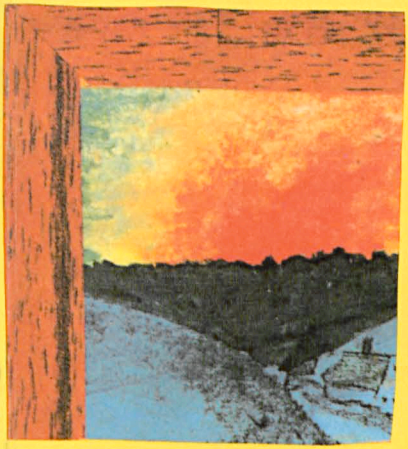
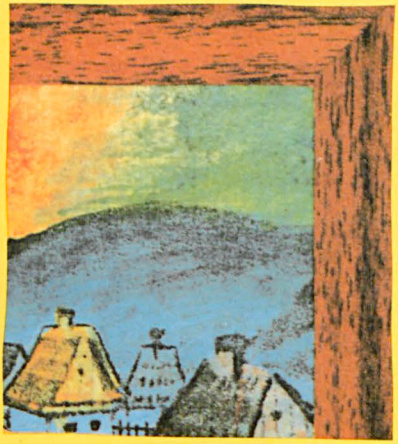
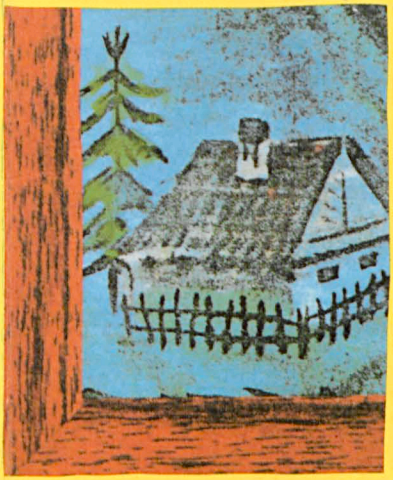
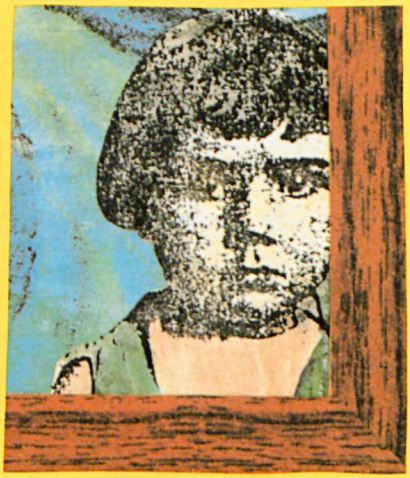
Stella Tzur









Suppose it Happened to Your Child

Pour mes Soeurs bien aimées
de Votre petite Soeur
Stella
24/XII - 72 - 95

Then said I unto them, ye see the evil case that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: Come and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach.

Nehemia 2:18-19

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SUPPOSE IT HAPPENED TO YOUR CHILD

(Memoirs of the "Shoa")

by Stella Tzur

Dedicated to the rescuers and to Alice Arbel, Norma Harari and Deborrah, with gratitude for their help in translating, editing and typing my work and to all "my children," suffering and searching for truth and love today.

Stella

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I first began to write these memoirs at the request of the Prioress of the Carmelite Monastery in Czestochowa where I lived in 1961 and I kept writing down notes and ideas till, with the help of my friends, it took this present form.

Everything in this book is the truth as I lived, saw and felt it at the time. Life is dynamic and we and our perspectives change as we grow older. I beg your indulgence, my intent is not to hurt the sensibilities of anyone. A few of the names have been changed for the sake of the privacy of those involved.

(1929)

This photo presents my daughter of 4 years of name „Stella".
Photos of me and my wife I shall send you on require.—
With regards
Your
Shoolem
S. Silberstein
Lodz, Cegielniana 26 3.VI

Chapter 1

In the year 1945, I read a poem in a newspaper whose author I do not remember, but I remember the poem:

It is December of forty-one
Behold the willow the shadow of
the cross
The night breaks in a voice so terrified,
The voice barefoot, a hand on its lips
yellow patch star, rag on the shoulder
the voice, sick
Just bread could illness cure
But no doors open with bread, the doors
run away like a thief
The moon is like a gendarme across the sky
grow patch on leaf but it is always
in shade, our side ours and among us.

My mother's grandfather owned three villages near Kobylany Podlaskie. As he was not a farmer, he rented out his fields to the surrounding peasantry. A gentile landowner took advantage of him and suggested they exchange fields, wherein my grandfather gave one acre of fertile field for two acres of sandy ground and went bankrupt.

His son Eleazer Perelman, who had his head

in celestial matters, belonged to a famous Chasidic group of Eastern Poland. His main concern, following the tradition of the family, was to educate his three children. Everything else was my grandmother's task. Religion entailed her proving herself "Eshet Chail," a woman endowed with the many qualities necessary for making a proper Jewish home and maintaining it by the sweat of her brow.

My mother Chaya Gitla experienced three wars, the Japanese one, and the first and second world wars. My grandmother died during the first world war because the deseas she got while she was in prison for smuggling cheese to feed the family. Her younger brother had died at the age of eighteen. My grandfather lived in Losice, a Jewish town near the Bug River, with Rivka, his oldest daughter,the only religious one in the family. My mother, the younger daughter, ran away from home at the age of ten to an uncle in the town of Mordy, in whose shop she worked, because she could never understand why such an all powerful God to whom her father prayed needed the fulfillment of so many insignificant commandments. My grandfather nicknamed her "Epicorus," which means "Epicurian", a non Jew. He used to light Sabbath candles in her stead, for he knew that she would never light Sabbath candles on her own. At the age of eighteen she moved to

Warsaw to an aunt who worked in a factory and lived in a damp, dank cellar. While she was at work, my mother decorated the place in white wall paper and turned it into "a palace."

By that time, she had already formed her philosophy of life; if you want to live well with people, be easy to live with. From her I learned to forget myself and to live for everyone else.

Chaya-Gitla began to work in a factory and after a while she had an apartment of her own. Her flat was open to all. If she earned half a loaf of bread, in the evening, she shared it with her friends. Next day, if she earned another half a loaf of bread, she again shared it with her friends. More than her hunger for bread was her hunger for truth. She joined several organizations but was disappointed each time; Zionism, or Socialism, none of which really satisfied her. Although she was not religious, her friend Jacques who knew her well, used to say; "Chaya Gitla's religion is her unrelenting craving for truth."

One day, at the theater, she met a man six years her senior, Salomon Silberstein by name, who looked younger than his years, was honest, cultured and intelligent, and unlike hes family, was very assimilated into Polish society. Salomon had lost his father Abraham at the age of fourteen. His father had been fitfully sleeping on the sofa with his hand on his heart.

Suddenly, he cried. Salomon's mother asked him to wake his father up. He was afraid. His mother approached and saw that he was dead. Since his mother was a housewife unable to earn a living, he and his sixteen year old sister, Esther, were forced to provide for the family. Though they could no longer go to school, they helped educate their younger sisters and brothers; Esther had a large, heavy typewriter and the janitor had to bring it to her place of work and bring it back when she was finished for she wouldn't part with it. Salomon, among other occupations, worked as an errand boy. Bernard, his younger brother, who was eight at the time, grew up to become an accountant and manager; ten year old Sala, the younger sister became a legal secretary. Wilus the five year old became a businessman and twelve year old Hela, a dressmaker and shopkeeper.

My grandmother was religious and observed tradition throughout her life. There is a custom that on Passover Eve, the head of the family opens the door to Elijah, the Prophet. Since grandfather's death, my grandmother took over this duty. She nearly fainted when she saw Elijah in a white robe at the door.

The next day, Salomon was punished, by his uncle, for this prank. The boy, who by this time, already considered himself an atheist, was always full of life. He put together a film

improvised a stage with sheets and actors, made various cinematic experiments. After work he exchanged German lessons for Russian,then he taught himself French and English. He wrote beautiful letters and it is through them the unaffected, intelligent girl who was my mother fell in love with him.

Before they got engaged, she took him to visit her family in Losice, a small village, to meet a number of old and ugly aunts in wigs. Introducing him to them was a sign of her integrity. On the first of January 1925, Salomon's aunt arrived from Palestine to be present at the marriage ceremony of his youngest sister, Hela. Solomon announced his own wedding on the same date without consulting his girlfriend. Only two months later did they find an apartment of their own.

I was born in my own good time, on the 29th of November 1925 to be exact. My mother wanted a daughter because a son would have created conflict. My father Severin, as she liked to call him, would not have allowed circumcision and the refusal would have caused my grandfather great sorrow. I should have been named Esther after my maternal grandmother as was the custom, but my father wanted an "international" name and called me "Stella," having found in the dictionary that Esther really means "star."

I was four years old when my mother's sister, Rivka died suddenly. Three weeks later, my grandfather died of sorrow. We didn't attended the funeral in Losice because my mother was ill. When we finally arrived, my mother cried a great deal and so I too cried although I couldn't understand why.

My grandmother's family asked me, if mother lit candles on the Sabbath. I answered, "No, why should we, we have electricity."

My mother thought I would find my own way to faith. She didn't want to impose any religious conception on my conscience. I never said any prayer or took part in any religious ceremonies. I was brought up according to Rousseau's doctrine in **Emile**. My parents believed I was "tabula rasa." But I wasn't. One day, my mother went out to see a neighbor and left a little packet of butter on the table. I ate it all up and when my mother came back, I told her the dog had eaten it. In those days, I still could not apologize. I said as I usually did, "You can beat me mother but just don't shout at me." I was never told stories, children's stories, only facts. And, therefore, so far as I was concerned, only the things I could grasp with my intellect really existed. My father was the symbol of justice and strength. Mother was a flower, sweet and very much a woman. God was never mentioned and I did not imagine He

existed. Instead of being taught about God, we woke up at four a.m. to see the sun rise. I loved nature and beauty without the need to question its creator. In the midst of nature, I was always quiet and a better person.

I always chose friends who were of a higher intellectual level than mine. Tola was the most intelligent girl in our class. She wrote beautiful little poems. After school, we walked for hours and never had enough of speaking to each other. And there were always interesting books on my desk. They were so attractive that I just had to read them and much of my homework was neglected. I went to sleep worried about next morning. During the breaks, I found time to copy everything as quickly as I could but I was always afraid I might be questioned. This did not make me happy.

I had no notion of belonging to one group or another, Gentile and Jewish children lived and played together, though I always wanted to belong to the poorer classes. I loved and understood them. I think I gave the impression of living only in dreams. However, during the war, my dreams became less of a reality to me. The kids asked me whether I wanted to become a queen. "No," I answered, I want to become a mother like everybody else and have many many children." "Are you Jewish or Polish," they asked and I answered, "I don't know, I

know only that I am Helman's tenant. Jewish or Polish," they asked and I answered, "I don't know, I know only that I am Helman's tenant."

Half a year after I was born, mother caught tuberculosis and father took on two jobs to help her through her illness. As a result, he could send me to a very good and most expensive private school named after Eliza Orzeszkowa, a writer of the time on Positivism. When father sent me to school on Yom Kippur. The Day of Atonement and the holiest day of the Jewish year, and I found myself the only pupil present, I realized this was really a Polish school for Jewish children. However up to the third grade, when I was sent to another school, I never knew what antisemitism was. All I was interested in was to grow into a good human being. I felt myself a Polish citizen like everyone else, and no other possibility occurred to me.

My mother sometimes sang sad Jewish songs. For five years, we spent every holiday in Otwock, where there were many forests. My mother said she understood the language of the trees. I was in the second grade when there was a general wage cut and my father had to ask for easier payments at the school. And so I became the poor child in the midst of rich ones.

I once entered the classroom and forgot to close the door, Erna, an industrialist's daughter, asked in a loud voice: "Since when does a

lackey need a servant?" I did not react, but ever since then my heart goes out ever more strongly to the poor.

Sometimes, on Sunday morning, while my mother was busy preparing dinner, I would go out for a walk with father. We walked near the monastery of St. Wincenty hospital, on which there was an inscription, "Res Sacra Miser." I asked father to translate it for me, "The poor are holy," he said. I sensed the truth of this statement.

As a rule, my mother did not participate in our excursion especially if Father and I were going deep into the forest. We looked at ancient tree stumps, at the hills and at the birds.

Subconsciously, I longed for belief in beauty and the irrational, I didn't know about original sin then, I evolved my own ethics

Chapter 2

I think I was hyperactive at school, never sat still for long. I was considered "the enfant terrible" of the school. The janitor used to call me "fleex" because I was black, tiny and always jumping about. I was nine years old when we moved to Dowborczykow street near the power station and I was transferred to a private school under the directorship of a Mrs. Sobolewska.

Most of the children there were of the middle class. I once stuck my economy stamps left side right and Tadek, one of the kids, whispered to his friend, "She did that because she is Jewish."

I never knew Jewish people wrote from right to left nor felt particularly Jewish. There were three other Jewish girls in my class. Only much later did I ask my mother who we are. She said, "We are Jews." After hearing more remarks about my Jewishness I asked to return to my former school.

And so I went back to Eliza Orzeszkowa's school where all the Jewish girls were obliged to take lessons in religion. I listened to these lessons as if they were Grimm's fairy tales. We didn't have to study for these lessons. We automatically got very good grades. I do not know why I thought that God had to be very big in size, maybe because the teacher spoke of

God's omnipresence. I asked her, "Is it possible for God to be present in an ink bottle?" The teacher, sure that I was making fun of her, scolded me. I didn't react but I came to the conclusion that she just didn't know anything about the existence of God.

The following year, our teacher Mrs. Kaluzewska told us that every person must believe in something, a stone, a heaven, something. I accepted this idea gladly. But it was man rather than a spiritual conception, that interested me.

Maybe because I was the only one in the class who was fairly poor, I developed sympathy for poor people whom I loved very much. Another time, Mrs. Kaluzewska told us that in the poor and swamp ridden district of Poland, she had seen a child eating a piece of bread and sharing it with a hundred flies. So I decided that one day I would study agriculture and dry the swamps and teach the children to earn their daily bread. I knew, then, I would have to create my own future all by myself. On my grandmother's Memorial Day, we visited the cemetery. My father, I felt, had loved my grandmother even though he did not pray at her graveside. He just stood before it in long minutes of contemplation and then wiped a tear from the corner of his eye.

I remember with what emotion my father

used to part with my grandmother's photograph which made the rounds from one brother and sister to another and stayed with each for several months. The picture hung in the dining room facing his chair.

Grandmother, in the picture, was a forty year old lady dressed in a black woolen winter dress with white lace collar. Her face was harmonious, straight nose and very beautifully shaped lips. Her big black eyes shone with goodness and intelligence and a certain spirituality. Her face was exotic like an Egyptian wall painting.

At the entrance to the cemetery, Father showed me the ritual cleaning place of the dead. "At least here, there is absolute equality," he said. My father longed for absolute equality and absolute justice. I needed more than that, I had to love as well.

In 1934, my father's aunt and uncle arrived from Palestine.

Their aim was to convince us to go to Palestine as long as "the white book" allowed immigration. Aunt Esther decided to take their advice and in order to prepare herself, she sent her children to the Hebrew College. And my father decided to go to Birobidjan, a Jewish Republic of the USSR.

In the flat at Dowborczykow Street our neighbor, Edward Brandwein, had only one

daughter. Her name was Stefcia. During The First World war he had belonged to the Pilsudski legion and then had become director of a Jewish school. A Polish friend had tried to convert him to Christianity as a means to furthering his career. He had refused, even though he felt himself an atheist and a Polish citizen, linked to the Jewish people merely by the memory of his parents. His name had been mentioned in the book, **Jewish Participation as Polish Freedom Fighters**. There had been a large Jewish group fighting for the liberty of Poland. Most Poles had difficulty accepting these Jewish freedom fighters as one of them especially if they hadn't been converted to Christianity.

Stefcia once said, "Even if I could free all the Jews from the stigma of being Jewish, I would not tattle on my father to it in order to reach that goal."

I told her I certainly would sacrifice my father so no one would ever hear the word, "dirty Jew" again. I could take it, for as far as I was concerned I was not dirty but very clean, but if I could have spared others hearing these words, I would do so.

My uncle Bernard also belonged to this group of people who thought it wise to cease the suffering of being Jewish and convert. He often visited Jews who believed that Jesus was

the Messiah. These converts tried to influence others but the sect had difficulty in enlisting followers. Even atheists, at the time, felt it would be a betrayal to conver. He and his whole family were killed in Treblinka together with my father's family.

In the Orzeszkowa school Catholic, Protestant and Jewish teachers worked side by side. On the day Warsaw University started segregating Jewish students, our school went on strike despite the fact that the younger pupils didn't quite understand why we stood at attention for five hours in silent protest.

I did not yet know what antisemitsm meant but I saw my mother cry when she read about Franco in the papers. "This will also happen to us," she said in 1938.

When I was taught how rain and snow are formed, I wondered why people should pray for rain. I explained to myself that wherever people do not know the origin of some phenomena they call it God but science will explain all this then there will be no need for God.

Every schoolday started in the same improbable way, we had to sing our daily prayers. Our Jewish teacher explained to us that we must never go against our own conscience. I therefore stopped singing because I considered myself an atheist. It was very hard keeping my mouth shut while everyone around me was

singing. My mother was asked to come to school.

Finally, I had to give in and sing along with the rest of the pupils every morning. I cried and considered this my first real tragedy in life. The very same teachers I admired had forced me to lie and pretend acquiescence. I was seething with anger and only wanted to revolt. My mother was on my side.

I loved my homeland, which had created such unjust laws, a little less intensely. I now saw corruption, lies, exploitation, hate and pretense all about me. I believed that with common effort the world could be a better place and truth would prevail.

The outbreak of antisemitsm led me to Socialism. Everyday, I read articles in the Socialist newspapers with great interest. Under their influence, I considered Catholics with great doubt and suspicion. I believed that Mother Mary's blue mantle hid hypocrisy and greed and that the priest blinded people to reality.

At this time, without my knowledge, my father had already applied for citizenship to Birobidjan, the projected Jewish state in the Soviet Union.

In the sixth class we read Stefan Zeromski's, **People without a Home.** I loved the hero of this book. The last chapter is called **The Split**

Pine. In this chapter the hero of the book, Dr. Yudym, a member of a poor worker's family though a gifted medical student who always stresses his humble worker's origins, goes for a walk with his girlfriend, a young, idealistic teacher.

