leave D.P. camp Goldkop, on the way to Israel in 1948.
These were all single people, severed branches of once huge family trees, each one bearing their scars with them for life.

The Jewish State

May 14th, 1948 - the United Nations were meeting to vote on the Palestine question. Everyone was holding their breath, with ears glued to the radios.

OH JOY OF JOYS - we heard it! The vote was in favour of partition. Rejected - of course - by the Arabs, followed by THE DECLARATION BY BEN GURION OF A JEWISH STATE TO BE KNOWN AS ISRAEL.

I cannot describe the feelings, emotions, tears and joy that overcame us. With the declaration came the announcement that every Jew, wherever he may be, has the right to come and automatically become a citizen of Israel. Suddenly, we were stateless no more. After two thousand years and near-genocide, we, our generation, has been privileged to witness the creation and return of our people to our ancestral homeland. Next year in Jerusalem, as has been recited in every prayer for two thousand years, has been answered.

Out of the stunned silence came euphoria. Someone produced a blue and white flag. We formed ourselves into a procession and marched around the three buildings of our camp singing every Hebrew song we knew. I was marching beside my mother.

The euphoria did not last very long. The tiny Jewish population of the Yishuv - about 600,000 in all - was soon attacked from all sides by well-trained Arab armies. The Chalutzim who drained the swamps and tried to redeem the land from the desert, defying rampant malaria, had to take up arms and fight. The English, who hounded them for years, not allowing them to establish an army to defend themselves against marauding Arabs, did a last dirty trick on them now. They left behind, or handed over, all their weapons and equipment to the Arabs rather than the Jews. They felt so sure that the Arabs will push all the Jews into the sea in no time. But this is another story, which you can find in the now history books. It is obvious that the people of Israel triumphed in the end.

Call it a miracle if you wish, but never forget the innocent young lives that were lost to make it happen.

We were getting restless. Single people were moving out faster now, but not the families; we had to wait. Our permits to Australia were also not forthcoming.

One day, late in 1948, I was sent to the P.X. to Kassel to pick up some provisions. I was given a jeep with a driver. It was getting colder; it rained a little that morning and the wet road was covered with an icy, slippery surface, barely noticeable.

On the way back, on a bend, stood a man motioning for us to stop. The driver, thinking he wanted a lift, kept on going. Next thing I knew we were flying off the road into a ditch and were stopped by a tree. The German had tried to warn us about the ice on the road. I was stunned. I had a cut on my forehead and my hand but my first thought was for my nylon stockings which I was privileged to have.

Soon after, another jeep from the opposite direction arrived and stopped to assist us. It was Chaim Liberman. He pulled me out of the jeep and took me to Goldkop. I went to see the doctor before going to my parents. Shortly after this we received the news that we have been approved for departure to Australia, via Paris and Marseille.

Izzy had asked my dad if he would allow me to go to the United States with him if his papers would come first. We would marry first of course.

Dad told Izzy that this would sadden him very much but he would not like to stand in our way. We must do what we think is best for us, he cannot do anything else.

However, Izzy received his permit for Australia first and was called to leave for Paris right away, one month ahead of us. From there he would travel to Rotterdam to board the Dutch ship '*VOLLENDAM*' for Australia. Two weeks later, his permit to go to the USA arrived. Too late, but no regrets. By this time I was sure I could not separate from my parents.

We left Goldkop one month later. Once again we gathered our belongings - a truck took us to the station together with some other families. We boarded a passenger train (this time), to be met by Izzy and representatives from the American Jewish Joint in Paris.

Paris - France

It was mid-December already and quite cold, but there was no snow yet in Paris. The A.J.J. representatives arranged rooms for all refugees in their care, in various hotels. Ours was by the Gare St. Lazare; we were given two rooms. There were other people in transit in the same hotel and we soon got to know each other.

Izzy had been in Paris four weeks now, and had one more until he was to depart for his ship. He had already got to know a lot about Paris, and we made the best of that week. He took me to the Folies Bergère, we walked a lot together with Eva, we visited the Louvre more than once, we took photographs on top of the Arc de Triomphe, we visited Notre Dame and the Eiffel Tower, and the Palais de Chaillot - the home of the United Nations - where Izzy attended two sessions and heard the first Foreign Minister of the State of Israel, Abba Eban, deliver a speech. It was a thrilling experience, living history. It was a joy for us being together in Paris.

Soon it was over, and Izzy had to leave. We were just at the start of our six weeks in Paris. We received money, allowances for food, and we had a lot of fun going to the street markets for cheap fruit and vegetables. We had not seen anything like this ever before.

One day we found our Aunt Rywka with her family in one of the hotels. They had got out of Poland and were also on their way to Australia. Uncle Jacob had a cousin living there, and she obtained permits for them. They had a delightful little daughter now - Halinka - and Nathan (Nanek) was a young man of fifteen. We were happy to be reunited and heading for the same destination at last.

For the adults the joy was mixed with grief. After they came back from Russia, he Ring family had remained in Poland for three years. During that time, Rywka tried everything to find some trace of their mother, sisters, husbands, children, cousins, uncles, aunts, nieces, nephews - hundreds if she would add them up - but not one of them, not a trace even, could she find. Six million Jewish people were slaughtered in Auschwitz, Treblinka, Majdanek, Chelmno, Bergen-Belsen - to mention just a few of the many, the more notorious ones.

Somewhere among this number were our nearest and dearest family. Our own flesh and blood. There was not much laughter among the sisters.

Uncle Jacob too could not find any trace of his parents, sister, or brother Baruch, who was taken away by the Russians in the middle of the night from the dormitory they had shared in Magnitagorsk. They were never told why. Baruch disappeared without a trace, despite immediate efforts to find him.

We learned that Bronia Prager, together with her sister and her little girl Rachel, also returned from Russia and they were on their way to Israel.

My beloved Uncle Simcha, his wife and child, also disappeared. We were told they were last seen in the Warsaw Ghetto.

We farewelled Izzy on his way to Rotterdam just before the New Year of 1948/49. Eva and I were just waking up to life as young adults. Ida was still a child of about ten. Eva and I went everywhere together. We were like chaperones for each other, which made it easier for mum and dad. After all, this was a country new to us. We did not speak the language and hardly knew anybody except people like us - refugees in transit.

However, one can not stifle youth, especially in Paris. The Champs Elysées boulevard was beautiful and we would go walking the whole length of it as often as we could. We found people we knew - Shifka Olcha, Keila Flicker and others. Boys would attach themselves to us - they were lonely too. Our hotel room became a meeting place for our friends. We all went together to a New Year's Eve Ball organized by the local Jewish community, danced all night, and returned to our hotel by the first metro (underground) at 6 am. We have discovered the wonder of the world that was Paris.

We would save our food allowance and go to pictures. The taste of French pastries and crisp baguettes was beyond our wildest dreams.

Our Voyage to Australia

The six weeks ran away much too quickly, and we were advised to get ready to leave for Marseille, as our ship would sail from there. Aunt Rywka and her family were also to sail on the same ship. After a few days in Marseille we boarded the '*VILLE D'AMIEN*'. It turned out to be the worst tub that ever sailed the seas. We were packed in like sardines on two-storey bunks. Hundreds of people, with disgusting sanitary facilities. Our family got a little corner on the top bunk and underneath us was a family with two little boys - the Libermans, Jack, Zhenia and their two sons.

The journey lasted ten weeks. We sailed via the Panama Canal, stopping in the city of Cristobal for nine days. The Jewish community was advised of our arrival and we were given a reception with food and drink. Dad met a family here he knew from Wyszków. Years ago they made their home here. Eva and I were given some clothes - she got a pair of red pants and I got blue ones. The French crew named us *Pantalon Rouge* and *Pantalon Bleu*.

There was no doctor on board, only an orderly. He took a liking to Eva and me, and offered us the use of his cabin for washing, ironing or whatever else we needed. We were invited to a party he organized, but we insisted on one older lady to come along. She was lively and had a good sense of humour. She agreed to come.

There were some very nice, handsome young men on board. Jewish survivors from Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Germany. They were on their way to join family in Sydney and Melbourne. They were good company, and we spent much time socializing with them.

Mum and dad were getting depressed, frightened of the unknown. Aunt Rywka got sick with asthma and sinuses. The squalor of the ship was sometimes unbearable. There was one pregnant woman on board who became sick and had to be taken to hospital at the next port. I went with her as an interpreter. I was the only one who could speak English reasonably well.

In Cristobal, our ship docked offshore, and we had to go by barge to shore and back. It was late one evening when Eva and I were waiting for the barge to take us back to our ship. We were approached by two officers from a luxury liner that stood in port - they wanted to show off their ship, the '*CARINYA*'. We had never seen a real ship, and they promised to hold up the barge until we returned, to the annoyance of the other people who were also waiting for the barge.

Uzbekistan - Izio with friends in Uzbek dress in front of their mud brick house.

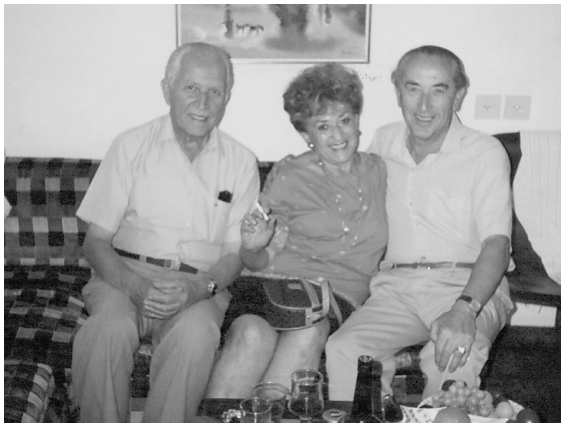
Izio, January 1949.
A lonely voyage to Australia

We were tempted. However, in those days we needed someone older as a chaperone. Many of our co-voyagers were already jealous enough of the attention we were getting from the ship's crew. Waiting with us was the same lady who accompanied us to the party before. Energetic, in her mid-fifties, she was quite unlike the people of small-town origins, and she wanted to come along. The officers did not mind. They were proud of their ship and liked to show her off. It was a great thrill - like a dream in a fairy tale, beyond our imagination. We were treated to soft drinks, and returned to the barge, which was waiting for us. It was good to be young.

We sailed on, stopping in Tahiti for four days. I can still remember the beautiful sunset as we approached the harbour, the calm mirror-like sea and balmy nights. The ship once again docked offshore and we had to come in to land by small boat. One of the sailors, a handsome native of the Island of Martinique, accompanied us together with mum and dad all over Tahiti, showing us the beauty of this place.

As I said before - ten weeks on our tub was a very long time. The *Ville d'Amien* was never allowed to sail to Australia again. In the meantime we had more stops - Port Villa, Martinique, and Noumea. Here we had time to roam around the island. It was beautiful, and the climate was mild to warm. In Noumea I tasted my first milkshake - it was delicious.

The voyage from Noumea to Sydney took four days; these were most unpleasant. All the toilets were blocked, the sea was rough and most of the passengers were seasick. No one came to the dining-room to eat anymore. The sight of land four days later was very welcome indeed.



Szmuel, Ania and Izzy - Tel Aviv 1989

Izio at 16

Aviva, David, Evelyn, William, Nikki and Mishi

David, Ethel, Barry and Aviva Perczuk

Tobie, Mendi & Avi

Vusia, Avi & Szmuel

Landing in Sydney

It was a cool but sunny morning - the 1st of May, 1949. Everyone lined up on deck to catch a glimpse of our new country. There was hope and apprehension. We have come from one end of the world to the other - so far away from our roots. We also knew that whatever happens, this is it - we are here to stay.

As the ship drew alongside the wharf, there were many people there awaiting relatives or just watching. My dad leaned over the rail and called out, *"There is Shapiro's brother!"* It was Fishl Gingold - the boy we were together with in Pojaminka. Dad could not recall his name but he remembered his sister Mrs. Shapiro. We went through customs and were met by the Jewish Welfare Society representatives. Fishl kept us company through the day. He had arrived here a couple of years ago to see close relatives.

Next morning we were put on the train for Melbourne. Looking out of the window at the empty countryside gave me a dull feeling inside. So different from Europe, even the colours.

We arrived at Spencer Street station. Izzy was there to meet us. Shifka Olcha was there. Fishl Flicker came and broke the news that he was going to be married soon to Urszula - but no Uncle Kolinski could we see. We felt strangely let down. We wondered, perhaps there was a reason? Maybe he is not well? We knew that he married in the meantime a German-Jewish lady. We could understand his loneliness - but not being at the station to greet us seemed strange. Izzy found a taxi, gave the address, and we loaded ourselves and our possessions in.

All those years of waiting, we imagined London Street, East Bentleigh, in the city of Melbourne, to be an important location. After what seemed a very long drive, we arrived at a quiet corner house, in a street where we could not see one human being walk past. The next house seemed half a mile away. Uncle Moishe gave some excuse of being unwell for not coming to meet us. In fact he looked perfectly well.

His wife looked nice and greeted us warmly. We were shown into a room and she prepared a meal. We talked for some time and gave them presents we bought in Paris. He told us that he received the $500 dad's relatives from the United States have sent for us to give us a start. Uncle Benny had asked dad where to send the money to, and dad replied that they may as well send it directly to Australia, to Moishe. The meal was not too generous and a flat, tired feeling came over us. Next morning Uncle Moishe produced the employment pages from *The Age* and told us to look for employment.

We did not know how to look - where to go - he growled something while we waited for Izzy to arrive; he lived in a rooming house somewhere on the other side of town. We looked at the little houses - the shops in the Bentleigh shopping centre all on the one lower level, and all we could see was one sprawling village. Eventually, we got to look around the city on the weekend and found it deserted. Few people to be seen here and there. We felt this is the end of the world for us.

Izzy helped us look for jobs. Eva and I had to forget about secretarial work as our English and a ten-week typing course was not adequate in an English-speaking country. Besides, it did not pay as well as a factory job, and we needed every penny we could earn. There were many jobs advertised for machinists and finishers and we decided to apply.

The first place we came to started showing us what to do. They needed labour desperately. By the end of the second day they realized that we don't know a thing about sewing, so we got the sack. The next place we came to we had already learned something in the previous place, so we lasted a couple more days. We came to several other places the same way until we learned some more of what was required.

By the time we came to the fifth factory, we were 'experts', and they were desperate for workers so they decided to teach us - Eva as a machinist and me as finisher. We sustained our first paid jobs at £4.50 a week.

It was much harder for dad. He was looking for any kind of work and ended up in desperation in the abattoirs, Smorgon's in Footscray. After a few days he realized that this is impossible for him to carry on.

We came to the conclusion that Uncle Moishe was not in his right mind. We watched his wife account for every penny she spent on food. He resented our coming back after dark.

We had to walk to the station, wait for the train, and it took more than half an hour to get to Bentleigh Station. From there it was an extra half-hour walk to the house.

One evening Eva and I returned from the city at about 7 o'clock and found the door locked. We knew that mum, dad and Ida were inside. The lights were out. We could see him sitting a little way back from the window, watching us. We shivered on the front doorstep and were afraid to go away as the street was totally deserted. Izzy lived in Carlton and there was no telephone to call.

After a couple of hours, and in tears, we were let inside. The next morning he asked us to leave. Dad asked him for the $500 that was sent to him for us from America. He said it cost him to make our landing permits and he will not give us

a cent. In fact it did not cost him anything - he gave our names to the Jewish Welfare Society. They obtained the papers at their cost.

We found out later that he owned two houses and had a lot of money. His wife was standing by all this, crying, afraid to say anything. By mid-morning we found ourselves in the street with our belongings. We dragged everything to the shopping centre near Jasper Rd. We got to know some Jewish people who owned a shop there. Dad told them about our predicament and they replied they knew all about crazy, mean Kolinski. They allowed us to bring our things inside and dad went to Carlton to find someone to talk to among the new arrivals.

He found one couple, who had bought a shop and dwelling upstairs, in Moonee Ponds. They were letting rooms to pay for it. They were lovely people - he was a barber and the shop was for himself. They occupied one room, and we and two other tenants moved into the others. We all had a lot in common. Finally, we had a roof of our own and were free to do as we liked.

Eva and I went to work, but dad was still trying to get a job. He was then about 51, 52 years old. I will not write about this any more for the moment because the stories could fill another book.

Eva and I would hand over our pay-packets to Mum at the end of the week and she would give us pocket money for fares. It never occurred to us to do otherwise.

The following episode stands out in my mind and I cannot resist telling about it:

I remember taking Ida to the Moonee Ponds State School for the first time. She had never been to a real school before. In Goldkop there was a teacher who gathered all the little kids and taught them Hebrew letters and songs. All she had to do was go downstairs in the same building to their special room they called the 'school'.

When we arrived at this school, we walked into the office and enrolled her, had a nice chat with the principal and walked out into the corridor towards the classroom. I could see Ida getting tense. She looked up and noticed a cross on the wall. She became hysterical - she would not stay. She was screaming at me by now. What have you done? Why did you bring me to this country? Why didn't we go to Israel? She was crying and sobbing all the way home on the tram; I couldn't calm her. Only when she saw mum and cried bitterly on her chest did she calm down. Ida was screaming aloud what we all wanted to scream, but knew better and kept silent, choking inside.

For the next six months we did not unpack our miserable belongings. Everything we did not need immediately stayed in the suitcases under the bed.

We did not think we could live in this vast village. This is not the end of our travels - somehow we will get away from here.

The realization came slowly that we have no means to go anywhere, that this is, after all, a country of plenty; we will not go hungry again. After some exploring, dad found people he knew from nearby and around the region where we used to live in Poland. They came here just before the war started.

The Kurtz family had a lovely house in Carlton and we were often invited there. They became close friends. Mum found a couple of second cousins - the Kahns, the Burstins and the Bars. We became good friends.

Aunt Rywka and family were not too happy either. They lived in the 'Warsaw Centre' - a house belonging to the Jewish Welfare, where many families found refuge (they fared much better than we did). Uncle Jacob's cousin, who sponsored them to come here, was very polite but kept at arm's length.

This, in fact, was the case with most relatives. Anyone who was well situated in the old country would never have given a thought to going to Australia. Only the people who were in poverty, or, for persecution reasons, had to get away from Europe, picked Australia, because it was the only country to which they could get entry.

My Uncle Jacob was a very proud man. He would neither ask nor accept any favours. Too proud to ask for assistance, he took a job in the Ford car plant. The work was hard and the hours long. It took him hours to get there and back, covered in grease. No matter how Rywka tried to get him out of there, he would not budge.