She tells him that her dream is to have a modest house with simple furniture and work alongside her husband, but the hero says, that in his blood, he feels the need to be rich if he is to have a family. I was very impressed by this book and had long discussions with Tola and other girls from my class on whether it was possible to have a normal family life and yet work for the common good. The other girls thought it was possible to unite the two ideals, Socialism and a married life, but I didn't. Tola couldn't see any ideal in working for a collective good, she believed in her own private happiness but I believed I would find the path to the ideal, which to me meant working for the universal good.

In 1939, I skipped another class at school I read much about the original chaos and the laws evolving from it. Tola, my girlfriend, helped me to believe in the possibility of the existence of God. But I wasn't ready, it was too soon for me. At this time I took extra French lessons and then stopped.

My father asked me why?

I told him I was just not going to, that's all. It's too difficult.

He said quietly, "If you don't want to study, you shouldn't do so, you can always be a seamstress."

My father wasn't a fool, he knew his daughter would not grow up to be a seamstress. I just needed those extra lessons in French. Old poor, Mrs Salomonowicz taught me. With my parents faith in me, I could do anything I pleased. They never questioned me. If I needed 50 groszy, I simply didn't go to the French lessons, but during that summer I started learning French in earnest

I was loved wisely and well. But, I needed someone to need me and I could have sacrificed my whole being to any ideal. My friend Danusia explained to me that I should love my parents as much as they loved me, but this exchange of love did not satisfy me.

I was jealous of siblings playing together in my neighborhood and I used to beg my mother for a brother or sister of my own, promising to do all the housework entailed. My father explained very seriously that due to mother's illness, it was the doctors' opinion she should not have any more children. Neither could transient plants and flowers nor other people's babies left in my care for the summer fill this longing I had to love. I wanted love on a

permanent basis, forever mine.

And then I fell in love with my history teacher. My mother was a little jealous listening to my descriptions of my wonderful teacher Wanda. I loved her with all of my being. My life would have some meaning if I could but stay at her side. She taught us Ancient History with such enthusiasm that for her sake I was ready to believe in the religion of the Ancient Greeks. I was unaware of the contradictions growing within me, I who wanted to fight the ignorance of religious beliefs and find only in nature the source of my strength.

In the middle of that school year a catastrophe befell me, my Wanda was married and left us. I cried for three days and in spite of the many questions asked, I could not tell them in truth why I cried so.

I know this sounds foolish but I hated Wanda's husband who had taken her away from me. Life had lost all meaning and beauty for me. I went on living merely through force of habi. But I kept on dreaming about future meetings with Wanda. I wrote an essay in her honor about the religion of ancient Greece.

This was the first religion I tried to understand and I didn't know then that Paganism would not give me any real answer to my basic questions; I loved humanity too much, especially the poor and the miserable.

After reading **Quo Vadis** we were asked to write about one of the personalities in the book.

Tola wrote about Petronius. I was more interested in Hilo. I felt that every human being is justified in his actions, whatever his failings. Like in the book by Stefan Zeromski,, **People Without a Home.** I thought society as a whole was responsible for the individual's moral downfall.

But my idealism required action. The guilty ones were those who didn't care about the poor and avoided action and thereby caused their demoralization and downfall.

Consciously, I wanted to believe in wisdom and science but Wanda belonged to a Catholic family even though her husband was a Socialist. And I knew all about Christianity by having read about it in the Socialist newspaper Lodzianin. I knew Catholic meant narrow, fanatic and rather too humble. In spite of Wanda's being Catholic, she was a very positive personality and my longing for her and my memories of her can never be forgotten.

I once described Wanda for two hours to a friend who was willing to listen, but no one could really understand me and soon I found myself empty and without purpose, I found no joy in sports nor in anything else. There seemed to be no reason for living a useless and purposeless life.

I was determined to put an end to my life. Tola tried to dissuade me with little success. Thinking of suicide all the way home, I was nearly run over by a car. I was in shock and asked myself why I hadn't used the accident as a means of committing suicide if I wanted to die so badly. I decided that my life had been saved for some purpose. This thought saved me and gave me some hope. I see now that this is how my life has always been. I walk to the very edge of a precipice and God saves me at the very last minute.

I did not like our drawing teacher, I used to imitate her, making fun of her during the lesson, and she wrote a bad note in my copybook. I ripped out the page. Somehow my father saw a page was missing and asked me about it. Father's simple goodness, my respect for him because he promised not to tell my sick mother made me cry and so I told him the whole truth. I felt relieved after that and loved him very much. I would respond to goodness and acquiesce but I refused to be coerced by threats.

In the Spring, pregnant Wanda came to visit friends who lived in the neighborhood. We met and she talked about her man. I asked her whether she believed in God. This problem worried me, I thought if she should believe in God, all my doubts would be dispelled. She told me nothing had changed, her friend the atheist

was still an atheist and she herself, except for several rituals, was still a believer. She, contrary to my hopes, did not try to influence me in any way though she did say, "many scientists believe in God." I understood and tried to adopt her attitude, but I couldn't. If the scientist believes, and she believes, I said to myself, why can't I believe?

Chapter 3

Danusia, Eva, Tola and I, in preparation for our meeting with Wanda, created a circle for self improvement. Our subject was: "Does Socialism solve social, political and economic problems?"

Each of us picked an aspect of the subject and promised to write an essay. It was not easy explaining, at Borochow leftist library, why thirteen year old girls needed books on these subjects. After a long lecture, we became convinced that Socialism was just, human and right in every way. Our meetings with Wanda made my friends and I understand how superficial our knowledge was. When we expressed doubts about the question of whether war was possible in a Socialist country, she asked her husband his opinion. She called him, "the expert." His answer was that if Socialism spread all over the world, then there would be no need for war. The world looked so good and so beautiful but this did not last long. It all began after Hitler's rise to power. My father had become a member of the leftist Jewish Bund organization after being exposed to growing antisemitism. He had been engaged in a lengthy law suit against the Jewish community of Lodz because he refused to pay the yearly burial taxes they imposed. The judge ruled that he had to pay the taxes since he had

to reserve his cemetery plot in the cemetery of the Jews as there was no atheist cemetery in Poland.

I had to have my photos taken because my parents were asking for an entrance visa into the USSR. I cried.

"Why are you crying?" mother asked. "What are you leaving behind? Fatherland? Whom don't you want to leave behind? The family?"

"Wanda," I replied, crying harder.

My mother said that if Wanda could only leave she would choose to go to Communist Russia. But I absolutely refused to move and my mother would not insist. She promised that if I refused to go, they would have to stay with me. I felt that I could trust my mother. She had never failed to keep her promise and I knew that she really had my well-being and happiness at heart, so it was clear to me that she would not force me to go to Birobidjan if I felt I would be unhappy there. To be on the safe side, I pulled a terribly crazy face for my official photograph so that the Russians would not want me.

My father believed that in Birobidjan we would find justice, equality and freedom. He was too proud to put up with the growing feeling of antisemitism around him. He understood and hated both its roots and its inevitable results . He told both Jews and Poles

the truth to their faces. I thought it was fun and was very proud of him. I loved to hear him very much.

In the summer of 1939, we were in a village near Lodz, I went swimming twice a day, coming home only for meals through the tall wheat fields with the blue sky and the sun over my head; the sun was my first cult and God, who did not yet exist for me, severed me from it.

My mother was a modest and very considerate person. She noticed that our religious neighbors looked critically at my swimming outfit which I wore all day long. "Why are they looking at me like that?" I asked.

She didn't answer nor insist that I wear more modest clothes. I didn't see anything wrong in my behavior. I'd come home to eat and take a little nap, that's all.

Danusia, my classmate, came to stay with me in the village for three days. On the third day of her visit, I lost my watch in the pool. When I came home and told my parents about it, my father grew very angry and struck me. The whole family was sitting around the dining room table and I felt this to be too much. After all, I was thirteen years old. My pride could not bear the insult and without a word I walked to the highway nearby.

Danusia came crying after me, imploring me

to come back, but I threatened suicide. She knew that I was capable of anything and she turned back. Everyone was very worried about me. I did not really plan anything, but I wanted to go as far away as possible from home, so I walked fast to quiet the storm within me. The further I walked, the more tired I grew and my anger subsided. I began thinking of what to do next. Wanda, I thought, would not take me in but if I was to be her maid, she might. It was dark when I finally decided to go home. My mother, uncle and Danusia had already come halfway to meet me. For three days I didn't speak to my father; he was ashamed of me but I felt my mother was on my side. Afterwards, we made up and again became the best of friends.

That summer, for three nights running, my mother dreamt we were with her family in Losice. We laughed loudly about her dreams. It was absurd. Who could imagine that we would ever live in Losice? But half a year later, this dream became reality. To us, the children, war was known only from stories, and descriptions told by others. We thought it fun because it would give us the opportunity to perform heroic deeds and make noble sacrifices to Fatherland. So we were calm, thankful to Marshal Smigly-Rydz who daily proclaimed our strength, unity and preparedness. "Poland will not give up a single button from her soldiers'

uniforms," he announced.

On the first day of September 1939, Hitler took Pomorze, on the second and third day of September England and France joined the war. It was a beautiful Autumn day, the air was clear and the landscape, the forests and the woods, lovely. We stood in queues for days to buy a few more matches and some salt. With our cousins we sewed bandages in place of gas masks and I fried potato pies for us. We bought some 50 kilograms of potatoes and expected to spend the rest of the blitzkrieg in the village. We were busy at this time clearing our language of German expressions.

When there was a general mobilization, my father took a few possessions with him and kissed my mother goodbye. She cried, but I only said, "Be a hero, my father!" He came back that same evening very sad. There was no one to turn to. Where was the unity and the strength? Indeed, only the Germans were prepared and united.

The children were glad there was no school. A week later, we took a few things and walked back to Lodz. My mother thought it impossible to go back to town without a hat but she settled for a kerchief round her head. Our flat near the Electric Power Station seemed to mother an easy mark for bombings so we all went to Aunt Hela's flat. We lived there

temporarily, fourteen people on two beds. Under a hail of bullets, my father and I twice went to our own flat to gather a few belongings. My father was not afraid and as for me, it was only a new game. I didn't believe bullets could kill us. From time to time, we went to the air raid shelter.

A shell fell on the roof of that house but there were no casualties. Three days later my father came down to the shelter with a tragic face. Tomczak, the bishop of our town, had surrendered to the Germans. The Germans immediately posted their "Ordnungs."

From our window in aunt Hela's flat we could see an Orthodox Jew at his prayer, dressed in his prayer shawl. We looked at him with awe, but none of us thought of following his example.

We went back to our own flat and I back to school. My father went back to work. The German language became obligatory in the schools and father taught me German at home. We had a copy of **Anna Karenina** written in Gothic letters. But I refused, I did not want to learn German and my father grasped the gold pen from my hand and threw it on the floor. The lessons were finished forever. I had been happy not to have to learn French any more but I hated Germans, I hated their tongue, the smell of their vehicles, everything about them.

We took our mattresses and moved out of our bedroom.

We slept in the living room because the house next to ours had been taken over by the Germans as a Commissariat. Through the walls of the bedroom, we heard the terrible cries of the beaten and tortured.

Tola and I longed to join the fighters at Modlin, but on the twenty-ninth of September the fortress fell. We felt this last crumbling of resistance very deeply. Shortly afterwards, my beloved Wanda returned with her baby in arms. "We shall call her Christina," she said, "though there has been no christening." The child had been born during the air raids and bombings on Warsaw; conditions were awful, but the baby was well and healthy. Wanda sometimes talked about the war and often about her mother.

At this time, Mr. Eduard Brandwein, our neighbor, returned from Piotrkow. News had reached us that he had been buried alive under the ruins. It wasn't true.

Before the war, I stated my nationality as Jewish. But the German onslaught created a feeling of Polish national identity. It was as a Pole that I hated the Germans more and more. Religion had united the Polish people throughout history, so now when we started the schoolday with a religious song, even I participated. I felt this need for unity. The whole

class shared this feeling.

The love within me always needed to find an outlet without which it could not exist. I meant to sacrifice myself to Fatherland which took preference over my love for the poor and downtrodden though not over my love for Wanda.

To please Wanda, I constructed rubber stamps with various patriotic slogans, "Long live Poland!," "May there be a Polish Army in France!." I stamped them on every German "Ordnung" on the street Wanda passed on her way home. Tola stood at the corner to keep watch.

My father discovered the rubber stamps among my belongings and asked me if they were for private use. I said yes, and he never questioned me again since he knew that he couldn't stop me.

Every sensible person would have wisely pointed out that this activity of mine was unproductive. But Wanda, though lacking our youthful enthusiasm, encouraged us to go on so on we went. But this was not enough for me. I couldn't stand the German who had overturned the Kosciuszko monument and then danced around it joyfully. I had a heathen thirst for revenge boiling in my heart. I used to dream of opening the arteries of Germans with a razor blade. I know of a woman in Warsaw who used

to do that.

On our frequent walks together, Tola and I spoke of food and asked ourselves why we'd never talked about food before the war and we spoke of the reasons for war in this world. It was as difficult to find an answer as to find food.

One evening, we were walking down the street putting my mark under the Deutche "Ordnungs." Tola keeping watch as sometimes Eva did, and I knew I was doing this for Fatherland and for Wanda when suddenly Tola asked me,

"Will you tattle on me to the Germans if they torture you?"

Maybe this was only meant as a provocative question but it really hurt me very much. Here I was endangering my life and she only had her personal safety in mind. I said, "I don't know," but my heart was broken. I felt the hopelessness of our friendship. After the initial shock, I understood that though I must not alienate myself from other people, because love is one of my deepest needs - this is my nature and will not change - in order not to suffer disappointment, I must stop looking for friendship.

My friendship had been abused and I suffered, but I had learned a lesson which would help me throughout my life. I never expected anything in return for my friendship. I

felt this insight into my nature had set me free. I felt stronger and not bitter, the joy of loving and giving of myself was yet left me.

Chapter 4

Although I never showed it, Tola knew how I felt. One day the Germans caught my father and made him camouflage a tunnel against aircraft fire. Two hours later he came back with his shirt wet more from humiliation than hard work.

He said, "It's either them or me!" And as they stayed on, my father decided his only choice was to flee to Russia. On the sixteenth of November 1939, my parents parted once more with a kiss and I understood they were one body being torn fiercely apart. My father could not tear himself away and I, who was the fruit of their love, only got a warm kiss. Before leaving, my father made it clear that from then on, he considered me to be the head of the family. He asked me to help mother since she was frail.

The postal service did not exist any more so letters were being sent by special messenger. We promised to join him in Lwow, which at the time was annexed to Russia, as soon as possible.

When the Russians declared that whoever wanted to cross to the German side of Poland could go back and whoever wanted to be a Russian citizen would be sent to three month's hard labor, my father decided to do hard labor. He felled trees in the forests surrounding Moscow. Then he was sent to Devidowo, Number 41 Nizmy, Novogrod Gorkowski

Oblasty as a teacher of German.

Once again with tears in my eyes I told Wanda of our imminent departure.

Wanda, to comfort me,said sadly that Poland had never been a good homeland for the Jews. She promised to send her daughter to Odessa, leaving her in my care. She used to change her daughter's diapers saying that it was the only really sane thing a mother could do for her child. She wrote a quotation from Slowacky in my diary. "When the forest is burning, it is no time to weep for the roses." To me this was a reference to the unhappy situation of Poland and Europe.

At this time the Germans began to imprison the Polish Intelligentsia. Wanda had to leave her house and take her baby to Warsaw. Her father, who was a doctor, a brigadier, a public man and friend of Jews escaped to a village, worked as a teacher changing his name and identity. But to no avail, he was caught, brought to Auschwitz where he was killed.

In November, the first exiles from Kalisz and Blaszki came to Lodz. My mother gave them anything she could find to keep them warm. I loved her for this more than ever. She found it hard to leave her plants and flowers with the housekeeper and leave home. I left all my books with my friends, my father's encyclopedias and dictionaries had been given

to Aunt Hela for safe keeping. My mother believed that one day she would return to her well kept apartment. After waiting in the crowded railroad station for three days, on December 18, 1939 my mother, my uncle Bernard and I succeeded in getting on a train to Warsaw. A horse drawn carriage took us to a hostel; empty windows looked like skulls. Warsaw which had been a beautiful city full of fun was now in ruins. Walking down the streets by day I hoped to see Wanda's fur coat, and followed women wearing the same fur as she, only to find that none of them was Wanda. I was afraid to ask about her because I knew that she was in hiding.

We spent a few days with mother's family and then we rented a big room on Zlota Street in Warsaw. When two more aunts and their children joined us, it became very crowded. I slept with my mother on a writing desk. It was very difficult to get food and coal. Whenever anyone complained, Aunt Esther said that we must pray not to remember these days in better days to come. Our misery we shared in common and the love we shared helped us through.

In January, I traveled with my mother to Podlasie. We stopped for a few days at my uncle Alter Bekerman's house. He loved us and pretended not to see our religious transgressions. My uncle sent us to his brother in

Sarnaki, a little village some six kilometers from the river Bug. We made a deal with a professional smuggler who promised to lead us across the frozen river. Three times we packed and unpacked our bundles and paid our guide. I who had been a healthy child became sick with a fever during those three weeks, so the journey had to be delayed an extra week.

We lived in the house of my uncle's brother in the village of Sarnaki where my mother had been born. Half of the house was occupied by deported people from Blaszki near Kalish. Before the war the village had numbered about one thousand inhabitants. When my mother was a little girl she used to knit red socks and a red collar for her white cat. When it snowed the cat ran around the market place and all the children in the village went running after it.

The family treated us very nicely, but that was the only time in my life I remember ever having been bored. Everybody spoke Yiddish of which I spoke not a word. We were snowed in, the windows covered with frost and if I wanted to see the outside world, I had to scratch the frost off the windowpane. In the morning, in order to go to the toilet, we had to push the door against a pile of one meter of snow and carefully make our way to the well. I spent the time reading Josephus Flavius's book **The Jewish War**. And once in a while we were

invited to the town house of Mrs. Szumerowa, where we met her nephew and during supper read the **Prophecy of Wernyhora**. Talking Polish, I felt a sense of belonging to the Polish people again. Twice, we went to see my mother's relatives. They owned a flour mill. They knew I didn't speak Yiddish so they complained in Polish with great bitterness against Polish antisemitism. My mother explained to them that I knew the flower of Polish society. They were not convinced. It took three weeks for the ice to melt and we were obliged to go back to Losice where we stayed in uncle Beckerman's apartment. I was happy and my mother was glad that due to the war, she would not have to go to Russia and be spat upon.

The winter of 1940 was very cold. Communist Jews had returned from Russia with smallpox. They had been imprisoned in concentration camps for Communists before the war. They explained that if we were sent to Russia for half a year, it would be enough to cure us of any Communist feelings we might be harboring.

I learned how to knit. My mother and I earned a living by knitting. We sent food parcels to my aunts in Warsaw. We had brought our own wool with us and this became very useful. I also learned how to read as I knitted, swallowing whole books in Polish. Nearly everyone about me spoke Yiddish. For the first

few months, I couldn't understand a word and I longed for the Polish language and the means to do some useful work for Fatherland. But what could I do all alone in a Jewish village with no friends and no means at my disposal.

My mother and I were sitting in front of our house, knitting, we spoke of our former housekeeper Mrs. Zbucka, and her brother-in-law when we suddenly saw him coming towards us. He told us stupid stories about the Jews. That afternoon, we were surprised to find these same tales in the only daily newspaper in town. Their behavior surprised us because Mrs. Zbucka and her brother-in-law, had always been so nice and friendly.

I read a book called **The Fatherland of bread and the Fatherland of Longing**. As far as I was concerned, Russia was the Fatherland of bread and Poland, the Fatherland of longing. My father tried through legal means to bring us to the land of bread. Before the outbreak of war between Germany and Russia there had been a possibility of exchanging war prisoners. My father lived in Devidowo until Germany attacked Russia. We were left behind in Poland. I spent the long days of loneliness waiting and I discovered the truth in the words, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity."

Altruism, Socialism, Communism, Patriotism, all fascinated me for a while until I discovered

their shortcomings. I would give myself wholly to each just to find I had sacrificed my self in vain. I knew I only lived once and I wanted to find bliss in this life, but so far I had not found it anywhere. I could not find it. I tried to find fulfillment in the organization of "Philomats" and "Philarets," (lovers of knowledge and Science). They were the loveliest idealists I had ever met.

These organizations were founded in Vilna after the Vienna Congress as a reaction to Russian despotism. Its members aspired to spiritual perfection and to the spread of scientific knowledge.

In 1823, both organizations were condemned as illegal and their members were arrested and sent to the Russian interior. The greatest Polish poet, Adam Mickiewicz belonged to the Philomats. There was an underground youth organization started by Tomas Zan in 1819 at Vilna University. But I could not live up to their expectations. Blindly, I tried to find an aim in life, but though my eyes were closed, my heart was open.

We were living in Losice, where my grandmother and aunt Rivka are buried. The town was thirty six kilometers from Bug on the German-Russian frontier. I traveled from there to the Warsaw ghetto which was forbidden to Jews. Usually, I took the papers of my Polish

neighbor, Mrs. Piotrowska, a woman twice my age. Once I traveled without any papers dressed in the colorful clothes of a country girl. This made me suspect.

At the Warsaw train station, someone was staring at me. I walked down the stairs. A Gestapo officer asked me, in German, for my papers and took me up into the Gestapo office. "I don't understand," I replied in Polish. Another S.S. officer tried to open my bag. I was very nervous. I couldn't stand it any longer. "What do you want from me?" I shouted in Polish of course.

I was dismissed. I walked down and out of the train station looking beyond the tramway at the street where "the denouncer," the man who had been staring at me, stood. When he saw me coming towards him, he quickly jumped on the tramway and I almost shouted at him. This incident might have ended very badly.

My family was in quarantine. I was alone in their home I couldn't sleep all that night. I didn't say anything to mother either. She gathered that something was wrong. From then on I never traveled without my friend's papers. My mother's seeming understanding of the situation, finally forced me to tell her the truth.

On the tenth of June, 1941, we received a ten kilogram package from my father full of food, candies, lots of soap and dry salami.

I was studying the history of Napoleon as the Nazi tank convoys moved East. The sign of victory was posted on the sides of the tanks. Soldiers spoke to my mother and pointed to maps showing that Moscow was just 150 kilometers away. Each of them had a job to do there. In the summer all our furs were taken away so the soldiers could be kept warm.

The war between Russia and Germany broke out on the 22nd of June. I was very happy because I knew that this was the date Napoleon had gone to Moscow with the ensuing defeat to his armies. We used to joke that the Germans felt that one German is equal to ten Russians but what, we asked ourselves, would they do when there were eleven Russians to each German?

Two months later the Germans organized the ghetto in Losice. There our living condition improved. Two rows of houses were situated in the middle of the market. Thanks to my uncle Alter Beckerman, my cousin Nehemia's father, we had a corner room which was six meters square.

Mrs. Zbucka, our former landlady, helped me to wallpaper it. I convinced my mother that it was the right time to hang the curtains. There were two windows and a door to the balcony. We shared a bed because there was no room for more than one. There was no toilet so we threw

our wastes into the fire. Our Polish friends came with work for us, for the ghetto was open, because most people in this town were Jews.

Chapter 5

Mrs. Helena Gruszka-Kazmierczak worked in a cooperative in Losice. She loved my mother and often visited us. She brought her a little work to do and much honey. We used to knit and our Polish friends bought the work. Even the girls that worked with us said the Mrs, Kazmierczak was a nice woman, "a voila goya."

The two sisters of Mrs. Romaniukowa, the Haraszkiewicz came from Warsaw to buy food and sometimes took me to Warsaw on the minibus. I slept in their house. In spite of the fact that it was forbidden for Jews to leave the ghettos and travel from one place to another, during the last few days of November 1941, they once again took me back with them.

That morning, a very skinny fifteen year old girl from the Warsaw ghetto landed at the doorstep of the Haraszkiewicz. I told her I wanted to get into the ghetto. I offered her an apple. She said, "I can never refuse food."

The ghetto was surrounded by a wall, but in one corner there was a hole. I gave 20 zloty to a Polish policeman who stood on the Aryan side of the wall and passed through the hole On the other side of the wall a Jewish policeman stood and I gave him 20 zloty too. And there I was in the ghetto.

I went into my aunt Esther's apartment

MASO GŁODUJĄCA!

Wszyscy głodujący z całego Getta zbierają się w niedzielę dnia 25/8 o godz. 9 rano na Lutomierskiej 13

BRACIA I SIOSTRY!

Stańmy się licznie by wspólną siłą złączeni skończyć nareszcie z naszą skrajną nędzą oraz z BARBARZYŃSKIM POSTĘPOWANIEM przedstawicieli gminy, wobec biednej i wycieńczonej masy głodującej.

Niechaj każdy spełni swój ludzki obowiązek wobec bliźnich i niechaj krzyczy z hasłem:

CHLEBA DLA WSZYSTKICH!!!

Weźmie udział w walce z przeklętym pasożytem gminy

ŻĄDAMY OTWARCIA KUCHNI BLOKOWYCH!!!

Let all the hungry of the Ghetto assemble on Sunday the 25th of August at 9 in the morning on Lutomierska street No. 13.

Brothers and Sisters!

Let us stand united against the terrible misery and poverty and the autrageous conduct of the community leaders towards the exhausted and starved masses of the Ghetto population.

Let each and every one fulfill his human duty to his kin and raise the cry.

Bread for all!!

Let every one take part in the struggle against the cursed parasites of the community.

We demand the opening of all the soup kitchens of the blocks!!

which she shared with six people, among them my aunt Hela and her twelve year old son Izio; her husband Arnold had been killed in the Lodz ghetto as had her brother Wilhelm. But my uncle Bernard was with them. He had caught tuberculosis and needed better food than the others. Given special permission, he continued working as a book keeper in Bata, a rubber factory. Most of the women in the ghetto looked awful with big heads and eyes and no body left at all. My aunt, who had been fat before the war, looked thin as a stick. She still had a few things to sell and her economic condition wasn't as bad as the others. I brought her as many packages as I could. Four children lived with them, a two- year old girl named Judith who was blond and had blue eyes, Felusia who was twelve years old, her brother Izio, and twelve year old "little" Izio. When uncle Bernard was fired from his job, big Izio, who was two years older than "little" Izio, alone worked to support the family.

My aunt, who used to save every penny for her children's sake, now couldn't pass by without giving a little money to those dying of starvation and disease in the streets. There were frozen people in every doorway, people lying half naked in the cold street. The color of their skin was violet to purple. They were from burning with fever, swollen with hunger and

longing for death.

There was no transportation in the ghetto and people used a kind of rickshaw to go from place to place. In this vehicle, my aunt took me to the cafe of Mrs. Zaid. When the driver took his money, I caught a glimpse of a man near the steps leading to the cafe swollen and frozen and crying. His eyes glimmered with pain and fever.

Every few minutes the door of the cafe would open, people would come out and hurriedly run down the steps so they wouldn't have to look at him. Inside it was all chandeliers and romantic piano music. We sat at an elegant table, a waitress with a lovely apron served us coffee and little cakes. Mrs. Zaid, who owned half of the cafe wanted to know all about her daughter Dziunia and her boyfriend Adzik, about her husband, Dr. Zaid, Dziunia's father, who lived with us in the Losice ghetto. I was incapable of talking about anything else, but their problems. I couldn't ask Mrs. Zaid to take the dying man inside her cafe and let him die in comfort and make the guests face reality.

The next day, Mrs. Zaid invited me to a restaurant for lunch. There was little food but what there was, was very good.

When I returned to the ghetto in Losice, I didn't tell anybody about the Warsaw ghetto. I did not want to create panic.

But in my dreams, I kept hearing the cries of that dying man beneath the cafe stairs along with the tango music, and for days I was obsessed, unable to bear the impact of what I had seen in the ghetto. Maybe, I thought to myself, the people need a cafe in which to breathe a bit of normalcy, but for me the cofee-house was a nightmare I have carried within my soul for fifty years and will do so until my dying day.

I thought that only Jews, and not Christians, could be so indifferent to the suffering of others. At this time, I felt I had nothing in common with the Jews. I hated their kind of selfishness which I could see and my hatred for them grew stronger with the occurrences in Losice. The poor Jews who had escaped from Warsaw to our village knew that this was their only hope for survival. Since our ghetto was open, not enclosed by a wall, there was a great deal of business going on. Peasants brought food in exchange for materials. The Judenrath could have saved many people but they didn't want to be bothered by endless demands and only wanted to get rid of those infortrunate people. They asked the Germans to send "the beggars" back to Warsaw. Most of the Jews sent back were so exhausted that they collapsed on the way. Among them was the man who used to bring us water.

When he first knocked at our door, we felt respect for him. Maybe he reminded us of my father. Though he was so skinny and ragged, his thin face was noble; he impressed me as a very cultured person, certainly not a beggar. My mother wanted to give him one zloty but he refused. He said it was too much. My mother insisted and so he offered to be our water carrier in exchange for the money. He brought us water for three weeks and accepted his salary. Now he was among the other destitute Jews on the way to Warsaw with no bread or money to buy any.

At home, we had bread and fried bacon, so I made him sandwiches for the road. When I handed him the food, he managed to whisper the address of his children whom he had hidden with some relatives. Across the street, I saw Mr. Ash from my town of Lodz. He was the husband of my teacher in the ghetto and a member of the Judenrath, a job with a good salary. I asked him to lend me five zloty. He saw me giving the money to our water carrier, but later when I returned the money I had borrowed from him, he accepted it from me without saying a word.

This march of the Jews back to Warsaw under the guard of Jews was awful to see. I went home boiling with rage. My mother found our water-carrier's daughter and two little sons.

For several days she secretly brought them food but fearing the Judenrath as much as the German she dared not continue. Finally, we managed to have them listed as locals.

Rozia, the daughter,worked and ate with us and we were happy to see her gradually become healthy and ever more beautiful. My mother knew that she needn't ask my permission and gave one of my skirts to Rozia. We understood each other in this matter and I, too, didn't ask her permission to give anything to anyone. I remember only once being resoundingly slapped in the face. It was Spring, when a letter came from Warsaw informing us that my Aunt Esther was sick with typhus. It was only three months since I had seen her looking skinny as a scarecrow. I wanted to sell my new suit in order to save her. My mother was strictly against it. She could not understand how bad the situation in the Warsaw ghetto was and why I had to make such a sacrifice, selling my best suit, for the family in Warsaw. We shared a bed and neither of us could sleep. We both felt guilty and she tried to make it up again.

Only on my sixteenth birthday did I ask my mother's forgiveness. It was an act of heroism on my part to do this after she had hit me. I loved my mother, I was her only real relative. For my sake she had remained behind in Poland.

We were alone in a strange, hostile place where our way of thinking was so different.

Ten days later we got a letter, Rozia's father had made it to Warsaw on the long march, but had collapsed there. This enhanced my dislike for Jews.

Our life became more and more the life of prisoners. News brought only depression and I longed for freedom. Compared to others, I had more than they. I did some gardening for Mr. Zbucki and he gave me a certificate of employment. He was married and had a child and there were times I thought he was the ideal man. I loved him. I dreamt sexy dreams about him but once when we were in the field, he tried to kiss me and in answer, I slapped him. I can't forget this incident.

Every evening, looking through the window, I sang a song, "dark and deep night/ while the clock on the tower strikes midnight/ prisoners are sleeping." Did I know what kind of freedom I wanted. I don't think so. I only wanted to be free.

My mother and I kept on knitting. Once, we knitted a dress for a prostitute who refused to pay us the price I asked. She complained to a gendarme member of the Volksdeutch, who soon came to pay us a visit. Even though Mother spoke German like a native and tried to convince him we were German Jews and

citizens of the Third Reich, this only intensified his anger. Mother's identity card did not help either. Even though at the time Lodz was called Litzmanstadt and was part of Germany, the officer and the woman searched our flat, took all the wool we had and struck my mother on the head. I screamed loud enough for everyone in the street to hear. I wanted to attract a crowd, got struck in the face for the effort, so, for two weeks I could not go out. I felt too humiliated.

Mother had a headache for several week and black and blue marks on her cheeks. Although we suffered, there was no material damage. Poles from Losice and Polish exiles from Pomorze, living with us, went to the Germans and asked for "their wool," so we got everything back. And finally the Nazi declared our knitting, an artistic endeavor and the price reasonable. We worked well and with precision. In the meanwhile, Germans and Jews went on with their business and I was powerless to do anything else but dream of revenge. I tried to imagine how I would act if the Nazi were a refugee. I would deliver him into the hands of his enemies. No, worse than that, I would tell his sons what their parents had done to us, no more, no less.

Our neighbor in the ghetto was a millionaire. The woman loved only one of her daughters and left her everything in her will,

leaving nothing to the other one who was hungry and whose husband was full of lice. Their daughter was sick with typhus and my mother and a friend collected alms from all over the ghetto in order to help her. This was a very religious family. I could feel no tie to them, only contempt. I have never been able to understand religion without love.

One Saturday morning, I went to empty our pail in the market as usual, when all of a sudden some twenty orthodox Jews emerged. They screamed at me for working on the Sabbath and for not speaking Yiddish, blaming it on my father. I stood there alone facing them, mad with rage. I stamped my feet and shouted and told them not to touch me or mention my fathe. "You never gave me anything and I don't expect anything from you, don't ever interfere in my affairs." I shouted. They disappeared as suddenly as they had come.

I did not tell my mother about this incident as I had not told her about my visits to the Warsaw ghetto, but she could read my mind and she must have guessed something was wrong without my telling her.

We sometimes went to visit her relatives in the Losice ghetto. For three months a young boy named Herszko had lain in bed there, after which time he got up and started teaching me English in our flat. It was then that he told us in secret that during the first roundup "action," in Bialystock he had managed to escape by jumping into a sewer and staying there for 12 hours covered in excrement up to his neck. At night, a woman pulled him out, washed him and dressed him in clean clothes and then he fled to his parents in our ghetto. He told me never to believe any empty promises about "work camps." The German word "Action," meant total holocaust.

The only thing to do was to escape quickly, moving as far away as possible, using any means available. Therefore I decided to flee.

In order to bear the ghetto life, I finished a book every second day. I read Tolstoy's **"Resurrection"** hoping to find there my own salvation, but I was disappointed. I read another author's **"Son of Man."** I found a human being

there, perhaps a genius or a magician but nothing more. A figure so removed in time and in distance could not lead me to salvation. I read Herzl's biography **"Modern Moses."** He thought that only a return to their homeland would save the Jews. When I finished reading his book my mother said, "You too will be a modern Moses."

I did not answer because I did not want to hurt her, but I despised the Jews and felt nothing in common with them. Why should their fate be more important to me than the fate of any other nation. I felt such a stranger in their midst, shut up in the ghetto, and right here in Poland, my fatherland. Nonetheless, my mother's words about a modern Moses took root in my heart.

She also said that whoever was not a proven genius by the age of twenty, be he painter or poet, would achieve nothing with the addition of years. I was already sixteen and there was no sign of genius.

One spring day, as I was sitting on the balcony knitting and looking down at the market, I was attracted by the blond curls of a handsome boy. I thought I could love this boy. I felt I had inexhaustible love to grant. I thought I must go on living, otherwise what would happen to all this love?-And even if God perchance should not exist, I must surely invent

Him. Earth could be destroyed and the sun might burn itself out, but the power of my love would last forever; and, if this was true I thought, I needed an eternal object to love. It could not be this blond boy.

I know now that this was a moment of grace which I certainly did not deserve and which changed my entire life. From that moment on, I urgently searched for God. But it was not a Jewish God I had in mind; the religion of the Jews repelled me.

I knew I could be stoned if they knew how determined I was to be baptized and how much I detested them. I did not mind. I wanted to find God and thereby find my own happiness. I hoped to be a Christian like Wanda. I once asked Zbucki if the Catholic priests were able to teach me to know and love God. He answered cynically that they knew no more about God than he and I did and that they were all antisemitic and would not baptize me. He had his own reasons for saying that.

My way to the priest seemed closed. But how was I to find God if not through my mother or a priest? Never before had the need for belief in God been so strong within me. I knew God existed, but no one appeared to be able to teach me how to love Him.

After this ray of light came a time of darkness and despair. For years I couldn't feel

the existence of God and I had no means of knowing Him and loving Him. I knew very little about hell, but hell must be suffering without hope. I asked my mother why she hadn't taught me about God. Other mothers taught their children to believe in God and to love God and it seemed that my mother could not do so. My mother explained that she was opposed to the belief of my grandfather. She wanted to spare me the kind of conflict she had experienced with her parents and she hoped I myself would find my own way to the truth. I understood what she was saying, but it didn't help me much.

Even before the Holocaust, I would ask everybody if God really existed and if they really believed in Him. The answers were very different but none were convincing. One answer went like this, "Can you tell the time by looking at the back of a watch?"

Dziunia had said once, "I believe because it is easier to live with belief than without it." And I thought, there must be more sense to life than this. Is it only I who cannot believe, even though this lack of belief is very disturbing? I needed faith very badly because I needed some support in life - and just at this time when everything about me was collapsing. I needed someone unchangeable, stable and true as the external world arose to haunt me. The Germans cut off the mail. We no longer knew what was

happening.