My dad had a Yeshiva education. He was also a modern man. He had a lot of Torah wisdom and knew a story or a joke for every situation. He used to be very entertaining with his Talmud stories, and was a very well-liked man.

But nobody offered him any assistance in finding a job. The same people he socialized with and entertained with his knowledge and wisdom were quite different people when visited in their office or factory. They did not like to give a job to someone they knew, even if they had a dozen of them available, in case one will not be as fast as their more experienced workers, or the pay would be so miserly they would not like you to know about it.

One learned not to go to a friend or acquaintances for a job in the first place or you would soon lose their friendship.

Dad got a job eventually in a shoe factory, preparing the upper parts for the next worker to assemble. His boss was a well-known communal worker. When Yom Kippur came around he paid all the non-Jewish workers for the day off. My dad and a woman, also a newcomer, did not get any. When asked why, he told them that they will be fasting on that day anyway so he does not feel obliged to pay them for the extra day.

Moving to Carlton

The first money we saved up (several hundred pounds) we paid as key-money for renting a miserable, damp cottage in Station St., North Carlton. For us it was an enormous step forward. For the first time in ten years we had a home for ourselves. Carlton was the place where all newcomers congregated at that time. People came to find each other. Jewish restaurants have established themselves, the Kadimah was a meeting place, and life flourished in many ways. It was the immigrant's suburb, and Jews made themselves at home there.

Mum got a part-time job hand-finishing coats and jackets at home for a neighbour, and this helped pay expenses.

Dad discovered a family Elbaum who came from Wyszków or nearby, and had lived here for quite a number of years already. Harry Elbaum knew dad from Wyszków, and a close friendship developed. There were elderly parents, two sons and a daughter, Ruchale. Harry and Ruchale had two children and they lived together with their parents.

After we settled down in our cottage, many young people, mostly friends of Eva, used to come for gatherings. There were Lucy and John, Leah and Jack, Keila, Shifka, Zosia (Kipen), who lived next door with her parents, and many new boys we made friends with all the time. Eva was a beautiful young lady by now and attracted many boyfriends. Ida went to school, where she found many Jewish friends. The Kadimah was a gathering point for cultural evenings, commemorations, etc.

A few months later, we both felt sure that the time was right for me and Izzy to marry. He lived in a rented room, also in Carlton. He too got his job in much the same way we did - in clothing factories, learning something in each one. The clothing factories paid better wages than any other, and one could always find some overtime, which he needed. We would meet only briefly after work. It seemed right that after four years of romancing we would like to be married.

Our Wedding

Dad happened to mention this to the Elbaums. They became excited and suggested the house of a friend of theirs. They insisted that it will be a mitzvah for them to help organize the event, and so we set the date for October 23rd, 1949, just after Succoth, and six months after we landed in Australia.

About two weeks prior to the date, Ruchale Elbaum invited me over to their place for a chat. She took out a huge box, opened it, and among the pile of tissues revealed a most beautiful wedding dress. She asked me to try it on just for the fun of it. I protested, saying that it was too elaborate - too grand for this kind of a wedding; I would not feel like myself. She insisted I try it on anyway. It was a perfect fit on me, and against my red hair it made a beautiful picture. The dress had a long train that needed four bridesmaids to carry. I was not going to have that in any way at all. Ruchale was so enchanted with the way I looked in her dress that she suggested having the train cut off if I would agree to wear it. I could not resist the temptation.

My dad took one look at me in my wedding dress, leaned back his head, and slowly, with a smile on his lips, said to me, *"Pussycat don't walk in the mud."*

We were married in Stone's Shul in Carlton by the then Reverend Rudzki. Izzy, having no relatives, was attended by ('unterfihrers') Mr. & Mrs. Elbaum senior. I stayed in the house of Ruchale's sister, Mrs. Kravat, and her husband drove us to the chuppah. To this day, I am referred to by the Elbaums as *'Kaleshi'* (little bride). Our photo stayed in the photographer's showcase for a few years afterwards. We had a reception for about fifty relatives and friends and new acquaintances.

The next morning we left for our honeymoon to Roller's in Hepburn Springs. All we had between us was 25 pounds; all our belongings fitted into one suitcase. We were in love and very happy. We went to live in a rented room - in a cottage in Drummond street, with the use of the bathroom, shared with a couple and their fifteen year-old son. We paid five shillings extra for keeping a packet of butter and a bottle of milk in their ice box. After some months, life there became unbearable and we found another room to rent above a barber shop, on the corner of Albion st. and Sydney Road. The owners, a couple in their fifties, were lovely, full of wit and humour. We started to enjoy life.

I worked for three years and we saved every penny we could. The first money we saved up was almost enough to put a deposit on a cottage of our own. We gave away key money on the advice of a good friend, an old settled successful businessman, who used to invite us to his home, feeling somewhat paternal towards Izzy.

We needed a guarantee at the bank for 500 pounds in order to be able to buy the cottage we found. It would take us another year to save up. He obviously was not keen to do it for us, as he kept giving us every possible argument why we should not buy it. He thought the interest was too high. The cottage we could have bought for £2000 tripled in value within six months. We ended up in a tiny, upstairs, one-bedroom flat with no hot water and a bath-heater that exploded whenever we tried to light it. With all our savings gone, it took us years to get on our feet again.

On December 22nd, 1952, our first child, a son was born. We named him Abraham (Alan) after Izzy's father. He was beautiful and we were ecstatic. Our little flat with a lively overactive boy was a real trial for me and yet it was a gathering place for family and friends every Sunday. Four years later, on October 26th, 1956, when the Olympic Games took place in Melbourne, we were blessed and delighted with a beautiful little daughter. We named her Sara (Sally) after Izzy's mother.

I was in hospital when the Israel-Egypt war broke out. I cried bitterly expecting the worst. But another miracle happened - tears soon turned to smiles. It took six years living in that little flat until we finally had enough deposit for a very old house in Elwood. It had few conveniences, but it was ours to pay off.

We had many happy and exciting times there. Two dogs, a cat, a rabbit and possums in the garage in the back; no car yet. We celebrated Alan's barmitzvah when we lived there. I still remember my father teaching him the haftorah. Alan made his zeida sing it for him, and he memorized it by playing it first on the piano. Other exciting times were when Alan won the TV 'Showcase' for his brilliant piano playing of the classics. He won a trip around the world, the critics' award, and an appearance on the most prestigious show in New York, the Ed Sullivan Show. He was then thirteen years old, and it was also my first trip, as his chaperone, to the United States, England and Israel.

On our voyage to Australia I had met a lady who told me when I mentioned that the name of my fiancé is Kogosowski that she knew a Szmuel and Vusia Kogosowski in the D.P. camp in Austria. Izzy wrote to the address given to me and learned that Szmuel was on his way to Israel. We later had happy visits with them.

In 1958 we brought out from Poland Izzy's sister and her family. Life had become unbearable for them there. Ethel, her husband David, daughter Aviva and son Barry, settled in Melbourne.

Those were happy times. Alan's barmitzvah was our first big simcha, a time to pause and count our blessings. A source of much pride at our head table were my mother and father, as well as all other family members. The young Rabbi

Chaim Gutnick was there as a friend as well as chairman; all our old and new friends as well. It was an unforgettable evening.

At that time, Alan would go to Elwood Shul every Saturday. He wanted to please his zeida. He would sneak up on him from behind, tap him on the shoulder, and say *Git Shabbes, Zeidish*. My father would later tell us about all the tricks Alan got up to in shul, with a hidden smile on his lips. Once I looked out the window to see Alan teaching his zeida how to do push-ups on the terrace. They were both stretched out side by side, Alan encouraging him to do more push-ups.

Dad had two favourite tunes - *Sheibonu Beis Hamikdosh* and *Mein Shtetele Belz*. He found the sheet music at Cantor's shop and brought it for Alan to play it for him. Another passion was Yiddish books and newspapers from all over the world. Mum would read these as well, and we would hear all the news and funny items on Sundays at lunch.

The Three Daughters Married

Sisters three - and all of us romantics. First and foremost of importance was falling in love. All else was secondary.

Eva married Martin Slomovits in 1954. He was just about the handsomest man in Melbourne, and she was an exceptional beauty. They stood out in any crowd.

Eva and Martin ('Motty' to us) have two children - Johnny and Helen. At the time of writing, they have five adorable grandchildren between them.

Izzy met Stan Gurvis through his business. Stan came here from California, where his parents and sisters made their home many years ago. Stan was here on holiday, touring Australia, and later tried Melbourne to make a business; that was when he met Izzy. Being all alone, Izzy invited Stan to our home for lunch. That's when he met Ida. They became friends, and that later developed into a romance.

Ida and Stan married in 1963. They were given a beautiful wedding with all the trimmings. Stan's parents arrived from Sacramento, California, for the occasion, and we took an instant liking to each other. This was one of the very happy times. Ida and Stan have two sons and a daughter. They had two beautiful barmitzvahs and one batmitzvah, the rest is still to come.

Martin's Story

Martin (Motty) Slyomovits came from a small town in eastern Czechoslovakia, close to the Ukraine, called Tacovo (Tachevo). In 1938, Hungary, with the consent of their German Nazi friends, occupied this part of Czechoslovakia in the same way Poland was allowed to grab a part of northern Czechoslovakia - in the south of Poland, beyond the River Olza, called Zaolzie in Polish. When the Russians drove the Germans out in 1945 they made this part of the country their own and it still belongs to Russia to this day.