One big, fat beggar woman was killed by having her head banged cruelly in order to terrorize the others in the ghetto. My mother could think of nothing else for days. She was used to reading the newspapers and she was worried. I knew that newspapers often lie so I never bothered reading them at all.

We had hidden mother's remaining furs among friends and uncle Alter had them sent to the Zbucki's cellar for safekeeping.

In the summer of 1942 the German front progressed toward Leningrad and Moscow. This was the beginning of the end. To all events and purposes all was as usual, but everyone was thinking of the future. I knew that I would escape. My mother was incapable of leaving and preferred to die in her own bed. It was horrible, because I knew I would not be there to help her. This was her third war, and with her tense nerves it would be impossible to survive. These were days of the unexpected and the unknown.

In the New Testament, Jesus asked to pray that escape should not take place on the Sabbath or in the winter. The day of our escape was on the Sabbath, the twenty second of August 1942. I was sharing a bed with my mother as usual. I don't know why I couldn't sleep. Our bed was near the window. I could

see two policemen across the street around the corner holding their rifles. I did not wake my mother up but she woke up a half hour later and saw the same sight. She asked me what it meant.

I said, maybe it has something to do with airplanes. But I knew that the policemen with the guns were not armed against airplanes. By morning, some workers who had left their homes as usual for work at the railway station with permits - were killed. Then some more people were killed. A Polish dentist and some Polish friends stood under our window and we threw some of our clothes and other better things down to them.

At ten o'clock in the morning, my cousin Nehemia, a ghetto Jewish policeman, came to tell us that everyone had to take a few belongings and go to the market place. His job was to make sure everybody went in "ordnung." Almost everyone was there already. Then, I saw the farmers horses and carts which had been ordered to take the women and children. I was wearing several woolen dresses one on top of the other because I knew I would escape and I was also wearing my father's spring coat, I took a jar of honey (a present from Mrs. Helena Gruszka Kazmierczak) and a heavy bag full of sheets. Mother didn't want to go down but the apartment was not a place to hide in so we descended. We could see people

carrying huge bags and packages when suddenly the Germans started firing into the crowd with automatic weapons.

Someone came and told us that Dziunia and her boyfriend Adzik had escaped. What no one told us was that they had been murdered by the Germans. Someone else told us that Herszko, my English teacher, had escaped too. I got into the cart with my mother. I could see Zbucki, the Polish gardener, my dream lover, in front of us. I asked him for some water. He was afraid to help me. I took off my bag and left it in the cart. I gave my mother the jar of honey and told her that I was going to escape. She asked me if I meant to leave her all alone. I told her she could escape as well and jumped off the cart in the bat of an eyelash when the Polish policeman, wasn't looking. I was angry at the Jews, instead of saving their own lives, they chose to die by the hand of the Nazis without even trying to escape, and there were no more than about fifty Germans against 4,000 Jews.

I fled to Mrs, Piotrowska garden, jumping into the bush and lying there. I buried my student card in the bushes. Some children saw me jump and I told them to run to Zbucki, the gardener, and ask his permission for me to hide in his basement.

Throughout these negotiations, I could hear shooting. I was worried. I had left my mother by

herself. I thought of going back to her but I knew that that would solve nothing I was not able to help her at all. All I could think of was how to get away from there.

In the afternoon, Mrs. Piotrowska's sister-in-law came and brought me bread and milk. She apologized for the dry bread telling me she did not have anything better. I thanked her and ate it. It tasted bitter. My pride was wounded. This was the first time I was unable to pay for my own bread.

For a year Mrs. Piotrowska and her family had been our neighbors and we had been quite content with each other, now they had put their lives in danger by giving me that piece of bread. By three in the afternoon all the screaming and shooting had died down The crowd moved away. Everyone was afraid to offer me a place to hide. I promised to leave by nightfall and go to the nearest village in Swiniarow, where we had friends and customers. On the way to the village of Artichow, there was a pool and I wanted to swim in it since I was hot wearing all those dresses. When I got to the village in the darkness after nine at night, I changed my mind about swimming.

On the way, I had to ask the village watchman how to find the Smieciuch family. They gave me the right directions but knew that I was fleeing the Nazis. In the morning, they

asked the head of the family to send me on my way because the whole village might suffer if I were to be found there. I pretended to be sleeping soundly to gather strength. In the morning, slowly and carefully, I got up and washed. It was hard to start out towards the unknown. I didn't have any money and I was helpless.

As I was leaving, the family told me that rather than thinking only of my own safety, I should have stayed with my mother which made me feel very guilty about my mother. They gave me breakfast and a little money for the way. The daughters were going to church, and they showed me how to get to the next village, Wyczolki, where I knew the head of a village called Kalicki.

On the way to the village, many people were coming from church. A modest peasant, not very big, who lived nearby joined me. His head kept moving to the right. He quickly understood my situation and asked me where I was going. I said, "To the Kalickis in Wyczolki." He told me he had a daughter my age, and added, "I have a special hiding place for pigs in my barn. There you can hide. There will be time to go to Kalicki after."

One of his neighbors saw us and asked him where I was going. Waclaw Radzikowski, that was the name of the peasant, told him that I was

going to the next village. In front of the barn there was a dog. Behind, there was a little door which led to the fields. "My wife will bring you food, only avoid being seen by my servant," he added.

I was very grateful and asked for wool to knit something for them. They were so good to me. I felt they wanted me to stay with them. She brought me food. On Sunday, they brought me warm water to wash. From time to time, Mrs. Radzikowska, to pamper me, brought me fruit and juice. In the evening I got a pillow and a warm, black jacket. "Don't be afraid, we have no scabies," he said, handing me the jacket.

That evening, Waclaw Radzikowski wanted to sleep next to me. I asked him to go back to his wife. He went. My life was in such danger. Had he insisted, I would have given him anything he wanted. So I lay down in my hole and he covered it from above with bundles of straw. It was impossible to find me there. They liked my knitting and I asked him to bring me more wool. I felt so secure. From behind my hiding place I could see the lovely landscape, fields and forests. The air was transparent and full of light, heaven and earth seemed to harmonize and prove the existence of a creator. I was happy. I would live, I would find Him, I thought.

This was not a promise, only a deeply

distant dream which I never mentioned to anybody. I was sure that my survival depended largely on the strength of my nerves, so I badly needed an outlook on life that would help me to live through the bad times and keep me strong in spite of everything. I wanted to forget Jews and identify myself exclusively with the Poles and Christianity.

I asked Mr. Radzikowski to go to our friend's house and inform me about my mother, but he was afraid. I was optimistic and hoped my mother too had found a similar place of hiding. In any case, if she were in hiding, no one would tell me about it. I knew that Jews were being concentrated from all the smaller ghettos in Siedlce where they were eventually killed but some managed to escape and I was sure that my mother was among them. This was the frame of mind I needed in order to survive, I decided to consider every new day a gift. I could be killed with the other Jews but for now I was still alive. I made up my mind not to think of the past nor of the future, only the present moment counted. Should I be killed on the morrow, I had nothing to leave to the people who had sheltered me but only my good name. I tried to help them with the housework. If they got up at 5 in the morning, I got up at 4 a.m. in order to help them more effectively Their little daughter Irena was not yet in school, and I tried to teach her how to

read. I asked for a suitable book. They brought me a Catechism and let me have no other book. I always read and knitted simultaneously.

Fron This lecture for the first time, I envied little children because they learned in the Catechism that "Man is created to know and love God and to work Him." While I did not know why I was alive. Many passages from the Chatechism remained with me in spite of the fact that I did not always understand what they meant.

Suddenly, I understood why I am living. Why I am man. And I felt that I had reached the source of my dreams, the essence of my longing and my search. So lying in the straw in that barn, I felt happy. I never confided in anybody. This process had to grow quietly within me.

On Sundays, everybody went to church and I stayed home and played with little Irka. While I knitted, we read. I told her fairy tales. We fell asleep among the stacks of straw in my barn and the family, coming back late and not finding us, had to search for us with a torch.

One afternoon, I did not manage to hide in time from their servant and I was very frightened but the Radzikowski's asked him to keep quiet about having seen me and he kept his promise.

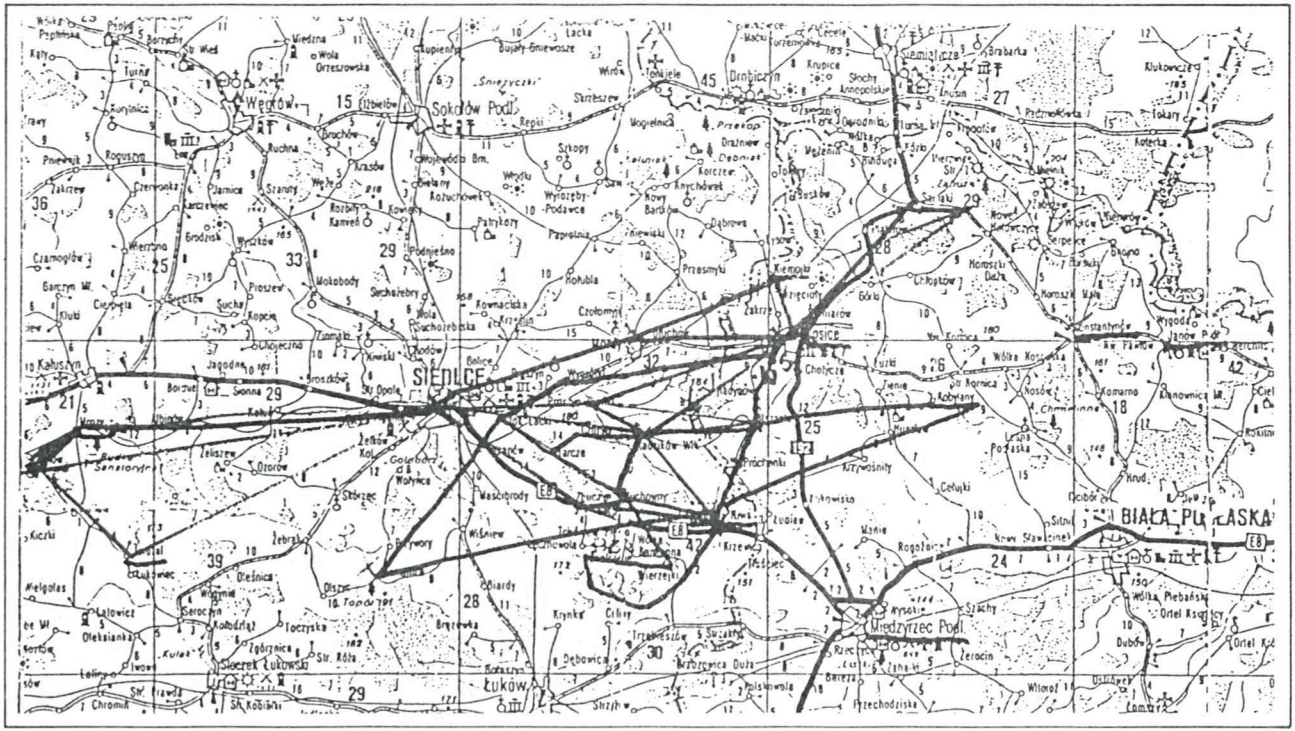
On cold evenings, well-after dark, they used to invite me to their home. I sat in the kitchen

and ate supper with the whole family. If somebody came in, I hid in a nearby room. There was always the danger of being seen through a window but after a period of good luck we were less afraid.

Once, a woman from a nearby village came into the house without announcing herself and I did not have a chance to hide in time. Mrs. Radzikowska told her I was her daughter. The woman believed her, taking me for her elder daughter, Wacia. She was amazed that I had grown so.

Several times in the evenings, Mr. Radzikowski took me with him in the cart to the fields to gather vegetables so I would not feel so closed in always.

Saturdays when they gathered potatoes in the fields, I cleaned the house. Sometimes, I ventured out alone to the well to draw water.



My ways to find shelters from 22.8.42 to 1.9.44

Chapter 7

One night at ten o'clock, in the second week of September, 1942, I was awakened by shots at the door of my hiding place, and the dog outside barked. I was sure I had been betrayed and the Germans had come to take me away. I quickly drew the black coat over me and fled to the potato fields behind the barn. I ran from one field to the next. I thought that if they were going to shoot me, they might as well do it now, in the back, In my panic, I kept repeating one sentence from the Catechism, "Holy Trinity, one God, have mercy on me." And I wondered why this sentence kept repeating itself in my brain and would not let go. It was pitch dark. The stars seemed to become more distant and I had so far to run. In the dark I could see torches being lit from house to house.

I thought my escape route had been discovered by the Nazis who were warning all the peasants around to deliver me to the Gestapo. I decided not to enter any house and I kept on running. I reached the forest just as it started to rain, a slow warm drizzle. It was pitch dark. The stars seemed to become more distant and I had so far to run. I wrapped my coat tighter around me, lay down under a great tree and was happy. I felt as safe and secure as a child in its mother's arms.

I woke up before dawn. In the mist every bush looked like a monster and a shepherd with his staff looked like a giant. I have never been a coward but these hallucinations were very frightening. I ate some berries but I knew that I could not subsist on berries for long.

I asked people how to get to the Wyczolki village and I asked about the village elder Kalicki. I looked suspicious with my white muddy skirt, yellow top, covered in a strange black cape. I was barefoot, my hair unkempt and my face scratched.

Wyczolki was built a long one street, behind which there were buildings. It was the 15th of September 1942, the feast of the "Sorrowful Mother," so most women were in church and Mr. Kalicki was therefore alone at home. He welcomed me like a daughter and immediately told me about my mother who had sent a woman from Olszanka to ask about me. I was happy to know that my mother was alive and looking for me...

He gave me bread and milk and I stayed with them. I shall never forget my first meal in their home on a white table cloth with knives and forks. I slept in the second living room and we had meals in the kitchen. We all ate from one big plate but I shared a plate with their daughter Emma. We ate a plate heaped up with potatoes.

Later, I got used to eating from a common

plate and even preferred eating with the runny-nosed children because I felt like a member of the family and not a guest. I got clean sheets after all these weeks of sleeping in the barn next to the swine. Although I slept well in the barn, I always felt like an animal but now I felt like a human being. The Kalicki family now sent their son to my former village for information. It appeared that it hadn't been Germans who shot into the barn, but thieves who came to steal the pigs. They shot the dog who guarded the barn in the eye, the dog barked and the thieves fled.

After I had escaped through the back door, Radzikowski and his brother-in-law Kazimierz Galecki, seated on their horses, searched for me in the surrounding fields all night long. But I had already entered the forest.

Meanwhile their daughter, Wacia, saw that all my belongings were left behind in their home. She refused to touch them. They so wanted me to live and use them. They were very happy to learn that I was staying with the Kalickis and promised to shelter my mother should she come.

According to the German system, smaller ghettos were constantly being formed for those still left to be annihilated. The process was repeated over and over; those who were left went to an even smaller ghetto to insure that there was no one left alive. Nehemia and his

older brother Yankiel, my two cousins who were Jewish civil guards, met in the new ghetto. Nehemia had fallen in love with me from the moment we came to the village of Losice. I used to laugh at him with scorn and my mother warned him that eating apples that were not quite ripe was "not good for one's teeth." Nehemia like other members of the Judenrath was responsible for the orderly transfer of thousands of Jews from Losice to Siedlce, our own family included.

Mr. Kalicki, who was less afraid of the Germans than Radzikowski, sent someone to the ghetto to find my mother. They told my mother about my whereabouts. Two days later, I was knitting at a window, a truck full of Germans drove by and afterwards a woman with a kerchief on her head and wearing a grey overcoat came walking to the village.

At this moment several women of the neighborhood were in the Kalicki kitchen talking. The strange woman knocked at the door and asked about Emma, the Kalicki's daughter.

They immediately brought the woman to my room. My mother and I had to dampen all expressions of joy because the neighbors were in the kitchen.

I told my mother how I had fled from Radzikowski's barn thinking that the Germans

had come for me.

My mother told me that after I jumped off the cart in the ghetto square, she understood that she should also flee. So she too jumped off the cart. At three in the afternoon, the Germans moved the whole procession of people by foot and in the carts in the direction of Siedlce. She gave up her baggage to our worker so she could escape more easily. The Poles knew very well that the Jews were going to Treblinka. In the Jewish cemetery a tunnel eight meters long had been prepared to receive the corpses of the escapees. Mr. Romaniuk, a friend of my uncle, had come the morning of the exodus asking him to flee to the house because the transport that morning was destined for Treblinka. But my uncle, Alter Beckerman, hadn't believed him: "it isn't true, because the Judenrath took gold from us and promised that we were going to the Warsaw ghetto." Their last days are described, in his book, by Pinhas Uszer who was a boy of sixteen at the time, and worked with my mother in the new Losice ghetto.

Thanks to the Judenrath and their policy, whoever left his or her place in the procession, even if he or she fainted, was immediately shot by the Germans. After several hours they passed near a well. Many of them threw themselves down to drink being so thirsty. The Germans immediately shot them all. The rest went on to

Siedlce. It was evening. Seventeen thousand Jews were gathered there from the surrounding villages.

For three days and nights they all had to lie on the cobblestones in the center of town. Those three days they lay wounded and dying in their blood and excrement, without food or water, without being allowed to move or lift their heads. During those three days my cousins Yankiel and Nehemia, as policemen, had to watch members of their families in the crowd writhing in agony on the cobblestones. On the 25th of August the Germans finished the job, everyone was dead by then. And on this day Nehemia fled and Yankiel followed.

This my mother knew only from their story. Afterwards, she began to tell me how she had escaped. She walked with the people until dark. Then, she entered a field that was near the road. There were already many corpses and bundles lying there.

Later, a peasant woman passed by. My mother called out to her, held out her wedding ring and asked for help. The woman gave her some bread, water, and a piece of sausage. She promised to come back late at night and take her home, then went on her way. Meanwhile, the Germans came back through the fields with bloodhounds. The dogs passed by my mother without touching her, as though ordained by

miracle. Later that night the woman came back to fetch her, but the neighbors called out to her warning her that if she took in a Jewess they would burn her house down. Next door to her, there lived a watchmaker who had escaped from Warsaw with his wife, Their family name was Zdzibichowski. They had no children and were very cultured people. They took her in.

My mother lacked the words to thank them. She asked me to write them immediately and tell them that she "had found her star."

My mother had no peace at the Zdzibichowskis because she had to look for me. She dressed like a beggar woman and barefoot went searching for me in the surrounding villages and fields. She looked at all the young girls she saw on her way and seemed to see my face in each one she met. People stared at her bare, white feet in amazement.

She informed all the people she knew about her whereabouts so that they could make contact between us. Although people were afraid to shelter her for any length of time, they gave her much love and understanding.

Mrs. Piotrowski told Mrs. Helena Gruszka-Kazmierczak that on the day of liquidation of the Losice ghetto I had escaped into their garden. She had given me food to eat and in the evening I had gone somewhere, she didn't know where. And later Mrs. Helena Gruszka-

Kazmierczak told me, "Once I saw your mother standing near our garden, I was stupefied we kissed one another and cried for joy and sorrow. I remember her face, tired, in despair and exhausted both psychologically and physically; a woman who had been so particular about her clothes, always clean and properly dressed in the very latest fashion. My father tried to comfort her; they spent much time talking but she needed rest first and afterwards there would be time to listen to more of her long story. I mean she wasn't just anyone, she was my beloved friend and I could not help her find her daughter."

"Our neighbor," she went on, "was a village elder who kept a Jew under his house who cried in a loud voice. He knew the village elder would have to be handed over to the Germans if he kept on shouting, but that did not stop him. We were not afraid. From the first day of the liquidation of the ghetto, we knew what the Jews had to bear; the extermination first of the sick and maimed folk, then the women and children. Anyone who tried to escape hoped that the Poles would help him and we were ready to do so.

"On the twenty-second of August," she went on, "my father asked us to feed the escapees. One was wounded. We took care of him for two months. When he recovered, a

woman gave him a revolver. He went to Father and pointing the revolver at him said, "If you don't hand me the money, I will kill you."
My father never doubted his willingness to kill him so he gave him all the money he had.

She told me all kinds of tales about me and my mother, for instance that I had gone mad and walked about the market place screaming, "Mother, Mother." Even the Germans would not touch me.

"Your mother wanted to go to Prochenki to find you. She came back two weeks later and again she went out to look for you. Not having found you, she came back."

Because of my mother's need to search for me, she'd gone back to the new ghetto believing that she would have a better chance of finding me there.

She once confessed that in the event she should survive this war, she would never go back to our city of Lodz. She would have to stay in the village of Losice all her life as a token of thanks to the inhabitants for all they had done for her.

I brought my mother to the Radzikowski family so that she could finish knitting a dress I had had no time to complete. It was also very important not to endanger the Kalicki family with whom I felt at home. I loved them and they loved me. I always had plenty of work. Emma

spun wool and dyed it and I knitted for the whole family sweaters, socks and gloves.

Every now and then, I used to visit my mother at the Radzikowski's. Miodunski, the Polish major, who had escaped from Wolyn then in the USSR, worked in the municipality issuing kennkarte.

Kalicki asked the Major to make a kennekarte for a certain woman. The woman happened to be my mother. He refused because she looked so obviously Jewish and was afraid to do so. So we bought mother, a false certificate instead for 2,000 zloty which we received from Nehemia.

I looked well and healthy at the time except for being very pale since I was never outdoors and my hair therefore looked very dark in contrast. So my mother suggested I rinse it in hydrogen peroxide to lighten the color and be less conspicuous.

My mother also suggested that I join the Kalicki girls at church for Sunday prayers so that people should get used to my presence. In the dark church with few people around, I felt safe. Only once did I not make the sign of the cross properly, and had to repeat it but no one noticed except Emma, who had brought me to church.

I envied Emma Kalicki who was entirely concentrated in her prayer, I was much

impressed by this very deep belief. I also wanted to believe and longed for God. I spoke with Emma about Christ. Everything I knew about Christ, I had read in a book, **Son of Man.** I understood well enough when she told me that He was a carpenter, son of a carpenter. But when she told me about His divinity and about the Holy Trinity, I could not respond.

I was amazed when Irena, the daughter of Major Miodunski, told us that at the age of seventeen she had lied for the first time, When asked by her mother whether she had earlier been flirting in the garden, she had denied it. I never thought that little things like those could be important to people. I never had qualms about my various little sins. As a rule, I had no need to lie at home since my parents believed in me. Also my mother possessed a most wonderful intuition and immediately knew the truth.

One Sunday, during early Holy Mass, Emma and I were sitting on the wall surrounding the church. One of our former customers from the ghetto days, a relative of, Mrs. Szydlowska, saw me there. She smiled at me. So I smiled back. I was not worried. I expected her to keep mum.

On the first of November, on All Saints Day, I heard the priest in the church at Hadynow say "Blessed be" eight times. I was most impressed by his saying, "Blessed be the poor," many more times. I also heard him say that it was easier for a

camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter heaven that was a curse on the rich. The congregation in the church was made up of the local aristocracy who were relatively rich. The priest did not flatter them.

According to the Socialist paper, **"Lodzianin"** which my father and I used to read, "the priests were out to fill their bellies and lull the mind of the people." At the time, I agreed but later I was not sure and lost my belief in Socialism.

Major Miodunski was asked by Emma, his future wife, to make a kennkarte for me. He knew nothing of my relationship to the Jewish looking woman. He was given all the so called particulars about me and my kennekarte was about to be issued, but I needed a photograph. Kalicki took me to Losice to Zbucki, who asked a photographer to come to his house. After all these terrible events, Nehemia found out I would be there and came to see me. We embraced and kissed each other warmly. Zbucki looked on with unbelievable jealousy.

In order to celebrate my having a kennkarte, I wanted to thank the family and to thank Miodunski. We made some salads and had a little party. Uninvited, a local Gestapo officer and his "woman" entered the house and we had to invite them to the party. I was asked to roll dough into naleshniki cakes in the

kitchen so the Gestapo would not ask questions. They were dancing in the salon and drinking quite a bit of vodka, so the Gestapo came into the kitchen and pulled me along to join the dancing. All the while my mother sat in a darkened inner room listening to what was going on. I can only imagine how she felt.

Soon, Mrs. Szydlowska made it general knowledge in the village of Hadinov that I was a Jew, really Jewish and the Major was afraid and refused to give me the document. However, his daughter Irena found it amongst his things at home and wanted to give it to me. He found the kennkarte missing and took it back, being very angry with Irena. I knew that I had no choice but to leave.

It was a strange evening, the one before I parted. The young people were asleep and I was up with Mrs. Kalicka. She grieved over human stupidity and meanness and I was the one who had to comfort her. I told her it wasn't important who finished knitting the sweaters; what was important to me was not to endanger the family by my presence. I told her that I could survive elsewhere, that I knew her home was open to all and to myself included, and that we would meet again.

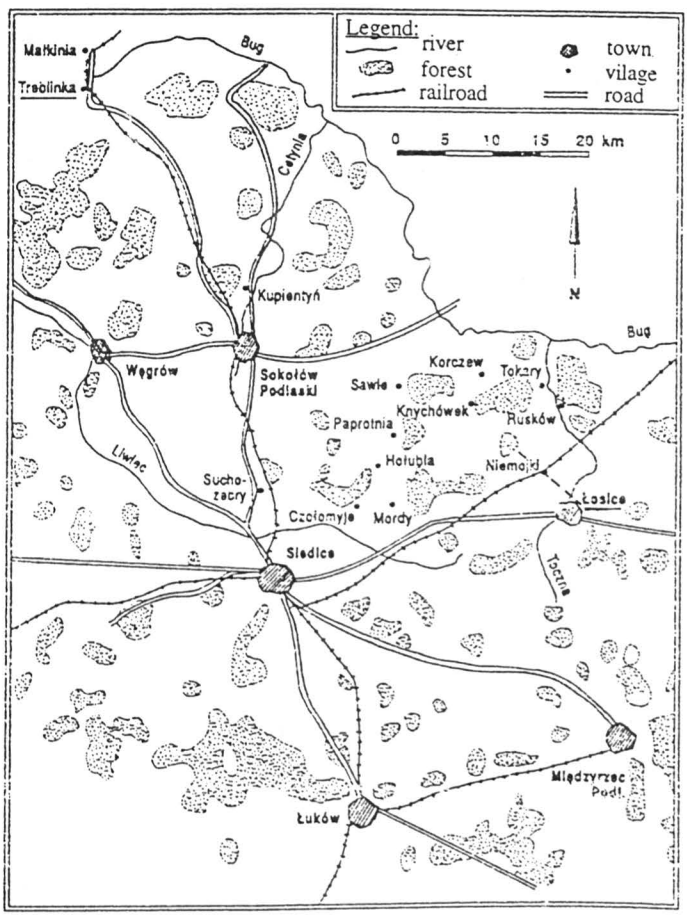
Mrs. Radzikowski arranged for me to go to a family in the next village, Bolesty. I spent the time there knitting and teaching the little son of

the family how to read and write. Mornings and evenings, I prayed with great fervor for everybody to see.

One night a jug was stolen from the neighboring farm. Next morning, two policemen came because of the theft. Their names were Pazyszek and Rutkowski. Since the neighbor wasn't at home, they came to our house, I sat in the living room. They looked at me and immediately knew that I was Jewish. I kept on denying my Jewishness and so did the head of the family. "She prays every day," he said "Praying or not, we are taking her along," they said. On the way, I still kept denying my Jewishness. But they said they had seen me knitting on the balcony in Losice in my uncle's house.

I begged them to free me, telling them that I had five gold roubles. They said that this was not enough, so I said that I still had two hundred zloty which I could add. And this was all I had. So they said they would take the five gold roubles and leave me the two hundred zloty because I might need it. I traveled with them for fifteen minutes. They let me go on the condition that I depart for a distant place where nobody knew me because in my present surroundings I was known to everybody as Beckerman's niece. They .suggested I pretend to be from around Zamosc because the natives

of the villages there had been strongly opposed to the Germans and as a result entire villages had been set afire, people and all their personal papers had been destroyed. They told me to say I was a refugee from there because my Polish was excellent and I did not look particularly Jewish. This saved me.



Chapter 8

That same evening I tried to get away but could get neither work nor find shelter anywhere. So in spite of my promise, I went to the Galecki family. He was the brother of Mr. Radzikowski, and he told my mother everything that had happened to me.

My mother was afraid. How could I escape if I hadn't been able to find shelter even for one night. So my mother thought it best for me to do forced labor with the Poles in Germany, but even for this I was not accepted.

I entered a small, snow covered isolated shack, a poor peasant house, which belonged to the Izdebski family. This house was divided into two parts, one half for the animals and the rest for the family. None of the children had shoes, so I combined wool with linen thread and made them warm socks. He made a bed for me from wooden planks. He sent the children to sleep on the stove on which bread was baked. It was wide enough for the three little children. I stayed with them for two weeks. The family received me with great pity and grace. They were happy to be able to help and showed me that they wanted me to stay with them. But after two weeks, when I saw that Mr. Izdebski was so afraid for the lives of his family, I left.

I visited my mother who was staying with

the Galecki family. She asked me to go and visit Nehemia.

Lodzia Pietrzak, a Jewish girl who took care of the cows in the farm of the Jablonski family in the village of Korczowka near Treblinka, convinced her patron to hide three young men in the bunker under the cowshed, one of them was my cousin Nehemia, Hershko, my English teacher was the second and the third was a young man named Beckerman who, although we shared a family name, was not a member of our family. He was very religious and read the Bible without stop. The boys paid for the privilege of staying there. When Nehemia had no more money left, he paid with my mother's fur coats which I brought. Mr. Jablonski bought food in different villages to avoid suspicion.

Before Christmas we were there knitting in the upper apartments. The father, Emil Jablonski used to repeat without stop, "hard times, hard times." He wanted me and mother to leave the place. He couldn't stand me. He felt I would bring him bad luck. A day before Christmas, my mother prepared the Christmas tree, white with cotton snow and tall as the ceiling. This was the only night I remember without fear. The table was set with a white tablecloth. The boys sat with us around the table. We sang. That night we slept in the bunker with the boys.

I understood much later that Mr. Jablonski's

fear was based on the fact that he manufactured false passports in his cellar.

My mother went back to Radzikowski and I went from house to house, sleeping wherever and whenever I could.

That winter, she again asked me to visit Nehemia in the bunker. I asked Lis to take me with his horse and wagon and before we got there he wanted to go to a restaurant and have some vodka. I left him in the restaurant and I went to Jablonski on foot. The father asked me how I had come and I told him with Lis. He was afraid and told me that Nehemia was no longer there. A few days later, in January, 1943, the Gestapo came on horseback. The family saw them from the window and told the boys in the bunker to flee.

Hershko and Beckerman were caught and killed and Nehemia escaped. It was Lis, whom I secretly loved, who told the Germans that the Jablonskis hid Jews.

The family had to pay the Nazis in kind, ducks and chickens, in order to keep the incident quiet.

After a time, I was near Olszanka with the Ulasiuk family when Nehemia came to see me. They let him stay in the storeroom.

We slept next to each other on the floor for a few nights but this time he didn't touch me. I didn't let him. He was so afraid. He went away

and I didn't know where.

A few months later, Mrs. Jablonska told me that he had been hiding in the bunker all the while but she had been afraid for my virtue and hadn't told me.

Later, she told me that she had visited Nehemia in Miedzyrzecze, the last remaining ghetto and that Nehemia told her that he slept with a different girl each night. They knew that life would be very short and would only last until the ghetto was liquidated.

Mr. Izdebski saw I had nowhere to stay and so I went back to his house. I gladly accepted his invitation to take me to his father-in-law for work for a fortnight in Krzesk. One day a young man in rags came to the door. He wanted to sleep in the barn.

They gave him a chunk of bread but nothing else. I was afraid to tell him I was also Jewish and could do nothing for him. In winter nobody washed much. The family wore heavy sheepskins and had plenty of lice .The neigh - bors had typhoid and other diseases.

I went back to the Galecki family to visit my mother. The house consisted of one small room in which my mother and I shared a bed vacated in our honor by a fourteen year old orphan girl who also lived with the family. Kazimierz Galecki and his wife slept on the other bed and the orphan on a straw mattress

on the floor. I started running a fever.

I swallowed Pyramidon tablets and "hogel mogel" egg yolk and sugar. My whole body was covered in red spots and I had a headache. My mother had already had typhoid fever during the First World War, so she was not afraid.

At night mother and I would have heart to heart talk. She told me that she knew about everything that happened to me under any circumstance. I considered her more a sister than a mother, so I told her that should I survive, I'd convert to Christianity. I said these people who take us in and risk their lives in so doing, don't do this for the sake of another woolen sweater. My mother also thought so, but did not want my father to think that we had traded our lives for religion. Nevertheless, I calmed her fears and told her that father knew us better than to believe such things about us.

During the long nights, my mother explained her outlook on life to me and how she applied it to real life. It went like this: If you want to live well with people, behave so that people will like living with you. She really poured her soul into mine. She confessed her "sin" to me, that she had wanted to live even if I had died, but she knew that she was not going to survive. This she told me many times over; her nerves were too frayed, although she

looked healthy.

I felt the need to believe, to have a spiritual spine to support me. I was very much ashamed of this need, so I explained to myself that I was simply going through the process of all humanity fervently believing in God during one period like the Middle Ages for example, and then at another stage in history, not believing. So I, too, had reacted at this time to blind belief, and later on, perhaps, I would discard it. God probably smiled at my childish thoughts and slowly, by degrees, I drew nearer to Him. Meanwhile it became known that the Germans were about to confiscate chickens on a grand scale in all the villages. But when the German chicken catchers came every few days and turned everything upside down, we of course had to disappear. When mother and I left each other, my mother said, "May God guide you." I did not know then that this would be our final separation.

After days of typhoid fever, I was scarcely able to sit up. The Radzikowski family looked at me with pity. They carried me to the cart and brought me to the Kalicki house. I spent four more days under my father's coat in their kitchen since I did not want to use the family sheets. The food they gave me I could not swallow so it went to the chickens. Slowly the fever left me. When the Germans drew near,

Emma, the daughter, put me on a cart and brought me back to Izdebski, a fair distance away. I was beginning to stand up. Mr. Izdebski was poor but merciful, however he was afraid that the Gestapo might find me at his place. In the morning, he went to bury his brother-in-law who had caught typhoid fever along with me. He was twenty years old, he was handsome and good, a strong worker whom the family depended on. I could not understand why he should have died while I lived, in spite of the fact that my life seemed quite useless.

They asked me to go with them to the church in Krzesk for the burial service but I was afraid to be seen or noticed. I went to see Josefa, Lis's sister and I stayed with her for a week. She had two little sons and I slept with them. I was terribly afraid to infect them, but I did not have the strength to go on elsewhere. Since I did not tell them about my illness, they let me wash the floors, the next day. They all lived in one small room, two meters by three. I could not swallow food. This seemed to me a sign of certain death, but I was too weak to feel much emotion about the fact.

I was not listed as a resident in this village, so the village elders were afraid and wanted me to leave. On the 29th of March 1943, Jozefa's brother came back from Losice with the news that the Germans had killed my mother in the

Jewish cemetery. I did not want to believe this, so I stayed with them for another two days. Since in any case I had to leave Krzesk and I had a little more strength to walk, I walked to Wyczolki for more news about my mother.

Mrs. Kalicki told me how guilty she felt that she had not kept my mother in their home. It was my mother who wanted to leave their house in order to sell her new corset in the neighborhood and get better food for me with this money. I felt pity for Mrs, Kalicki and told her that my mother would not have stayed with them for long in any case. I knew she wouldn't have wanted to be a burden to them.

She was looking for a possible buyer for her corset, and she came to Bolesty. While she was there in one of the village houses, the son of a Forest Inspector dressed in his green uniform and carrying a rifle - the Germans too wore green uniforms - entered the house. My mother turned pale and her hands were shaking.

Noticing her fear, he asked her whether she was Jewish. She gave him her false identity card. He refused to believe her. She was his meal ticket, he would get quite a bit of vodka for turning in another Jew. He would not let her go. He took her to Losice. For three days, they kept her there in prison and asked her where she had been all this time. She knew they were going to kill her anyhow. So although they

kept on beating her, she never admitted being Jewish and did not tell them where and with whom she had stayed for the past seven months. I later learned the rest of the story from Mrs. Pazyszek, the policeman's wife. Meanwhile Mrs. Kalicki was trying to give me some hope, telling me that maybe it was not really my mother who had been caught. I started running to the Radzikowskis, in a neighboring village deluding myself that I was going to find her there and hear her voice, but of course she was not there and the Radzikowskis did not know anything for sure.

So at night, I stole into Losice to speak to Mrs. Piotrowska. She told me the story of Zosia, a five year old girl who had escaped from Zamosc and had lived with them. She told me I could say I was the orphan's cousin. She had already heard that my mother was killed but in order to be quite sure she called Czeslaw Zbucki. He pitied me and lied to me.

Neither I nor the Piotrowski family believed him when he said he had been on guard in the cemetery for a whole week and nobody had been killed there during that period. That night, I dreamt that I was laying flowers on my mother's grave.