When the Nazis marched into Czechoslovakia soon after Poland in 1939, they unleashed every imaginable terror on the Jewish population. Between 1941 and 1942, some 40,000 Jewish people were driven out towards the German-occupied Ukraine, to Kamieniec-Podolsk, and, with plenty of help from the locals, the Nazis slaughtered them all right there. Their bodies were thrown into a mass grave or shoved into the River Dnieper.

Martin's father Yehiel, together with his grandfather Dovid, owned an orchard specializing in growing apples. Yehiel Slyomovits was also the meat inspector for their region. Martin's family, being in Hungary, were left alone until 1944, when they were rounded up and taken to Auschwitz, right on Shavuot - May 25th, 1944. Mother Helen, father, two older sisters, Martin, fifteen years old, two younger children (a sister and a brother), a grandmother and a 92 year-old great-grandmother, on his mother's side. One of the photographs in this book shows Martin beside his father just after being unloaded off the wagon train in Birkenau. Only a few years ago we saw a documentary on our TV screens when Martin recognized himself and his father there. He got in touch with the TV station and eventually obtained from them the photograph taken from this programme.

The following is Martin's account of that day:

As they were prompted out of their wagons, they were lined up in front of the infamous Dr. Mengele in his full 'glory' Nazi uniform, pointing his finger left or right. Martin's two older sisters, Etta and Hanna, went to the right and into a work camp. His mother, the younger sister and brother, grandmother and great-grandmother, went to the left. Martin never saw them again. They were sent straight to the gas chamber. To this day Martin observes May 25th as their yahrtzeit.

Martin's father was sent to a work camp inside Auschwitz. Martin being a strong, tall boy of fifteen, was sent out of Auschwitz to the Jawotna coal mines, about thirty kilometres from Katowice. At the end of December 1944, in the middle of winter,

the Russian armies started advancing rapidly. Many guards of Jawotna were ordered to take all their prisoners on a march to Germany. Six thousand sick and emaciated people in rags were driven by their henchmen in freezing temperatures and rain. Whoever dropped, fell behind, sat down because they could not walk any further, or stepped aside to relieve themselves, were shot on the spot. Some tried to support others to keep them upright, and marched on.

After ten or twelve days and nights they were led into a camp called Blehhammer. The Germans became very nervous. Sometimes they disappeared for a while but came back later to go on a shooting spree among their captives. Several times they ran away and later came back again. In the end there were 1,500 souls left out of the 6,000 at the beginning of this death march.

At one stage when the guards disappeared, Martin, together with another boy, made a run for their lives out of Blehhammer camp. They kept out of sight, moving along the countryside in the direction of the advancing Russians. They were somewhere in no man's land when the Russian army swept by. The two boys distrusted them and kept to themselves, hiding and making their way slowly east towards Czechoslovakia. They reached the liberated city of Kraków and found a small Jewish community centre that had started to operate. Many stragglers from the camps or from the forests, etc. came here to look for shelter and to register their names on lists.

From there Martin and his companion set out to make their way home on foot. It took some six weeks, sleeping in the open in freezing temperatures, his feet frozen inside his boots. He could not take them off. He did not know whether his father or anyone else of the family had survived.

Yehiel Slyomovits did survive Auschwitz and came by Kraków, where he found his son's name on the registry lists. He too, had started for their home town, thinking that this would be the place Motty (as he called him) would be heading for.

Sure enough, he found Motty asleep with his boots on. Upon enquiring, he found out that his son's boots were stuck to his feet and he could not take them off. He set about cutting the boots inch by inch off the feet, removing parts of his skin and toenails with them. With the help of a doctor, he knew they had started a fight to save Motty's feet. For a long, long time, Martin was not able to wear anything but very big slippers. They eventually succeeded. I guess youth triumphed again.

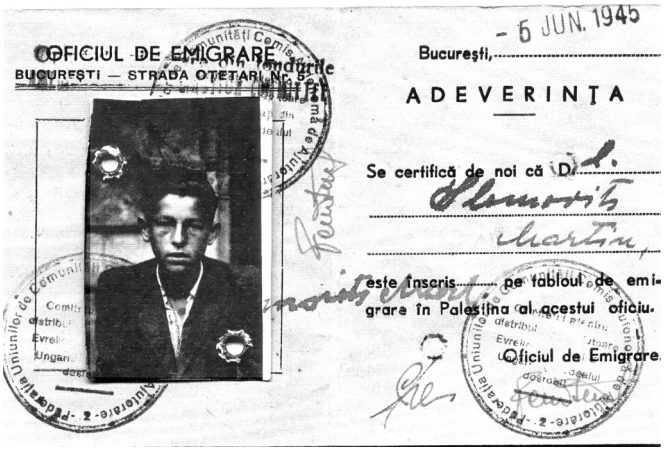
Sisters Etta and Hanna also survived Auschwitz and came back. All together they made their way to Israel. Etta still lives in Tel Aviv and has several Sabra grandchildren. Hanna passed away some years ago of cancer. His father died suddenly in Israel in 1954 at the age of fifty-nine.

Martin came to Australia to visit his Aunt and Uncle Malinowski (his father's sister). They too, were dragged through the death camps. Teresienstadt, Auschwitz and Birkenau. Martin's grandfather on his father's side died in Teresienstadt. After the liberation the Malinowskis made their way to Australia. I assume it was destiny that he and Eva should meet.

I have known Martin for some thirty-six years now. He never talked much about himself in any detail. We were always careful with questions that might touch on a raw nerve. Only recently, when Izzy and I were invited to lunch - there were only the four of us - Eva brought out a book full of pictures, which their son Johnny had found in Jerusalem and sent here. It is a collection of photographs that a German soldier had taken for his own interest and given to his woman friend. He must have been an expert photographer. These were later found by coincidence somewhere, by a Jewish woman, who kept them for many years and would not part with them. Later the Nazi hunter Beate Klarsfeld tracked her to the United States and convinced her to have these photographs published in a book by Yad Vashem.

Clearly shown in these pictures are all of Martin's family among all of the residents of Tachevo, having been driven out of their homes, clutching bundles with belongings. His ninety-two year-old great-grandmother was among all the other members of his family. It was for the first time that we heard what happened to those people.

Can anyone wonder why Martin cannot give up smoking?


OFICIUL DE EMIGRARE
BUCUREŞTI — STRADA OTETARI, Nr. 5

- 6 JUN. 1945

Bucureşti,.....

ADEVERINŢA

Se certifică de noi că D. ...

...

este înscris ... pe tabloul de emigrare în Palestina al acestui oficiu.

Oficiul de Emigrare.

After the Liberation

Yechiel and Helen Slyomovits Martin's parents

On arrival in Auschwitz - Martin's father (centre), Martin

Our Children

Our son Alan is a graduate of the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music and Diploma from the Royal College of Music in London. He also studied in Paris and Warsaw. He won many awards and prizes including a Churchill Fellowship. He set his heart early on for a career as a concert pianist, despite all our arguments against it. However, he is a strong character and we lost the battle. He loves music to the point of worship.

This has taken him away from us since he was seventeen, with occasional visits and a few intervals when he obtained his university degree. We rarely see our brilliant, talented, witty, sophisticated son. We keep in touch mostly by telephone lately. He gave us some of the biggest thrills of our lives, but he grew up too fast and got away from the family much too early.

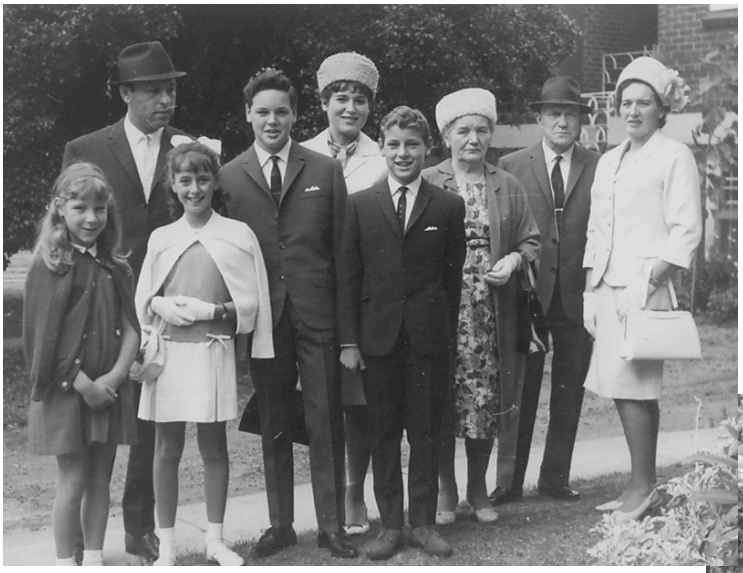
Our daughter Sally was always a quiet achiever. A bright and sparkling personality, she too was taught to play the piano, as well as ballet, singing and modern dancing. When it came to picking a career - she was an excellent student - she chose to become a doctor of medicine. Sally graduated three days after her wedding to her handsome young lawyer Steven Abromwich. They provided us with the best gift we could have wished for - our two adorable granddaughters, Nicole and Michelle (Nicky & Mishy).