Everybody was very sorry for my mother which enhanced my own sorrow. They praised her for her goodness and were very sorry that

she had been killed while I was still alive. I readily agreed with them but I was still so weak and frozen with pain so I could not cry over my mother's death. There also was the daily task of trying to stay alive. Without any papers, I too had no chance of escape. So I went to see the policeman who had saved me once and asked him for a new kennkarte. I wanted this identity card to be as convincing as possible, based on a birth certificate so that no one could prove that I was Jewish. The policeman Pazyszek was not at home. His wife wanted to give me the identity card of a woman who had been shot a week before. I did not take it. It was my mother's card.

On a chair nearby, the only chair in her room, there was the girdle which my mother had wanted to sell for my sake. I did not need any more proof.

The policeman Pazyszek was due to come home the next day. Meanwhile I went to see Zdzibichowski, the watchmaker who had been so hospitable to my mother at the beginning of her flight. They received me warmly and mourned my mother's passing. Pazyszek came and could not supply me with a convincing identity card.

After my illness and my mother's death, I went to see Mrs. Jablonska and got an address from her of a young man who might supply me

with a "birth certificate." I asked for a small prayer book. I liked the chapter about physical pity in it. I wandered from village to village to find work and shelter; usually, only at night when I felt so hopeless did I ever find anything. I got used to finding miraculous endings to every hopeless situation and began to believe in Providence. I always knocked at the right door, but I got very weary of it all.

I reconsidered my mother's early plan to propose myself for forced labor in Germany but I hated the Germans and I was afraid to react indecently should they call me "a dirty Polish swine." But without a kennkarte, identity card, I could not do it anyway and could not replace a Pole in a forced labor contingent.

Once on my wanderings, I suddenly saw the sky turn red. The peasants looked up from their work. I felt them pointing at me. I didn't know the meaning of the omen. Only later did I find out that this was the result of the uprising of the Warsaw ghetto a hundred and twenty kilometers away.

It was cold and damp. Whenever I asked for shelter in any house, I told the same story. I was from Zamosc, and I began to knit a new sweater for the children. I was apprehensive about the future. I was afraid to think. Some people in the village wondered about my hair, dyed blond.

I entered a house surrounded by fields. I

was grateful to have a few days of rest, glad to be knitting and peeling potatoes sitting down while working. In the field around the house my peasant family were scattering manure.

Through the window I saw five policemen approaching. Our house was isolated, at the outskirts of the village, there was no garden. I had no place to hide so I went to open the door to them. "Jewess?," they asked.

"No, I am a refugee from Zamosc." One of them talked to me from the open door of the kitchen, while the rest waited in the room. It wasn't hard to persuade him that my father was a Polish patriot from Zamosc. He was beginning to believe me, but asked "why I dyed my hair blond." "I want to be pretty," I said. "Yes, my wife also dyes her hair blond." But, he added, "why are you shaking? Are you afraid?" "You left the door open," I said. "I have a cold." Meanwhile my peasants had returned from the field and had begun to scramble eggs for the policemen. Of course they put vodka on the table, lots of vodka. One policeman asked the head of the family why he doesn't go to church. "I have no shoes," he answered" They believed him as they believed me, all except one named Wierzykowski. He said, "I know you are a Jew but I have a daughter your age." Nobody heard him, only I. Maybe after wodka, they had a change of heart and everybody else present

began to pity me. They needed a cook at headquarters and they asked me if I wanted the job. I explained that I did not know how to cook.

"The commanding officer's cousins will teach you, You'll get a room, a kennkarte and you won't even have to go to Germany to find work." After all my wanderings, these conditions seemed very attractive, but I was afraid of them. The Polish Police worked for the Germans as well as the Gendarmerie in the neighborhood.

They asked the peasant family to keep me until Sunday and on Sunday I would go to headquarters. For three long nights I did not sleep. Should I go into the lion's den? I could flee but it would endanger the lives of my peasants. I didn't want them to get into trouble; they had already divested themselves of much of their vodka on my account. On Sunday, I thanked them and went to the police headquarters. I hoped I would be given the papers they had promised me and then I would escape. When I got there, they were sitting in the reception room, there were about ten officers. " Then you really are not Jewish?" they asked.

"Would I have come here if I were Jewish?," I asked. "Maybe you would," they said. "Anyway, you speak good Polish and we need

a cook." The officer in charge was friendly and civilized. The others rather crude and drunk. I shared a room with the commandant's cousin who was supposed to teach me how to cook. For another three long nights I was so worried thinking of ways of escaping, I could not sleep.

Chapter 9

In order to prove that I was not Jewish and to get my birth certificate, they sent me to the local priest in Krzesk. He tested my knowledge of religion and asked me about the main principles of the Christian faith.

I said, "Most important of all, God is Mercy." The priest said, "No, the most important of all is the existence of God." I said, "so the second most important principle is God is Mercy." The priest said, "No it isn't." I couldn't believe that there was no such principle as God is Mercy. I had a little book of prayers that Mrs. W. had given me and I could remember only this principle of faith. I found it hard to understand that there should be six more important principles of the Christian faith and not one of them emphasizing mercy. I answered all the priest's questions concerning details of my birth and the registration in the Church of the Holy Cross in Lodz. He looked doubtful when I said that my mother's name was Wierzejska because I had told him that I came from the village of Wierzeje, that part at least was true. I went back to the Police station still clinging to the promise of certificates and that evening the commander asked me about my visit. I told him that the priest had asked me about the main principles of the Christian faith and that I hadn't known

them. He laughed and said that he too wouldn't have known them and so we had a good laugh together. Nonetheless I felt very bad about not having told the priest the truth. I was so troubled that I went back the next day meaning to tell him the truth. I knew that any answer he would get from my home town would not do me any good. He told me he had already sent the letter to Lodz. I thanked him and returned to the police station with a heavy heart. Trying to find a way to escape, I told the commandant and his cousin that my father would not approve of my serving policemen and Germans. I would therefore like to leave a soon as I received my kennkarte. The policemen were gathered around me and I told them that Lodz was in the Third Reich and postal communication was most uncertain and it would take at least a month to receive a reply from the church in Lodz.

"Wouldn't it be just as good if I got a false birth certificate from my friends in Warsaw? They are working for the Polish underground and they are prepared to help me.

"I took a big risk telling them this, but I felt I could trust them. "A forgery?" they asked. "Well, how could you be sure that my birth certificate coming from Lodz would not be a forgery? I see very little reason to wait a full month for a birth certificate. All I want is some

kind of paper stating that I worked for you. But they were afraid to give me any such paper.

Luckily, a young man from the Zalewski family was going to Siedlce on his bicycle and he gave me a lift to the railway station. I took a train to Warsaw, Andrzej, a man I knew through the W. lived in a little town near Warsaw. I had to wait three days for his return. It was before Passover. His mother asked me to wash the curtains and I did so willingly. I was surprised how freely she acted with the Jews. Wanda, the Jewish boarder, had Aryan documents and her father had paid 300 zloty a day for her room and board. Yet, she did not hide from the neighbors as I did. She joined us for dinner on an open veranda. Her father had owned a large factory. He was a rich and very religious Jew who understood the necessity of study and permitted her to go to school on the Sabbath. When Andrzej arrived, I told him the story of the Police. He took me to Warsaw and in half an hour brought me my "birth certificate." It looked real. The paper was old, it came from a destroyed church in Vilno. The priest had saved the paper for this purpose. Instead of the name Wierzejska, they had written, Wysocka and born in Vilno rather than Lodz. Andrzej was concerned about my contact with the Police. He asked me to pay him but I had no money. I gave him my father's wedding ring and he put

me back on the train to Siedlce. When I showed the police my birth certificate, they were afraid to keep me there, and proposed I go to the Mroz family in Blazeje.

There I worked in the fields, taking cows to pasture, and in the house. I spent two of the most difficult months there. I didn't have any shoes and I had wounds on my legs and I cried in the fields when no one was there to see me.

At Easter time, I went to church with the peasants. I was taught that the women pray on the right side and the men on the left in the Catholic church. I felt I must give priority to Christianity over Judaism. In the light of the new, the old must disappear.

In May after work, the people assembled before the cross outside to read and pray together. It was a lesson of love, simple and honest. I was very happy to take part.

But after a while our neighbors began to suspect that I was Jewish and said so. Once, one of the policemen from Krzesk came to the house again. The lady of the house told him once more that I was Catholic and that I had a birth certificate to prove it. He asked to see it. I didn't know whether he remembered that I had told him that I was born in Lodz at our first meeting. Vilno was now written on my birth certificate and the family name was not the one I had given to him, but he looked and said "It is

O.K., what do you want from her?"

Too much was being whispered about me, but only when the entire village started getting frightened did they pay me for my work and suggest I look further afield. They had kept me as long as they could and we had gotten along well. I decided to leave Blazeje. I spent a little time with Mrs. Zalewska in Stok Lacki. She hadn't much work in her little garden.

She took me to Halina Lugowska in Choja. Halina with her husband and three small children, had come to live with her grandparents for the duration of the war. The grandparents lived in the upper rooms and the young family down in the kitchen.

Halina was an orphan and she understood what it means to be homeless. She and her husband slept in one bed and I shared the other with the three children. The children didn't go to school because they had no shoes.

We huddled together in the kitchen, I knitted, she cooked while the children played. It was cold, only the men went out to work. The elders and the neighbors told Halina that it was dangerous to keep me. I remained there but she loved me and it was nice telling her stories about my home. I told her that during the war my mother used to make challah, a long braided loaf of bread eaten by the Jews on the Shabbat and at holiday meals. Halina warned me not to

tell anyone about this and I felt she was interested in my welfare and truly loved me.

She took me to the Z. family. They were rich. Everything was in its proper place. They appreciated good work. Mrs. Z. taught me how to clean the wooden floor while she knitted. In their house, I had a little room all to myself. I didn't know then that in the basement, in fear and trembling, a Jewish couple named Bedka and their son were hiding. Only in 1987, when I visited Poland for the first time after the war, did Mr. Z. tell me this.

When I finished my work, they paid me like many of the rich, a little less than I would get from the poor, and a woman took me to a widower in Kobylany. I knew from my mother's story that this village once belonged to my grandfather, but there was no one left to tell the tale. I decided not to stay long with the widower and I took advantage of an invitation to help Rozalia Wielgorska-Gawinkowska in the village of Kornica. She lived in half a house, the first house built in this village. She had one room with two windows and the kitchen was in the room. She, her husband and their two children lived in this room.

At Rozalka's, I preferred to sleep in the bed placed in the entrance because the apartment was too crowded for five people. During the winter, the snow fell on my bed. I had a

swandown quilt and I was warm despite the snow which seeped in through the badly closed doors. In the morning, I helped Rozalka with the housework and afterward I looked after the children. During this period, I knew God existed, whatever His name. I spent hours at night gazing at the stars through the window in silent conversation with the unknown deity. The next door neighbor, Irena, had a Bible at home. I started reading but stories like Isaac meeting Rebecca at the well did not interest me in the least.

A month later, I was sitting near the open window when one of the neighbors from the other side of the village came in to advise my hostess to send me away because I could bring only misfortune to the village. Rozalka refused, only she asked me to go to the church on Sundays and holy days. Once on a feast day, the church was full of strange persons who had come to the hamlet from Warsaw to buy provisions. As usual, I was upstairs in the choir loft because I didn't know how to behave in the church. The subject of the sermon that day was, Render to Caesar what is Caesar's" and " unto God what is God's." The priest, Zigmond Wachulak said to the congregation, "If the Germans tell us to give them our pigs, you can if we wish, it isn't a sin, but when the Germans tell you to give them our Jews, you mustn't because

the Jews have the same eternal souls as you. Give the Jews food, clothes and shelter because hiding them is your duty."

Standing there in the choir loft, I did not know whether the priest knew anything about me or not but after his sermon, talk about me in the village died down.

A week before Christmas a fire broke out in the barn of the head of the village. The farmers envied his wealth they would not venture out to help extinguish the fire. I couldn't bear seeing them standing there passively, only Czeslaw Gorzala climbed up to the roof and I filled pail after pail with water and handed it to him. In school I'd learned the principle, "all for one, and one for all." Two local priests arrived at the scene. I asked them to organize some help so I would not have to carry so many pails of water all by myself, but to no avail. The priest knew very well that the elite of village elders were very unpopular. The fire was finally extinguished.

In the morning, I would wake up with difficulty to Rozalka's screams of "Wanda! Wanda! Wanda," she said, "you were so quick to move when there was a fire, and now you just lie there." "But now there is no fire," I said flavoring my audacity.

She was all the more angry at me for helping someone whose political leanings she detested.

At that time I didn't understand why no one wanted to help put out the fire.

During the holidays, our neighbor Czeslaw Gorzala whose sisters were Benedictine nuns in the monastery in Zbuczyn, would bring me poems written by a Benedictine nun Sr. Lodzia and poems by Renia, a thirteen year old Jewish girl whom the nuns were hiding, poems of a child hungry for God. Fr. Sulej, a Marianin priest, born in Zbuczyn, got her a kennkarte. Later, when she finished school, she was baptised and married the Director of the hospital in Szczecin. Their son, too, grew up to become a physician in the same hospital.

After Christmas, it is traditional for the priest to visit his people and to ask questions about the catechism. He was supposed to come to us at the Gawinkowskis, too, and the women gossiped among themselves about what I would answer when questioned by him. They knew I couldn't recite even the simplest prayers. Deliberately, the priest did not ask me any questions, instead he said, "You did very well when the fire broke out."

Only when I was baptized at my request a half a year later did the priest remember that he could have asked me about the catechism at the Gawinkowski's, but he hadn't wanted to, he had only complimented me on my hard work.

I spent most evenings with Stasia, another

neighbor, or with refugees from Gilowice. I was free to go to these gatherings with the young and the elders. In general the get-to-gethers took place in a modest apartment which was now occupied by expelled Poles, Agnieszka and Franciszek Wnetrzak. She was a seamstress who sewed throughout the meeting. Grownups used to gather round Agnieszka and her husband Franciszek and sometimes Czeslaw Gorzala would drop by and improvise little poems for each of us. When he was told that intelligent people don't believe in God, only in science, he said, "intellectuals know with their minds that God does not exist but I believe."

He convince me. It was a very courageous attitude at the time. I waited anxiously for his poem about me. He wrote:

What shall I write you,
my road is already paved.
I look at it and can only feel sorrow for you
who live in fear
among unfriendly strangers
who do not love you.
You stare at the road before you
and the future lies far beyond
but the Lord is merciful.
Your life is full of fears
and you dream that in a little while, a man of peace
will lighten your woes
in that place
where happiness rises from the storm.

I was sure he knew everything there was to know about me, for he wrote this beautiful poem which showed the depth of his understanding of me.

It was New Year's 1944, and we sat at Stasia's. People laughed at me because I continuously looked through the window. Outside there was silence. We were snowed under. I had the feeling that this year something was going to happen any minute now that some happiness was going to walk in through the door or climb in through the window. I did not yet know what kind of happiness awaited me.

Chapter 10

I registered my demand for a kennkarte with the Municipality in Czuryly. They issued the document without any comment about previous registration. Czeslaw knew that my kennkarte was ready, I was afraid to go and get it so he went and got it for me. I felt I was saved. Since my hostess was too poor to keep me throughout the winter, I looked for another job.

In general, the poorest people paid the best wages and showed me the most affection. Czeslaw went to his friend Marian Piechowicz and asked him to take on "a cousin" for work, a cousin who did not want to work in Germany. He agreed. But when I arrived, Marian was frightened of me. His wife Lucyna asked him if I had been their child how would he feel? So they took me in on the condition that Czeslaw would promise to let them know when the Germans approached the village. They would then send me to their grandmother who lived one kilometer from their home. Their house was surrounded on three sides by a forest and on the fourth side by a field and the road to the church. They let me use the storeroom. I cleaned it. A bed was put in and a little table and one chair. My hostess taught me how to gather wood from the forest for the fire and

how to keep the twigs dry and how to keep the firewood stacked. I asked for one liter of milk for milking the cows and for one kilogram of bread for teaching the children.

I loved all my mistress' children, Hania, the nine year old Marylka, the seven year old and Tadzio who was five and little Mirka, the baby.

I loved to play with them as long as I did not have to teach them reading, writing and the catechism. They were not used to concentrating on lessons and I was often impatient with them and slapped their hands. I sometimes felt it would be easier to go out and work in the fields than to teach them.

Lucyna also paid me for knitting when the other chores were done. She loved me. Czeslaw came to their house from time to time to speak to Marian and bring me books and magazines. In one of them I read, "God is nearest to the soul that is in the most turmoil." He is near to me.

In March Czeslaw told me that the priests from Warsaw had arrived and suggested I go and hear them. I told him that I had heard enough priests in Warsaw. But he insisted. He said I should go; he believed that he could help save my soul. I told him my soul was destined for hell anyway. I said this only as an excuse for not going because I didn't know much about hell nor did I believe in it Nonetheless, the next day, I went to the church.

I stood in my usual place in the choir loft in front of the organ, near Rosalka. That day's sermon was about the commandment, "respect thy mother and father." The priest described how Miriam and Joseph lost Yeshua in Jerusalem. They asked their friends about Him. They searched in the fields. The priest used the same phrases my mother used when she described her search for me. It was the same kind of suffering. Rosalka remembering her mother. I cried and Rosalka cried.

From that day on, I listened to every sermon.

When Fr. Henryk Sulej spoke about heaven, his smile was sincere. He was sad when telling us about hell, which he said wasn't a place but a state of soul that knows the God exists but cannot reach Him nor love Him. The terminology was the same as I had used to express my suffering in the ghetto when I so needed God and when there was no one to teach me how to approach Him.

I was convinced that the priest's faith was as sincere as his smile I went to these daily meeting with growing enthusiasm. During one of the last sermons he asked the congregation to pray for those who would convert, but could not. All of the farmers knelt with such sincerity that I felt they were praying for me. I would pray, but could not.

Their prayer broke the ice around my soul. Even now, I can see the exact place where I told Irena as we walked home from church that I must go back, "I have to speak to the priest." I also told Czeslaw; he was very glad. He told me the priest was in the kitchen and so I went to look for him.

There were many people in the kitchen. The women had brought eggs and different kinds of food for their pupils at the school in Bielany. Now I know that they saved many Jewish boys, among the others, in that school. I found Fr. Sulej and told him that I have to speak to him alone. He led me to the balcony. It was cold but the cold soon passed.

"I want to be baptized," I told him.

"And what about the Holy Trinity?" he asked.

"It may be like the light that disperses into colors or the water that turns from ice to steam."

"Not exactly," he said, "but for the time being it will suffice."

"How are you living? Do you have a kennkarte?"

I was very proud to be able to answer that I had everything, including a kennkarte. All I needed was baptism. He invited me to come to Zbuczyn in two week; he would be there. I went back to Halina Lugowska to Choja, it was

the nearest village to Zbuczyn where I was to meet Fr. Sulej on Holy Friday. I told Halina that I was going to receive Holy Communion. I didn't know then that there would be no Eucharist that day, but on Halina's face there appeared only a passing smile. She made herself believe my story.

I walked in the snow in my mother's sandals and thought how after my death it would be written and everyone would know how heroic I was. I arrived at the church. The figure of Jesus on the Cross was put on the floor for adoration. When the ceremony finished, I found myself kneeling before the prone statue of the Crucified Christ.

It was the first time that I kissed the blood stains on his face with love. I can't explain why, yet from the beginning I felt myself to be the beloved of God. It was very irreverent of me, but even now I can't feel fear of God. After a while the Parish priest invited me to the Parish house. But I must wait for Fr. Sulej, he said. I was invited to sit near the fire so my feet could dry and was given a book to read, "The Story of the Soul," the autobiography of a French Carmelite nun named Therese of the Child Jesus. The book brought me close to the Carmel Order and to the life of sacrifice.

When Fr. Sulej returned, he spoke to me about the history of redemption from the revolt

of the Archangel up to the redemption won by Christ on the Cross. We were alone in the room. The man was handsome and I thought I could kiss him. He read my mind and told me that it is better to speak of these matters while kneeling. I remember that first lesson very clearly. The next lesson would be with a younger priest Chojecki in the church in Radzikow.

I finished my work for Halina and went back to my room in Malinowiec. The elder priest Fr. Zigmunt Wachulak (who had not embarrassed me by asking questions concerning the catechism) told me that he could prepare me for baptism if I insisted but that he was so busy with his fields, his cows and livestock that he preferred to have Chojecki, the younger priest prepare me. "It will be difficult," he said, "but if you truly believe, he can do it."

For a whole month I was a guest in his house. When I decided to belong to God, I wanted to confess my Jewish origins to everyone. Fr. Sulej forbade me to do so. I asked him to be present at my baptism. He promised.

My life, my spiritual rebirth, demanded knowledge. I was ignorant of the catechism. I knew nothing about the Bible. Fr. Chojecki gave me the New Testament and told me to read the Gospel according to St. John and to come back the next day at 10:30 a.m.

I came very late the next morning and Fr. Chojecki was waiting at front of the door. He was a little nervous about seeing me. At this time three thousand priests were interred in jails and concentration camps. Would I, too, inform the authorities about him as other priests had been informed upon? But he said nothing, he only asked why I was late. "I've been reading the Gospel and lost track of the time" I replied. He simply smiled.

For me, the Gospel was a book that I couldn't put down. It fascinated me. Passages about love for one's enemies charmed and delighted me. I was sure that no human being could invent such a commandment. I, who was so filled with hatred, felt so happy that I had found a religion that asked me to love and to pity. I was being given so much more than I could ever give in return. I worked for my daily bread, but the risk that others took in sheltering me was so great that I felt it was God's mercy that had kept any of them from being punished because of me. I worked but there was no one poorer than I. I learned to give 5% of my salary to those who were even poorer who did not live in the village.

Once, in a catechism lesson the priest asked me, "What is hope?"

"The strength to survive," I replied. That answer was not in my book but he said I was a

good pupil and sincere. I told him everything I had in my heart and he understood.

One afternoon, while I sat knitting near the church with one of the parishioners, a very religious woman, well known as a gossip, entered the house. She took one look at me and asked, "Aren't you the daughter of a woman from Lodz, known for her knitting?" I do not resemble my mother but my eyes were those of a hunted animal and they gave me away so I said, "Yes, I am the daughter." I was worried and Fr. Chojecki promised to settle the matter.

We fixed a date for the baptism, the 29th of May, 1944, the Saturday before Pentecost Sunday. The day which commemorates the second time in the year the first Christians were baptized. I felt I was one of these first Jews who had been converted in Jerusalem. Only much later did I understand the meaning of this event.

In Poland this whole month is dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Every evening, there are ceremonies with songs and prayers. After work, the people like to participate.

Since Fr. Sulej would not be able to come despite his promise, Fr. Chojecki would be officiating. He suggested his father as sponsor but I refused. Since my whole family had been killed, I wanted someone young who could be expected to live for a long time. So I asked Czeslaw Gorzala to be my godfather. He had

helped me find God the Father. When I glanced at Czeslaw in the church, I understood from his excitement that he knew I would honor him. He took his task seriously and didn't forget his responsibility till his dying day.

Fr. Chojecki asked his sister Irena, whom I didn't know, to be my godmother. She was only a few year older than I.

During my preparation period for the sacrament of Baptism, we went through every detail of the baptismal ceremony which is capped with a gift of a white garment. The priest asked me if I had any white clothes to wear. Alone in my room, I couldn't stop laughing, I had only a white towel. I was afraid that I would laugh during the ceremony too. Suddenly, I had a wave of doubt.

When I told Fr. Chojecki about this, I saw that he wanted very much to help. I understood how precious my soul was to him.

Two nights before the baptism, there was a burial of the Wysokinski family who had been caught hiding Jews on their way to Treblinka. The family was butchered. One boy only had escaped to tell the tale. The people in the church were sad, but I was too preoccupied with myself in those days to register the meaning of the sadness. The idea of having to obey the precepts of the Church till my dying day lay heavily on my heart. I needed to

believe, and I asked myself what would happen if I ceased believing. But I accepted the answer that faith isn't changed like a pair of gloves.

I spent three days in retreat before my baptism preparing myself spiritually. Not having a watch, I ran to the church at the break of dawn on the 29th of May 1944, afraid to be late on such an important occasion. Fr. Wachulak was making the rounds in his fields. The church was locked.

When the door was finally opened, Fr. Chojecki's sister Irena, upon seeing me, cried out. I was sorry my mother was not present to share my happiness. After the two Masses, when all the people had gone, the priest, my godparents and I remained in the church. According to the ancient ritual, the priest asked me if I denied all the errors and prejudices of the Jewish faith. I had no idea about the meaning of Jewish prejudices. Before my conversion I hadn't even known what the Ten Commandments were. I was then asked to deny the devil and his proud, and so on... "Do you want to be baptized?" I was asked. "Yes," I said with my whole heart.

My godparents put their hands on my shoulders. This gave me a feeling of security.

"Which name will you take?"

"Theresa," I answered. I wanted to be called Theresa.

"Wanda Theresa, I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Nobody said, "Amen" but in the silence it seemed like all of heaven said, "Amen."

I felt the water on my head and I felt cleansed like a newborn child. I knew that from now on everything would depend only on me. I prayed to God from the bottom of my heart, asking to belong to Him. I did not try to express my feelings. I knew that everything was now decided. I was given a lighted candle and a piece of white cloth for my head. We walked up to the main altar.

"Will you receive the Holy Communion now?"

When I answered "yes," Father lit the candles and recited the "I confess..." I thought that I had had no time in my short life to sin! Immediately afterward, I received the consecrated Host and with a heart full of happiness, I met my Lord. "I have been waiting for You for such a long time." I said without reproach. Fr. Chojecki called my name. I went over to kiss his hand but he drew his hand away. From the corner of my eye, I saw a pail full of white lilacs brought by Czeslaw. He had picked them unaware that these were the flowers my mother loved more than any others. A feeling of warmth embraced my heart. The lilac was a sign of her presence.

We had to leave the church because people were wondering what was going on inside. Before we parted, I embraced Irena on both cheeks. She too had cried during the Mass, but surely not because she missed her mother, hers was well and alive and very good to her.

The weather that day was wonderful. Czeslaw invited me to his home for the Pentecost holiday but I refused; I wanted to traverse the forest and go home to the Piechowicz family. On my way, I gave my thanks to nature which joined me in a hymn of love and peace. Each day, as I came back home through the forest, the old trees and the new, in all shades of green, enchanted me. I felt that I was in the most beautiful, the most perfect temple of God. Nature now had the signature of its Artist. As if scales had fallen from my eyes, I could suddenly see everything in a new light. God revealed himself to me in every leaf.

I sat down on the ground and looked at the prayerbook I had received from Fr. Chojecki. There was a marker in the Psalm of David, a psalm of penitence and waiting for the Messiah. The message was so simple.

How can Jews read these same Psalms and not understand? I asked myself. For the first time, I felt love and pity for them instead of hate. I'll have to find a way to bring God nearer to them, I reflected.

The first month of my conversion was like a honeymoon with God and I decided not to spoil it with thoughts of my future studies nor the years of my past suffering. Now, I had the right and the privilege to be truly happy, feeling only happiness.

Meanwhile, I had to begin working and living like a Christian. This was a Saturday and Lucyna, the landlady was very busy preparing for Pentecost. She was baking a cake and needed help. She knew I had been in the church for such a long time but she asked no questions. She gave me some fresh cake and we went on working. I was glad that God had provided a good breakfast for me.

For the next three days I was immersed in God's love and whatever I did, I did for love. Most important of all was my decision to love my neighbor as myself. I therefore brought potatoes from the cellar and asked Lucyna what else she needed. But she understood that I wanted to be free to go to the church and she said she didn't need any more help. Only then did I wash and put on my best dress for church.

To receive Holy Communion was more important to me than Holy Mass, that seemed too short to me anyway. Every morning after the first Mass I stayed on for the second Mass in order to give thanks. Afterwards, I stayed on

to say my own prayers. This was a time when I was most talkative to God. After all, I had a great deal to tell Him. At last, there was someone who was open to all my many needs. I also read my prayers from prayer books. Soon after, Helenka, who was responsible for decorating the church with flowers asked me to help her. I loved ascending the alter steps and being very near the Tabernacle. After Holy Communion, I tried to achieve inner calm so as to be able to hear whatever Jesus intention were for me that day. Then I tried to apply these intentions to my work the following day. Like the early Christians, I wanted to receive Holy Communion for the whole first week. I helped my landlady during the day but in the evening I again dressed and went to church for evening prayers.

While I was gathering wood in the forest for the kitchen stove, I considered how to achieve grace for the Jewish people who lived in such darkness. I am a Jew, I reasoned, and why should I be so happy and they so unfortunate? Even if I had all the technical facilities at my disposal, I could never convince them. That much I knew. So, I had only my new found joy with God, in contrast to my misery without God. Therefore, since I was unique among the Jews, after my "honeymoon", I decided to join the Carmelite Order. If I couldn't convert the Jews

to see the light of God, I would bring God closer to them.

I had never expected to find so much happiness in belief. Before my baptism, the idea of the Eucharist, the little I knew about it, seemed pale and uninviting. Only after Holy Communion did I experience this unexpected happiness, this sweetness. As I worked, I saw my life pass before my eyes. I understood how Providence had guided me through dangers and tortuous paths of my own ego. And how I was stopped at the lips of the abyss. This filled me with a feeling of thankfulness.

It was at harvest time that Mirka was born to my hostess. It was a difficult birth, and for a week afterwards I did not help with the harvest which I loved very much, because I had to help with the housework. Cooking was more difficult for me than any hard labor in the field. Neither did I go to church that week because the commandment of "love thy neighbor" seemed more important. Fr. Chojecki was worried about me and asked why I had stopped coming to church. He didn't believe I had been working and asked to see my hands. Then he smiled. "Thy work hath made thee noble." he said.

Like the first Christians, the whole first week after Baptism, I wore my white robes. Afterwards, I gave this up but I began thinking

that I had not sinned in any way and therefore I could receive Holy Communion every day. At this time Fr. Chojecki felt obliged to teach me that even the purest soul must confess every two weeks.

This I did gladly, since Fr. Chojecki was a person I admired. Though he sometimes tried to impose his view, we always finally came to an agreement. I told him that I was very slow and lazy getting up in the morning. In his mind, only laziness in serving God was a sin. He told me that praying wasn't enough, I had to participate a little in the suffering of Christ. So, I decided to fast on bread and water every Friday. In order not to be tempted by food, I ate everything I had on Thursday. Fr. Chojecki asked me who had given me permission to fast? Our relationship was close, like father and daughter. And I told him that I found it strange that I needed permission even for the doing of good deeds.

After one particular confession, I wept with joy. He said, "child!," and although I was seventeen, I so badly needed to be a child. Within the church, I felt like a child, it was a very sweet experience for me. I wept also when the choir sang, "Don't cry any more, Child." At the time, I thought every word of this song was meant for me, I was an orphan who had to hide her tears upon seeing mothers caressing their

children. My mother would never caress me any more. But after my baptism, I felt a child again, secure in the love of God. I was sure this feeling was due to my mother's intervention with God on my behalf. Her last words to me were, 'Let God guide your way,' and I felt I was on the way.

Before I was baptized, I used to comb my hair becomingly but now I just parted my hair in the middle in a very modest way. Fr. Chojecki told me to read, **Sweet Providence**, **Yes, Father** and the **Confession of St. Augustine**. His mother, St. Monica taught me to drink very little water, but I was drunk with happiness when I read, "God is the life of the soul."

The congregation was amazed to see me in church receiving the Eucharist daily. They asked Fr. Chojecki about this, he answered that my chief merit was not to oppose the grace I had been given. He could not know that I would never oppose the grace I had been given, because I had waited for it for so many years. In those days, I was convinced that grace comes only through baptism.

It seemed to me then that anyone who is baptized, because of the perfect teachings of Christ, must be perfect and cannot sin. But then my good feelings disappeared.

One evening, my hosts were going to the baptism ceremony of a newborn child in the

family. I remained at home with the children. I was contemplating the mystery of the soul of this new member of the Church, when I heard screaming and shouting.

Miss Lucyna had brought her drunken husband home. I shut the door behind him while he raced about and broke things and threatened. I felt humiliated witnessing this exhibition.

"I was sick in the darkness and in the lack of quiet," I told the elder priest, who sat to listen to my confession that day. He understood me well and told me to live a life of greater contemplation like Teresa of Avila. "The greatest soul passes through darkness and a desert of devastation. To love," he said," is not to feel but to will." My inner calm returned.
I agreed to make my way through the desert.

In spite of the fact that I couldn't understand this lack of perfection and there were examples all around me, I who had been so busy with my self, and couldn't be bothered with other people, now felt interconnected. I cared. I loved.

My mistress's mother-in-law from Kornica sent a young man to make my acquaintance. She wanted me to marry, but I told him I was already engaged.

"With whom?" he asked.

"With the best of teachers".

So he gave up and left. I was glad.

Once, Fr. Wachulak's sister invited me to a party. I thought I'd be meeting Partisans as Fr. Chojecki had hinted a few days before. I wanted to join them and fight. But instead the table was set for supper, and the village "intelligentsia" were sitting around the table drinking vodka. She wanted me to meet the important people of the town and I, disappointed, went back to my apartment. She gave me a box of sweets to take with me.

Jesus was so good to me from my very first encounter with Him, I felt like I was both a child and a beloved sister. I felt like a fish on a beach put back into the water. I drank greedily of the living water of Christianity. Before baptism, I was afraid that my faith might fade away after awhile but now I expected God to keep me with him forever.

However, Fr. Chojecki was worried about me. From his studies, he knew that many women become mentally ill from this religious excitement. He used to warn me not to overdo things, and to remain myself. But everything that was happening seemed so natural to me.

A boy, Stanislaw, who came to Lucyna's house for two weeks to help with the harvest because Lucyna was still weak after her very difficult birth, did not go to church for confession and Holy Communion. In my

religious fervor, we took him and the children to church as if we were bringing a great heathen to the Lord and we told Fr. Chojecki of his transgression. We saw sadness on the priest's sensitive face.

"Poor child," he said, "to be without God for such a long time." This impressed me very much. I understood him and I was ashamed but I was even happier with what my life was offering me.

I was thinking about which monastery would be most suitable for me. Fr. Chojecki did not love nuns. He told me that one of them, in charge of children, had eaten a large portion of honey instead of giving it to them.

Chapter-11

I was attracted to the Carmelite order; I kept reading about "the strong life." I understood how little St. Therese had found happiness in the midst of suffering, and I knew that suffering was the price that had to be paid to attract souls to the truth. But Fr. Chojecki had regard only for The Sisters of Mercy, who had taken care of him when he was in the hospital.

In the middle of June, 1944, Czeslaw said," the Germans have put up their hands and we are free." But, Siedlce, the nearest town was still being bombarded and friends of Marian Piechowicz of the Greybus family came to stay with us. I gave them my room and I slept on the top of the barn. In the morning Marian came to open the barn. One morning, I looked down and saw about twenty Soviet soldiers sleeping below, I hadn't heard them come in. If they knew that I am up!

Mrs. Greybus told us that she had saved a five year old girl. She was a Jewish child who had blond hair and the family loved her very much. But this child got sick and died. They could not forget her and so they asked me to stay in their house in Siedlce in her stead. I would be able to go to school. Mrs. Greybus said I could help her sons with the homework as payment. Fr. Wachulak was afraid. If the

children of rich peasants had difficulty living in town, how would I, who had no one, get along? Nevertheless, I took advantage of Mrs. Greybus' offer and when school opened, I went. Before I left, I asked Fr. Chojecki, how to choose a confessor. His answer was simple, "Choose the one for whom the most people are waiting in line." But since I often visited my village of Radzikow, my confessor continued to be Fr. Chojecki.

Mrs. Greybus was very good but too nervous for my liking. I would be doing my homework at night and she would tell me to go to sleep. I nearly forgot all I had learned in the Losice ghetto.

One Sunday, she asked me to fix her evening dress because she was going to a wedding. I was angry "Why hadn't she asked me to do this before Sunday? I would not work on Sunday!" I involuntarily fixed her dress badly and she went crazy, threw the dress into the fire. But afterwards, she was very good to me.

I always loved my history teachers. That year we had an excellent one, he had a very positive approach to his pupils.
He tried to teach us to think independently and to do independent research. He was open and ready to listen to us. He organized evening meetings for us. They made us feel closer to one

another.

In the beginning we had "confessions." Our teacher was the first to talk about himself. He said, "Once I was depressed and considered committing suicide. Nobody knew about this. The evening before I decided to get rid of my life, my sister came to see me. My mother felt there might be something wrong with me and had sent my sister in case I needed help. My mother's intuition so impressed me that I killed the thought of killing me."

During his lessons he often cited quotes from the New Testament and though he never criticized God, Jesus, or the Blessed Virgin, his examples undermined my faith. He quoted the New Testament, "judging a tree according to its fruit" but, he added, we needed the fruit of the Freemasons and of the UN, the Red Cross, the YMCA and many others as well. His point of view of history was different from that of the Church. All this talk disoriented me.