Shmuel came from Israel for the wedding, and his only son, Avi, a Sabra, together with his lovely wife Tobie and daughter Mendi, have visited us twice so far.

Ida & Stan

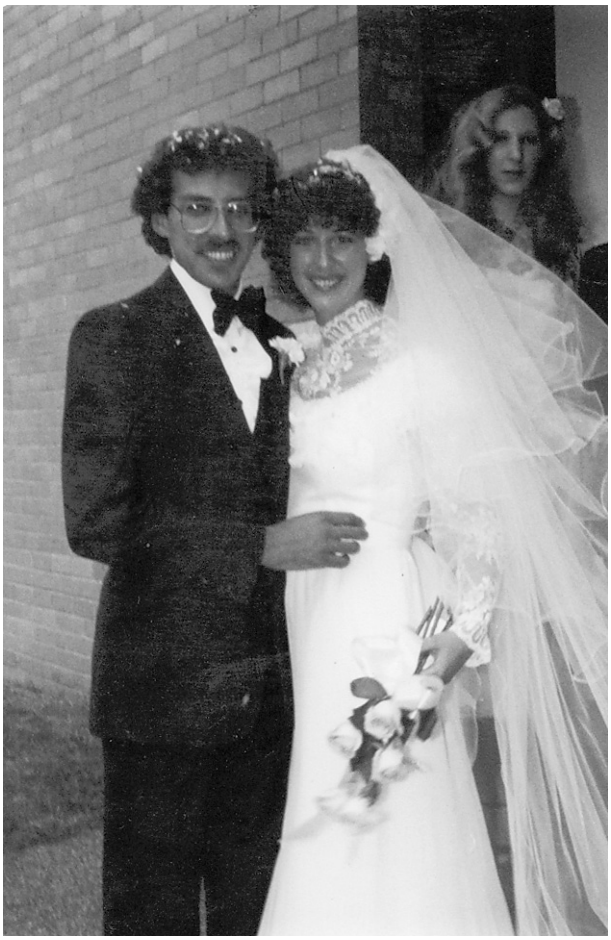
Eva & Motty

Hanna & Izzy



Alan's Barmitzvah, 1966

Danny, Ida, Karen, Stan and Mark on Mark's Barmitzvah



Steven and Sally

Alan at 16

Helen, Sally, Johnny, Alan

Nicole

Michelle

Karen

The Years in Business

The man Izzy worked for - Maurice Tych (orig. Tychbrocher) - came to Australia from Paris. He dressed immaculately and considered himself to be a gentleman in the French tradition. He lived in France for some years, migrating there from Poland and survived the war in hiding. His wife was not so lucky. She perished in a concentration camp.

Maurice was a tailor by trade, and he opened a factory here. He would make up ladies' suits for warehouses. In 1956 there was a slow-down in the clothing industry and Maurice found himself without work for his eight - ten employees. Maurice was an older man who liked dating young women and take things a little slower.

It was then that he suggested to Izzy that the two of them should go into partnership, buying their own materials. Maurice would be in charge of production and Izzy would go out and sell to the shops. Izzy liked the idea and they decided to try.

Izzy proved to be a very good salesman. Orders started to come in. After a while Maurice, the father-figure with a liking for art classes and compliments from young girls, started going easier and slower, while Izzy was working harder and longer hours. He would travel interstate twice a year with new samples, and I would come into the factory to help out, looking after things here. Sometimes, especially during travel time, he would arrive in the factory late in the evening and I would meet him there and help unpack, etc. We did not become rich, but we could save a little and lived comfortably. We built our present home - our castle - in 1968, after we finished paying off the house in Elwood.

After Maurice departed in 1972, Izzy continued on his own for a number of years. He was well-liked by his clients and devoted employees. He continued making good quality ladies suits and coats. Steven's father, Bill Abromwich, and Sally's father Izzy Kogosowski ('Kay' in business) happened to be in the same line of manufacturing - competition. They knew each other vaguely from Flinders Lane and would greet each other with a nod. Little did they suspect that they would end up being machatonim (in-laws). Sally and Steven have a poster on their wall from an advertising page where their fathers' suits are advertised side by side.

When it was time for Izzy to close down the business and retire in 1982, he did so reluctantly. Times have changed and there was no other choice. The best way I can sum up Izzy's business career is by quoting the following letter from one of his clients:

Dear Izzy,

I was very sorry to read that you have decided to close your factory, but I am sure that you have given the matter considerable thought and hope that your decision will ultimately benefit both you and your family. We have known each other virtually since we moved into dresses, suits, etc. I remember well the day you brought an armful of samples into our first floor showroom for Mrs G. S. and myself to see. Izzy, you impressed me then as you do now with your genuine nature.

I am sure that the trade is losing one of its gentlemen traders.

Signed, Robert, Holstens Pty. Ltd., Adelaide

Going back to the early 60s, my father eventually got a job with the Australian Jewish News. This would take him into many homes, and people got to know him for his wisdom, wit and entertainment. He bought a little car and drove around all over Melbourne wherever Jewish people lived. He would be called to take advertisements, announcements of all sorts, etc. Sometimes he would write articles for his paper. Mum and Dad moved from Carlton to a flat in Elwood, close to the Elwood Shul, and on Thursday nights dad would go there to study Gemarra with the then youthful Rabbi Chaim Gutnick. We were members of the Elwood Shul and still are. Dad liked Chaim Gutnick a lot, and so do we.

Many times my mother would ring me at 10 pm to say that she is worried dad hasn't come home yet - he left hours ago. I would reassure her, saying *"You know what he is doing - he is sitting in someone's house telling stories and jokes from the Gemarra or other sources and he forgot what time it is."* His hosts loved and encouraged him. He had some very funny tales about Rabbis and Chasidim.

When his health began to fail he would not retire. The thought of receiving the pension did not appeal to him. So long as he could get up in the morning and drive off on his rounds, meeting people, he would forget himself. When he eventually gave up work it was only eighteen months before he died suddenly at the age of seventy-two, in 1970.

It has been twenty-one years now since my father departed this world, yet still, hardly a week goes by that I don't meet someone who would say to me: *"You are Maier Prager's daughter - aren't you? We will never forget that man. He gave us so much pleasure and he made us laugh."*

After dad passed away, our mother gave up on herself. She really did not want to go on living. Her memory became vague and her speech became muddled (a result of little unnoticeable strokes, we were told). Our beautiful mum passed away two years later, at the age of seventy, murmuring the names of her lost sisters.

Our Uncle Jacob had a slight heart attack in the early 1960s, but as usual did not complain to anyone. When we found him in bed during a visit to their flat, he insisted he is suffering with the flu. A little while later he died suddenly of a heart attack at the age of sixty-four. Aunt Rywka lived on for a number of years in loneliness, disappointed by the twist of fate.

Universities were not free when Halinka was due to enter. Rywka and Jacob did their utmost to enable her to attend. It meant everything to them. After graduating, her beloved Halinka (affectionately called *'Dziubek'*) went overseas, and except for a couple of visits never came back. Nathan was married and had a family of his own. He did all he could for her. After Nathan's, we were her only family. She lived alone and often called us just to chat. She used to tell me I need to practice my voice and not forget my speech. I always made time for my Ciocia. She came to every seder on Passover and every other Yom-Tov. She knew she was always welcome at all our homes and would often come as she felt like it. In later years she would call me whenever she needed me. She too, has been gone some years now.

Travelling Overseas

Izzy and I went overseas three times together and twice on our own. The most emotional experience was arriving in Israel for the first time. On El-Al - an Israeli airline!

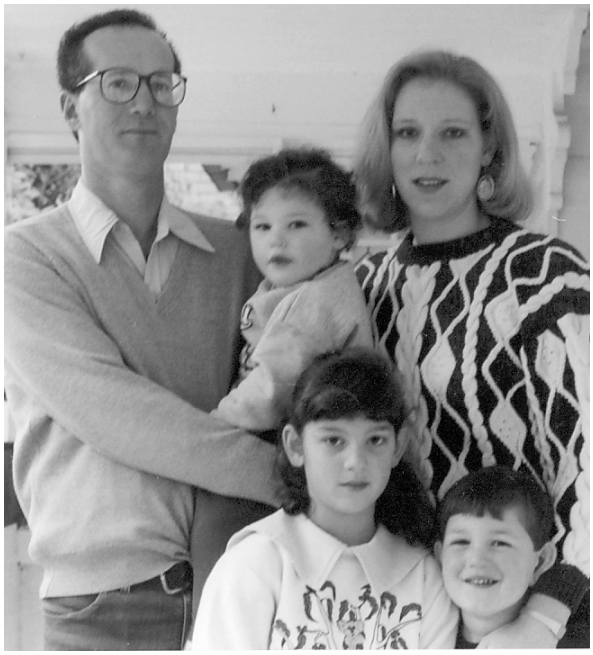
A Jewish soldier with a yarmulka on his head and a gun in his hand? A Jewish policeman or woman? The Israeli Parliament - Knesset? Hassidim dancing at the Wailing Wall on erev Shabbat? Me in front of the Wailing Wall touching the stone with my forehead and pushing a note into the crevices? It seemed so unreal. I had to tell myself that I was not dreaming. My only regret was that my mother and father did not make it to see and feel this.

On one visit, In 1972, Izzy and Alan were there together. They explored every little corner of the country. The film we have of that visit shows a delighted Alan roaming around with his dad, taking a dip in the cold sea in winter in Eilat and enjoying every minute of it.

Later on we visited Alan twice in London and in Florida, in 1983 and 1989. We stayed in Palm Beach, which is a breathtakingly beautiful place, with his friend and manager Juliette de Marcellus, and her mother Countess de Marcellus. Juliette is also the music critic of the Palm Beach newspaper. We were treated like royalty by all their friends and met many interesting people.

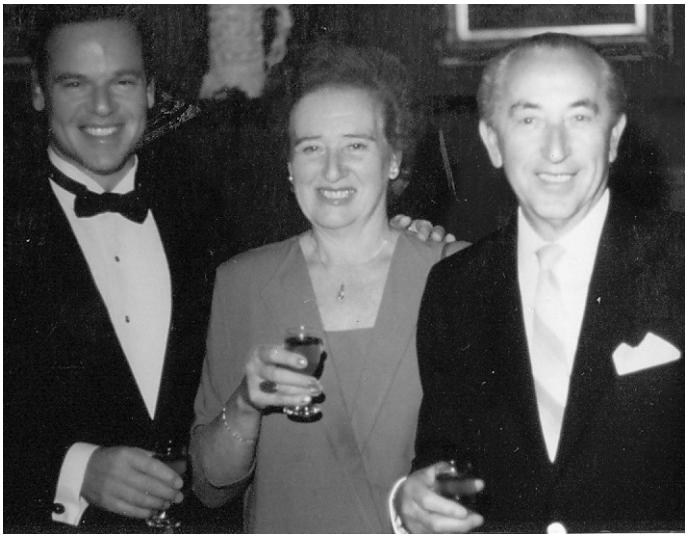
We visited family in New York and Boston - warm, wonderful, dear people. We loved being with them for a little while. From there we went to Europe - Paris, Zurich, Venice, Vienna, Budapest, and from there - we finally made it back to our roots, back to Wyszków.

Steven, Sally, Alan, Nicole and Michelle, 1990



Doron, Joshua, Helen, Avital & Jonathan, 1991

Izzy, Hannah, Johnny, Efrat, Adar
Tel-Aviv, 1989



London - June 1989

On Kever Avot

It was the middle of May, 1989. We arrived in Warsaw at 8 am. It was a beautiful sunny morning. I felt tense and full of trepidation. I really came back? After forty-three years. To the country I vowed never to set foot in again? However, lately, for the last two years, I felt the urge to say a prayer at Auschwitz and walk the path where I assume my grandmother Hinda Hercberg, my aunts, uncles, cousins and family walked for the last time to their final fate.

My father, Jacov Meier, did not make it back, but I am here, and I think he would have been pleased. He believed in prayer, in respect, love for his family and his fellow men. He believed in the Almighty, but like many of us I think, he was shaken by the horrors that have been committed on His Chosen Ones - six million of our Jewish people. He was still studying the holy books regularly, trying maybe to find an answer. I don't think he found any; he never said so. He was taken from us suddenly without time for goodbyes - far away from the country he came from, in Melbourne, Australia, where, like many of his generation, he never felt at home.

We were met at Warsaw airport by a pre-arranged driver and guide. What a treasure he turned out to be! He took care of us every step of the way.

Straight from the airport, he decided we had no time to waste (three days is not enough). He took us to all the monuments where the Jewish Ghetto used to be. The monument with Mordechai Anielewicz had special meaning for me, as he came from my home town, Wyszków, and was the leader of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Then we moved to the entombed monument after the bunker where he and his fighters died.

We followed the path of misery and pain (*'droga menczenstwa'*) to the *umschlagplatz*, from where the people were sent off to the death camps. In front of this square now stands a huge white marble wall - split in half - with thousands of Jewish first names only, carved into it. Every possible name of the victims who passed through here - not thousands but hundreds of thousands. We visited the Ghetto museum - what a chilling sight there was in one room - the sight of the Ghetto in flames was recreated, the final stand, it looked so real.

After that we visited the Nozik Synagogue, well looked after. Later we drove to the Jewish cemetery, where we saw monuments six hundred years old of famous writers and philosophers. Somehow the cemetery was not damaged. We met a group of Dutch young people there with a guide who spoke to them in German.

They were studying Jewish history, they said. There among the tall grass we found the monument to Janusz Korczak with his children. He has one in his arms, one by the hand and the others following by his side. Not at all a fitting site for this one, we were told by the driver.

Next he took us to the most famous part of Warsaw, where the palaces of kings stand, surrounded by the most beautiful sculptured gardens, the Lazienki. This is the gathering place for outdoor concerts, plays and many cultural activities. Long ago already they were the pride of the people of Warsaw.

It was strange not to see one Jewish face in Warsaw, which used to be like in New York. It gave us the shivers. This was the end of our first day in Warsaw. We checked into our hotel, mentally and physically exhausted, at 6 pm. The next morning we set out for Treblinka, via Wyszków.

It is hard to describe the feelings and emotions that overcame me. Traveling by car, the countryside so very familiar, we passed little towns and villages with names so embedded in my memory - Radzimin, Jadow, Lochow - how often I used to hear my mum and dad refer to one relative or another who lived there. It was hard to imagine them empty of Jewish life. The all-too-familiar sight of the river Bug, crossing the bridge where we used to stroll on Shabbos afternoons. It did not look any different from all those years ago. I caught a glimpse of the bridge where the train used to cross not far away and I felt like any moment I will hear its whistle.

I became very tense on entering the town. It looked strangely familiar, yet so much smaller than I remembered. The town square was empty where there used to be hustle and bustle and all Jewish shops, one next to the other, urrounding it. I can't remember seeing anyone walking on the footpaths. I caught a glimpse of a handwritten sign on a piece of cardboard in one of the windows - *'Cukiernia'* (meaning all sorts of sweets) - in where there used to be Pszetycki's shop of all sorts of imaginable goodies.

We drove straight to the street and the house we used to live in. Where there was an entrance to the stairs there was none now. There was a wire fence right up to the wall surrounding the empty block next door which belonged to our neighbours, Jewish horse-traders. They had a house and shop in the front and huge stables for the horses in the back. I used to go to their well for water and watch them train the most beautiful horses. Now it was overgrown with grass.

I walked into the shop below the apartment we had occupied to enquire about the people that used to own this house, and I was shooed away in an abrupt manner. I rang the doorbell of the house on the next corner. A man came out and I struck up

a conversation regarding the people that used to live here. He told me that he bought the dilapidated house and built himself this new one. I turned the conversation to the school I used to go to and he smiled saying he too went to the same school; he was seven years old then, and because we could be schoolmates he invited me and Izzy in for a cup of coffee. Another man appeared - he introduced him as his son-in-law. We did not see any woman about. While I was having my coffee, our host told us that Wyszków was completely destroyed during the war because of one Pole who killed a German because of a Jew.

The coffee got stuck in my throat. We thanked our host and walked out. I was frightened in this small town where a stranger sticks out like a sore thumb. I was paralyzed with fear, especially when I recalled the story of the two men who survived the death camps and came back here to have a look at their homes and were killed by the locals on sight.

I'd had enough - *"Let's get out of here,"* we told the driver. We travelled on to Treblinka, only a couple of hours from here, where there were no barracks of any kind, just a huge tower-like chimney where they used to bring the people, kill them, and stack them on the fire that burned day and night around the clock. Hundreds of thousands perished there.

As we walked in the gate looking in the distance we saw thousands of stones, each one a monument to the population of a whole town or village of Jews who were put to death there. The stones were the shape of people in shrouds. In the middle stands the tower-like chimney which the Germans tried to destroy before they ran away. It was reconstructed to its original size. The whole place is a shrine now, making money from the many tourists, who, like me, come to visit (on 'Kever Avot') the graves of our ancestors.

When we looked beyond the stone images we saw a beautiful forest and most peaceful countryside. It was hard to believe that such heinous, horrendous crimes have been committed here.

We came out of there completely drained, and were grateful for the group of Israeli high school kids, with their teachers and banners, whom we had met at the entrance and teamed up with to go inside this place of horror.

On the way back to Warsaw we had to pass Wyszków again. I plucked up the courage and asked the driver to stop near the park where we used to go gliding on sleds and where our beautiful high school building used to stand. There was no building; the ruins were still there. In the middle stood a hump surrounded by a lot of rubble, and an old man was sitting in the midst of it. The park was still beautiful, though.

Coming out, I glanced across the road where our shul used to stand. I could see ruins and one concrete post strutting out. I did not go across. I was too tense, as if the ground was burning under my feet, and I wanted to run away from here. We got in the car and drove past the same police-station sign - along the street that used to be throbbing with Jewish life and shops, one next to the other; one had been uncle Abe's. An attempt to restore them was obvious but they were old, drab and lifeless. We drove on in silence to our hotel in Warsaw for the night.

Next morning, early, we set out for the eight-hour journey to Auschwitz. It was a sunny, bright spring morning. We drove along a modern well-made highway with forests all along on either side. The landscape so familiar, the trees tall and straight, evenly spaced, as if planted by hand. We saw peasants working in the fields, just like I remembered them from my childhood. Today, many of them were dressed in their Sunday best and on their way to church. It happened to be a religious holiday.

The driver, anticipating a big procession to the shrine of the Madonna of Czestochowa, took a detour, and we finally arrived after midday to those gates we have seen so many times on the screen and in publications - with the all-too-well-known inscription above the gate '*Arbeit Macht Frei*'.

Here I am my dear Buba (grandmother), aunts, uncles, cousins, etc, 45 years onwards, but my memory of you is as vivid as if I would have looked at you yesterday.

We became very tense. The driver, a very gentle father-figure who took a liking to us (he sent us postcards with Rosh Hashana greetings ever since), took out a thermos with hot tea and insisted we have a drink before we go inside because, he argued, you will not want anything after.

We walked through the little office at the side of the entrance gate and paid the entrance fee. Because of the holiday, there were few people there. The driver accompanied us, he has been here countless times before and knew the staff. We went through each building, where we saw mountains of eyeglasses. A mountain of artificial limbs and crutches. A huge mountain of toothbrushes, dentures, utensils. A most distressing mountain of human hair, on top of which lay a blonde head of hair with a long plait perfectly intact, as though it had been shaved off in one piece. I cannot erase this one from my mind.

Next we went to the Jewish building where we have seen the most horrifying display of exhibits and pictures taken by the Germans of their victims in poses of agony. This was supplemented by two five-minute video shows, switched on for us by

one of the staff. Izzy and I huddled together, holding on tightly to each other. We could not cry - we just felt stony cold.

Before we came to the exit we entered a little room where below the floor there was a small box-like enclosure filled with a small pile of human bones, lit up from inside and covered with a glass top. As we stood there looking down an *Eil Mol Harahamim* flowed out of the box, the sound of which we are not likely to forget ever.

From there we got in the car to drive some three kilometres further, to Birkenau. There were signs on the roadside with the writing 'Brzezinka', meaning *'little young Birch tree'*. It took me some time to catch on that Brzezinka is Polish for Birkenau. Nothing - but nothing - has prepared us for the enormity of that place and the crimes committed there. After all the films, photos, books we have read - this was bigger and more horrendous than we could have imagined.

We walked along the ramps where the trains unloaded their victims, between two ravines filled with water so they could not get across to run anywhere. We entered the barracks, which are impossible to describe. We walked all the way to the other end, where the crematoria stood, obviously hand-destroyed. In Auschwitz there was one only crematorium left intact, and we were able to walk inside and see all the perfected methods of destruction on display. I felt my blood curdle. In one place there is a huge sculpture, in white stone or marble, depicting life-size people huddled in a group, being driven into the gas chamber.

We were the only ones there now including the driver. We were shivering but no tears came. We walked right down to the end of the perimeter where there was erected a huge monument made into a wall of burned logs; below it were laid out tablets with inscriptions in every language - *NEVER AGAIN*.

I often wondered why the glorious Allied pilots could not find the constantly-smoking chimneys and drop a few bombs on them? We glanced at the black swamp-like space behind the crematoria; it looked like a lake full of ash - which it was.

FOR US IT WAS TIME TO LEAVE THIS PLACE.

It was too late to make the trip back to Warsaw and we were booked to stay in a hotel overnight in nearby Kraków. It felt so good to get into a warm bath and bed. It had been a very long day.

Next morning, our guide took us for a brief look at this famous city of Polish kings, and where there was once a large thriving Jewish community. We went to visit the large Synagogue, which had survived intact, and is now a museum filled with many treasures and symbols depicting Jewish culture and learning, but there was not one Jewish guide to show us around. Next we visited the small shul nearby, the 'Rema', very famous, we are told. It is cared for by a couple of ancient women. One took us behind the shul where there still exists an ancient burial place where a famous Rabbi, scholar and wise man is buried. His name was Moses Isserles, and he dates back to the 16th century. The inscription on his tombstone is perfectly clear.

In the courtyard we met about eight more characters, who congregated to watch us. They looked like characters from Fiddler on the Roof in Anatevka. We handed around some money and moved on.

Next we visited the famous castle of the Kings, the Vawel. It looked just like we have seen and studied in our history books. Next we went to see the Sukiennice. It is something resembling an exhibition place, with a very famous, ornate facade and many little shops next to each other, selling arts and crafts from all over the region - beautiful embroideries, carved boxes and other items, famous Krakowianka dolls in national costumes, etc. It was fascinating.

I used to belong to a dancing group at school. We were taught to dance the Polka, Mazurkas and Krakowiaks. On special occasions we would perform dressed in the same colourful dresses with ribbons of many colours flowing from our shoulders or head garlands. Looking at those dolls brought it all back. However, whatever sentiments I felt for a minute soon disappeared and I was happy to get out of there to start our journey back to Warsaw, arriving at the hotel in the early evening.

Out Of The Darkness

Early the next morning our guide and by now friend took us to the airport and out we flew to Amsterdam and from there to London to meet Alan.

What a relief and joy it was to be here. The following evening we attended a concert of Alan's at Sotheby's (the famous antique auctioneers) among a beautiful crowd of elegantly dressed people. This was followed by a reception for a selected number of friends and associates, at a luxurious hotel suite. The catering was superb, like nothing I have ever seen or tasted in my entire life. Izzy and I were made a big fuss over. Everyone there adored Alan and his talent and they wanted to meet and talk to his mum and dad.

We had a glorious week in London, seeing Alan every day. We had several invitations to dinner parties with important and influential people. During this time it happened to be Shavuot and we decided to go to the Marble Arch Synagogue for the morning service. We walked in. My bag was checked in the foyer, Izzy was downstairs with the men and I went upstairs to the women. The ark was open and in front of, it stood a young, tall, blond Rabbi - Chazan. He started singing in a beautiful voice. It was like someone would have opened the floodgates. I felt tears, flowing freely out of my eyes, down my face uncontrollably. All the accumulated tensions of the past weeks came out at once.

After a few more adventures, we said a tearful farewell to Alan and flew out of London on El Al to Tel Aviv and into the arms of our nephews Johnny and Avi, Tobi, Rachel and Zvi, and of course Shmuel and his lovely wife Ania.

As on previous visits, Israel is a healer for our souls. We had two glorious weeks of sunshine and family warmth and laughter, followed by tears saying goodbye.

It was the middle of July when we returned home to our precious family, and hugs and kisses from our adorable granddaughters and Sally and Steven naturally.

Eva's son Johnny has made Israel his home and has two Sabra children. Her daughter Helen with her husband and three children are leaving soon to spend some time there also. Ida's son Mark left these shores for the USA and made his home in San Francisco. Our own son, Alan, has been away so long, he is only an occasional visitor here. So far our family has remained small but close and loving. We love getting together on festive occasions, especially for the Passover Seder.

We love it when Karen and Danny take over the singing of Hagadah passages in new tunes. We are grateful for the new little voices singing the four questions (kashes). I still feel that I have no better friends than my two sisters.

After all these years I still don't feel completely at home in Australia, even though I love this country. Everything that concerns Israel concerns us as well. I have worked very hard all these years, together with a wonderful group of friends (my second family) to help our people through WIZO. But this is another story that could fill a book of its own.

August 19th 1991

As I reached these last lines, the news is coming through radio and TV that the beginning of the end of Communism has begun in the U.S.S.R.

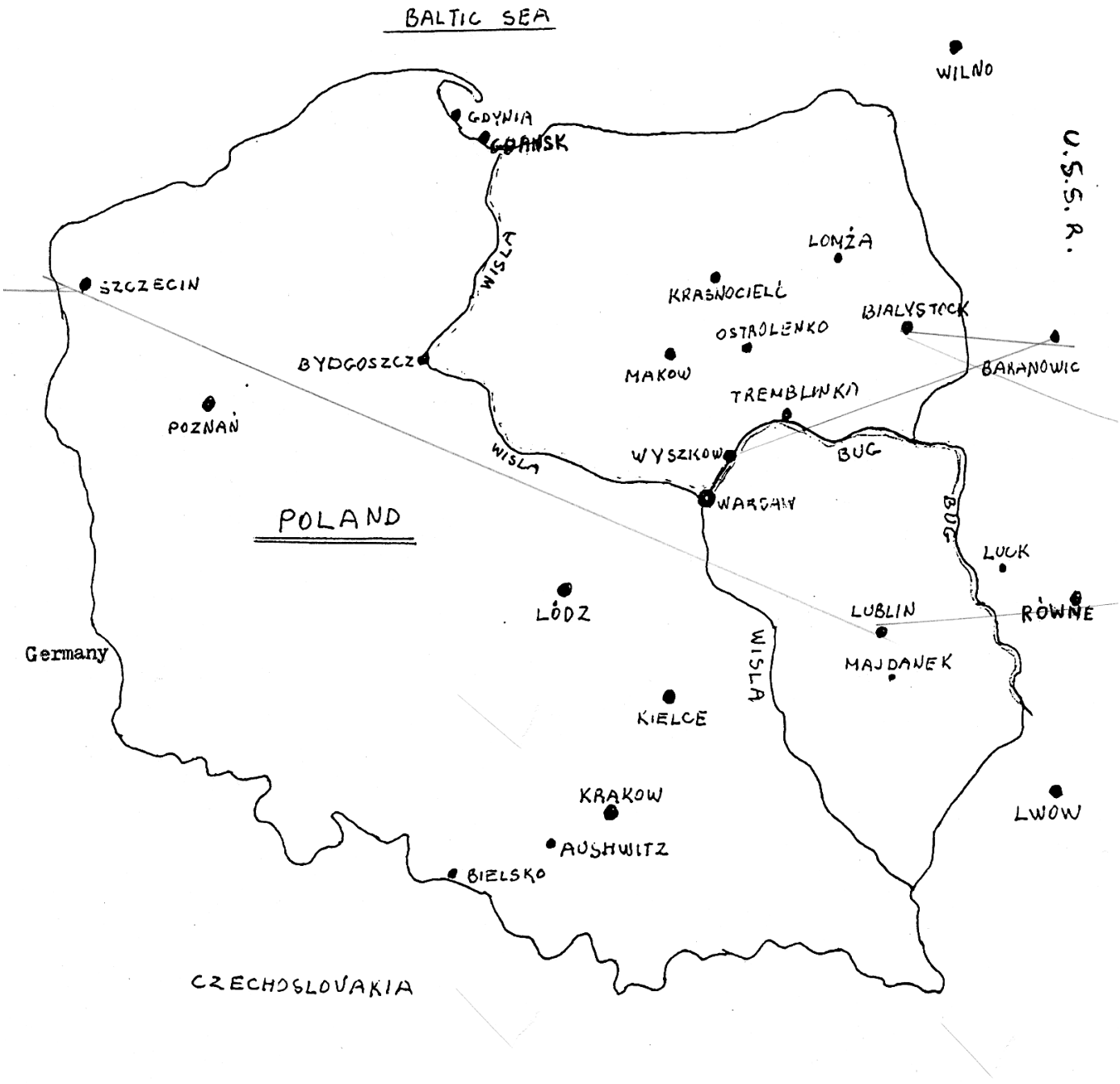
A coup is in progress to topple Mikhail Gorbachev. The 19th to 22nd of August 1991 - three days that shook the world. It also shook our whole being. Izzy and I are listening to the radio well into the night.

WE NEVER EXPECTED THIS TO HAPPEN IN OUR LIFETIME.

Today is Wednesday, October 30th, 1991.

It is also the start of the Middle East conference in Madrid.

Perhaps, there is hope - that our grandchildren might inherit a safer world.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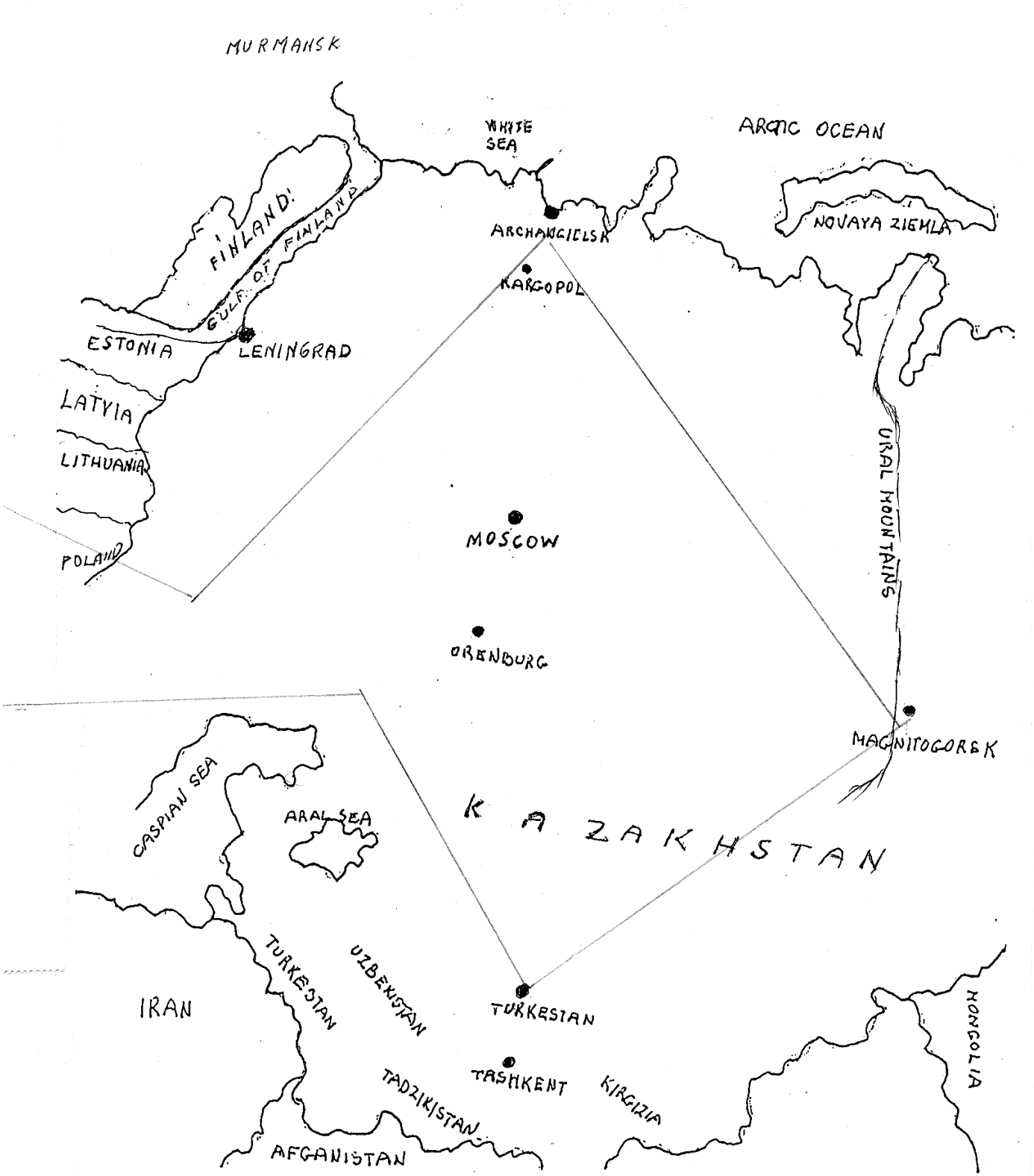
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MONGOLIA

UNITED STATES
HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM

January 13, 1994

Hanna Kogosowski
7 Bealibo Rd.
South Caulfield Vic 3162
AUSTRALIA

Dear Ms. Kogosowski:

I am in receipt of your personal narrative, The Times of My Life which you were good enough to donate to our Library. Such personal stories are a very important part of our collection and I am very happy to include it here. On behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, I would like to thank you for your donation to our Museum.

Enclosed, please find a bookplate for your use. If you like, you can fill it out and send it to us. We will place it in your work which has been included in our personal narratives collection.

Again, thank you for your contribution to our Library. It is through efforts such as yours that we are able to fulfill our mission of remembrance and education.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Koenig

Elizabeth Koenig
Director of the Library

SURVIVORS OF THE
SHOAH
VISUAL HISTORY FOUNDATION™

13 February 1997

Hanna Kogosowski
7 Bealiba Rd.
South Caulfield
Victoria 3162
Australia

Dear Mrs. Kogosowski,

In sharing your personal testimony as a survivor of the Holocaust, you have granted future generations the opportunity to experience a personal connection with history.

Your interview will be carefully preserved as an important part of the most comprehensive library of testimonies ever collected. Far into the future, people will be able to see a face, hear a voice, and observe a life, so that they may listen and learn, and always remember.

Thank you for your invaluable contribution, your strength, and your generosity of spirit.

All my best,

Steven Spielberg
Chairman

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The last time happy together - April 16th, 2006
Eva was taken from us too soon, on June 5th, 2006

Melbourne, Australia
October 1991

Every word, every feeling and emotion, is true,
as it ws experienced by me and every one of
the people named in this book.
Hanna Kogosowski is a wife, mother and grandmother,
the recipient of the REBECCA SIEFF award for service to
the cause of WIZO.

Dear Hanna,

How can I thank you? It's been a long time since I have been so moved, so touched by anything. The emotions you stirred in me are indescribable. I couldn't put the book down, and I cried. It filled me such pain, and at the same time joy and pride, over the sheer indestructability of your spirit, your dignity. You have honoured the people who died. They live on because of your words. This is an exciting, important piece of work.

- Halina Margan, New Orleans, USA

Dear Mrs. Kogosowski,

In sharing your personal testimony as a survivor of the Holocaust, you have granted future generations the opportunity to experience a personal connection with history. Thank you for your invaluable contribution, your strength, and your generosity of spirit

- Steven Spielberg,
Chairman, Visual History Foundation,
Los Angeles, California, USA

Dear Hanna,

I read your whole book this morning at work, and many times over again. I am so glad you wrote it. It is a fantastic document and I will treasure it and keep it for my children.

- Helen, Doron, Avital, Jonathan and Joshua, Israel

Dear Hanna,

Thank you so much for the opportunity of reading your book.. I found it a most engaging and thought-provoking account of what is a saga of survival in modern times. I must admit I liked very much the feeling of reading from the author's original manuscript. This gave your work a realism that is surely not possible with other forms of literature. This story should reach a wider audience - a wonderful account of survival and rebirth.

- Marcus Rose, Melbourne, Australia

Dear Mrs. Kogosowski,

I feel honoured that you lent me a copy to read this book. It was very moving and real, and obviously from the heart, and I feel this is a story the likes of which should be compulsory reading for all schoolchildren, to make them appreciate the sort of society we live in and how lucky we are.

- Paul Lethlean, Melbourne, Australia