There were whispers that this teacher was a member of the Freemasons which was a terrible thing in a Catholic country like Poland. I trusted him and I decided to tell him that the priests had deceived me and rendered me stupid. I asked him to teach me the truth. Since my intentions were pure, my conscience told me to confess to Fr. Chojecki who had risked so much consecrating me for the Church and I went to tell him

about the new steps I was taking. This happened during the period of my new found religious ecstasy and my happiness in my daily communion with the spirit of Christ. The Bishop heard the rumors about the history teacher, and came to school to hear him teach. After the lesson, the Bishop praised him. "I am glad," he said, "that you are teaching your pupils how to think".

I spent Christmas in Radzikow. Fr. Chojecki said, "your opinion on Freemasonry is not right." He explained to me that although he himself was not a historian, and that he might be wrong about one incident or another, he felt sure that it would be best for me to stay within the Church. Once more I saw in his eyes the sorrow and the will to help me. I believed in this more than in the words he spoke, and with peace in my soul I returned to Siedlce.

In the cathedral at Siedlce, I met two of my former school friends from Losice, Masia and Misia Piotrowski in whose mother's garden I had hidden. The cathedral had hardly been bombed during the war. Very often people were asked for contributions to help restore the Cathedral. And it was there that I believed my history teacher when he said that the priests abused the naive faith of the people.

Although Mrs. Greybus was good to me, she could not understand my need to study. I

told this to one of my young Latin teachers who offered to take me into her house to help care for her little boy. When I told Mrs. Greybus this, she was very sorry and promised me to help me go on studying, on the condition that I should continue to stay with them. Of course, I agreed.

In January, the Germans left Lodz and Mrs. Greybus insisted that I should go back to my home town. I felt close to the people who had saved me. I had made friends. It was difficult for me to leave everyone and to go back to a town in which I would find nobody.

I wasn't in the least interested in returning to a town which would be little more than a cemetery. Nevertheless, I took the first train to Warsaw. It was a Russian train used for transport, the people sat on the top of the train. Someone suggested I enter the car with the brakeman. He accepted me kindly. Outside, it was raining, inside it was dry and warm. In Ceglow, halfway to Warsaw, we waited twelve hours. There was no more wood with which to stoke the stove. Trees had to be cut down in the middle of the nearest forest. I kept asking when we would move. Throughout the night I listened to the same answer.
"Does it really matter?" "We have so much time!"

In the morning, we arrived at a little town

near Warsaw. Because the bridge had been destroyed by the bombardment, we had to cross the half frozen Wisla River on foot. My shoes were full of water and in the train station the railway men put me near the stove so my shoes could dry. From this station, I took the first train to Lodz. I went to see my friend Wanda first. She was back in her villa in Narutowicza Street with her mother and her daughter. Their home was always open for every caller, although in the beginning there was no food.

She told me that one day, during the war, she was sitting in her arm chair when suddenly she felt her father's presence near her chair. Much later she received an announcement of his death in Auschwitz, he had died that same day.

Before the war, in 1939, Wanda's father, Colonel Doctor Stanislaus Wieckowski, was an eye specialist, a member of the municipality, a member of the "Klub Demokratychny" and a member of our school committee. He had two children, Wanda, my beloved, and a son, Andrzej.

Since he had always protected Jews, he suffered a great deal for them. His family always considered Poland to be a homeland not only for Poles but also for Jews. When the Polish government agreed to seat the Jews on the left side in the University in Warsaw, Andrzej sat

with the Jews and was beaten as one of the Jews and lay with them afterwards in the hospital. Since the main aim of the Germans was to abolish the Polish intelligentsia, rather than the Jews, a few days after the occupation, Dr. Wieckowski changed his name from Stanislaus to Antoni, he began to list his profession as "teacher". The family thought this would make a difference, but the Germans found him anyway and sent him to Auschwitz. There he died.

In the city of our birth, Lodz, there is one street named in memory of Dr. St. Wieckowski. During the occupation, Andrzej, his son, hid Jews in their house but after the war he became an alcoholic and died.

There is no record of this in Yad Vashem Holocaust Martyrs and Heroes Remembrance Authority in Jerusalem.

When I got to our apartment, I had to stand in line for two days to reclaim my right to my family's apartment. It was available. Mrs. Greybus had been right about that. I walked into our rooms. The apartment didn't look like it had when I lived there with my mother. The retreating Germans had left little furniture and a few empty bottles, but it was more than enough for me. I thought that the two big rooms were even too much so I rented part of the flat to the Krzeminski family and their three children. The father was a policeman.

The whole city seemed like a graveyard. The streets were empty of people and there was no food. I ran to my aunts' apartments, other people were living there. They knew nothing about my family. Our school was no longer a school. With a heavy heart, I returned to Siedlce, to say "goodbye" to my friends and two weeks later I was back in my home.

The custodian Mr. Kajak, was an antisemite; he had died, but his wife let me woolen stockings and a few dresses, and now she was very friendly. My portrait when I was four years old was on the wall in her flat, near ours, and the tablecloths my mother had embroidered were spread on a sideboard, but I didn't talk about this. We had left many of our possessions in the village where we had spent the last summer before the war; I decided to reclaim everything; instead I got a little iron stove which I brought home on the tramway. I used it to cook on and to warm the room at the same time.

The city was empty and hungry. I traveled to the nearby villages in order to find work so I could buy some food but there wasn't any work. I asked someone to give me a little to eat; I was given something but asked if I wasn't ashamed to beg. I said that if I could find work, I would not beg. When I came back Mr. Krzeminski's corpse lay on my bed. He had gone to a German woman after ten o'clock in

the evening and had been shot. His widow and their three children stayed on in the flat. I tried to help her, but since my means were restricted, I couldn't do much. She believed that I did not really care.

I met my former headmistress, Mrs. Lazarowa. She lived temporarily with one of my teachers, Mrs. Gundlachowa who was German and whose father had been a pastor, as was her husband. Her son in law had been a Captain in the German army. They were all anti- Nazi and had been imprisoned in concentration camps.

When the Nazis entered Lodz, the German soldiers would grab the children who had not crossed the street properly, by their legs, and throw them against the wall. Mrs. Gundlachowa said in class, quite loudly, that she was ashamed to belong to this nation. She had remained in Poland during the whole occupation, while members of her family were imprisoned in concentration camps because they were anti-Nazi.

Mrs. Lazarowa had suffered from depression for twenty years. She took a liking to me. She told me about Fr. Tomasz Rostworowski, a member of the Society of Jesus. A book had been written about his courage and self sacrifice during the Warsaw uprising. She described his blue eyes, his smile and hooked nose.

During Easter, after the long Lenten fast, I went to the sacrament of Confession. The priest turned out to be Fr. Tomasz Rostworowski. I told him that I had been baptized and that I wanted to enter a monastery. He asked me what I had been before, had I been Protestant? Greek Orthodox? I would have preferred to confess to any number of sins rather than to admit my Jewishness, but I had no choice. He said, "All right, come back in two weeks."

When I came back the second time, we were very happy to find one another. He believed that I had in truth become a Christian. He was wise and very good. Fr. Tomasz became my confessor from that time on. Without my intervention, God always gave me the best of everything.

When I was in Zbuczyn, the Benedictine Sisters wanted me to join them, but I still wanted to join the Carmelite order.
They said I would not be received by the Carmelite nuns because, "they require a dowry." I was resigned not to be accepted by them. Whenever I had a chance, I stopped in to see Fr. Sulej in the monastery. He was glad that my conversion had been a true one. I believed that by the very fact of converting, I had humiliated myself and had been purified of all my impurities.

Not only Fr. Chojecki but also Fr. Tomasz

told me not to exceed 5% of my income for charity. Even this was sometimes difficult. One day in early Spring, I came home from Podlasie in a Russian cattle train. There I met a young girl who was trembling from the cold and from diarrhea. To warm her, I gave her my only scarf, one that I had been given by my friends in Siedlce. On arriving in the city, I helped her find a Red Cross station. She was returning to her mother in Jaroslaw, near Poznan. She had spent the war in the Ukraine. My home was near the train station and I decided to go home to eat, do my homework and come back help her find the train to Poznan. But I kept thinking that I had given away my only scarf and after all she was going home to her mother who would give her everything and I haven't anyone. So I went to see her. She looked clean and had eaten soup. The Red Cross took good care of her and those like her.

I asked her to return my scarf because I hadn't any other. She gave it to me reluctantly. I saw this in her eyes.

I don't remember when, but it was either the same day or the next at school, that I stuffed my scarf in the sleeve of my coat and hung my coat up on a peg. After school, I took my coat off the peg, but the scarf had been stolen. There never was a more blessed thief than this one. He had taught me a lesson I appreciated very much. I

must listen to my conscience, follow the lessons my mother taught me and listen more prudently to my teachers.

My apartment, like my heart, was always open to everybody.

Two girlfriends shared my room in the apartment, the larger room was occupied by the widow and her children. At the beginning of the academic year, a third girl arrived. I did not ask her to pay rent. Fr. Chojecki, whom we both admired so much, sent her. Teresa Listek, who eventually married Waclaw Gorczyca became my closest friend, the sister I never had but so needed.

Since there were only three beds in my part of the apartment, she shared mine. Ever since then, Teresa and her family "adopted" me and I them. She understood me very well. She brought fresh meat from home and told me it was not fresh because she knew I would not eat anything that could be eaten by them. They too were poor.

Chapter-12

Once I went to see Ft. Sulej in his monastery in Bielany near Warsaw. I was alone in the church and so happy that I thought I would die of happiness. There couldn't possibly be anything which would make me happier, I thought; but there was one exception: if it might be possible to be admitted to the Carmelite order. Fr. Sulej advised me to go to Laski and speak with the Franciscan Sisters there who specialized in caring for the blind. I immediately wrote my curriculum vitae. However, I did not mention that I was of Jewish origins because I was still so ashamed of this. When Ft. Sulej read it, he told me to rewrite the whole thing starting with my Jewish origins.

I went with this to Laski, a monastery composed of a few buildings placed among the pine forest. The little church and everything in it - the furniture made by the blinds - was made of the same rude pine wood. Many Jews had found the light of their souls there. I was enchanted by the Laski monastery, its beauty, its simplicity and especially by the intense spirituality of the blind children. I liked to see them praying. Their blind faces were so happy and peaceful. After a while Sr. Waclawa, who looked like a nun from the Middle Ages - so gaunt and tall with deep blue eyes - entered the

room. She took my letter of application. She would answer me in three months. I believed in the power of the children's prayer and asked my former master's children, Hania and Marylka to pray on my behalf. I was hurt when the nuns refused.

Fr. Sulej was resting at the monastery of the Gray Ursuline Sisters at Mlociny near Warsaw. I came to ask his advice about which monastery I should write to for admission.

"Would you like to stay here?" he asked me. I told him that I didn't mind which monastery admitted me. I heard him telling the sisters about my baptism and my great love of God and nature.

The Prioress talked to me and wanted to show me all the beautiful principles of their order. She also told me that the sisters worked for their keep, not accepting anything for free. But the Carmelite monastery was still my first love, and I was fully prepared to beg for alms. Sometimes I thought about the without habits Sisters at Bielany. They were so delicate and hospitable. I rested there for the night and each time I passed by there, the nun in charge prepared me wonderful sandwiches for the road.

On the eve of Pentecost, I received the Sacrament of Confirmation. I expected to be transformed by this sacrament as the Apostles

had been transformed. I was now ready to go forth and preach, giving my testimony to the world.

Throughout that whole year, I had told Fr. Tomasz that I was going to join the Ursuline order. But in Laski, there was a Sr. Katarzyna Steinberg who also had been Jewish. She was a physician. Her father was a very religious Jew. She never told him that she was a Christian and a nun. Once every month she would travel to see him, dressed in ordinary street clothes. He did not regret the fact that his daughter had converted to Christianity, because he never knew that truth as long as he lived.

During the Nazi occupation, she saved many Jewish children by having them moved from one place to another. Her style was very simple and direct. It was man's unhappiness she saw in the streets. Once, for example, she asked someone why he was unhappy. He answered that he did not have anywhere to live. So, she turned around and asked the man behind her if he had an extra room, and in this case as in many others, the answer was positive. She caused many miracles to happen in this way. There were also another 4 Jewish sisters.

In the meantime I learned how to knit on a machine with the St. Vincent de Paul Sisters. Once I went with one of the sisters to buy needles for the knitting machines. The store was

in the place where the Lodz ghetto used to be. There were many refugees there. I was sure that there were no Jews among them, but I was wrong. All the refugees were Jews, This encounter with them made a deep impression on me. I was sure that there were no Jews left alive in Poland.

At that time, I learned in the catechism that whoever wasn't baptized would go straight to hell. I felt responsible for all the Jews. I really wanted to save them. But how - and where?

Once Fr. Tomasz asked me, "Why do you want to join th Ursuline Order? Is it because you want to teach and not to have to knit anymore?" This suspicion hurt me, so that I burst out crying, he thereby accused me of being hysterical, which I might have been for lack of sleep. He ordered me to go to bed at 9:00 p.m. so as to be in church at 6:00 a.m. well rested. I really needed a strong hand to guide me. Since I was also underfed, I always found it very difficult to get up in the morning. His guidance was very important to me.

Although Holy Communion was a source of joy to me, I needed confession as a source of wisdom. I usually had supper in the Academic's kitchen. The little soup I ate geve me strength. So with difficulty, I came to church at around 9: a.m. and had to ask my priest for Holy communion. Usually there was a Fr. Przybylski

who stayed behind to hear confession and also give Communion. Only the fear of missing Communion made me get up in the morning. I never knew the time because I had no watch. After Fr. Tomasz's admonitions, I found myself wandering the streets around the church well before 6:00 a.m., thinking of the Song of Songs, "In the streets I looked for Him..."

But then when I encountered Fr. Tomasz at 6:00 a.m. in church, I felt great satisfaction. I spent much time in church - mornings and evenings - in prayer and meditation. After every sermon, I made a new resolution. Finally, when I visited Fr. Chojeski in Podlasie, I told him "I was choking with good resolutions." He said, "Try to make one more resulution, resolve not to make any more resolutions." This advice liberated me.

Back home, I felt unable to resolve a point which disturbed me, and I told Fr. Tomasz about it. He advised me to tell myself that I am too stupid to solve the problem and leave it at that.

I went back home laughing and telling myself that I need just to be happy because I am too stupid to resolve the problem anyway. Such an obvious conclusion never occurred to me. I nearly jumped for joy.

Once, two Jewish youngsters came to see me, sent, I am sure, by a certain neighbor. They wanted me to return to Judaism. I felt so sure of

myself that I told them straight out, "All right - if you can convince me, I'll go back to Judaism."

They also wanted me to spend the evening with them at the cinema, which I refused. As they left, my old, dear classmate, Marysia Kozanecka came to see me and I asked her to stay the night with me. She felt that I was upset and agreed. We shared a bed as usual and talked. She was deeply religious and wanted to convert our only Jewish classmate, Halina Czajkowska to Christianity. Halina was saved and baptized by a devoted aunt. But she didn't believe in anything. She was always first in the most difficult subjects but once she complained to me that at school everybody was glad to have her help but no one would invite her to the cinema or for a walk. I tried to mediate, but without success. Before Marysia knew that I too was Jewish, she explained that converts were not really in Poland's interest, in fact converts were harmful. Well, I told her then that Poland might as well renounce Jesus, too. The idea that Jesus was a Jew, never occurred to her.

Before entering the monastery, I wanted to give myself as much as possible to my immediate surroundings. Once, Halina was ill and I came to help. I told her about my happiness in having found Jesus. She said, "You didn't see what happened in the ghetto."

"Yes, I did." "But you didn't have to hide and flee." "yes, I did" I told her about what had happened to me. We became good friends, but we never discussed religion again.

I prepared table of sandwiches and cakes at school to help the sick and poor pupils. I also organized dancing and other festivities. I used to dance with various fathers of the pupils and with our home-room teacher, Mr. Jakubowski who was an atheist and who belonged to the P.P.R., the leftist party. I often argued with him during his lessons on Polish literature.

He taught us how to pass the examinations by reading excerpts of the books on the reading list. When I told Mrs. Lazarowa about this, she cried, "Oh no, what will happen to our Poland?"

On one occasion, 100 days before graduation, I danced with him. he said, "You've learned how to dance well in this school."

"Yes," I answered, "and dancing is the only thing I learned in this school." I liked to play the role of "enfant terrible."

Because our school was a municipal high school, the mayor was invited to our graduation for the occasion. Our classmates placed a crown on the eagle, the symbol of independent Poland, which the leftists, who were against Polish independence, removed. When I approached Mr. Jakubowski, who always held me responsible for all the wrong-doings in class, he

asked me "Why the crown had been placed on the Eagle?" I gave the typical Jewish answer, "Why not?" which made him really mad.

When we came up, one by one, to receive our certificate from the principal, one of the boys said, "We have worked so hard for this little piece of paper."

The Mayor sitting nearby on the podium answered, "Don't underestimate this little piece of paper. I don't have one, I prize it."

That graduation scene reminds me of a joke abut a professor and an army officer who were sitting on a train one day after the war, when the communists had taken over the country. A dog sat between them. He was looking over the professor's shoulder at the book that the professor was reading. The officer said to the dog: "Go on read, learn something - you too may become a professor."

But the professor turning to the dog said: "No, no my pet - don't learn, don't bother reading, don't study - you too may become an army officer."

After the graduation ceremony we all went to Jasna Gora, to thank Our Lady of the Shrine of the Black Madonna. We had promised each other that we would make this pilgrimage. A group of girls sang in front of the Madonna. I mingled with them, waiting with them to receive Holy Communion. I thought, here is the spiritual

heart of Poland. From this place, we will go back home stronger, and above all, unified in the cause which is Poland.

From Jasna Gora, I sent postcards to the three priests whom I always included in my prayers. On my return, I told Fr. Tomasz that I had made up my mind to enter the Carmelite Monastery. Finally, he agreed with my decision and told me to go to Radogoszcz, to the Carmelite Monastery. I found a woman outside the Jesuit church collecting alms for the restoration of St. Teresa's chapel in the town, which belongs to the Carmelite order. With my heart beating rapidly, I asked her to give me the address of the Carmelite monastery. I went to see the nuns. I spoke to Sr. Magdalena who fascinated me and told me to come back after awhile. She taught me that the main job of the order is to ask the Lord of the harvest for workers, not to work by myself. I found my vocation in this. I was afraid the monastery might not accept me, since my baptism was so recent. There is a law in the church that requires recent converts to wait three years before entering a religious order. Fr. Tomasz told me that he was going to Rome and he promised to bring me an official dispensation which would facilitate my entry.

In order to prepare myself for the religious life, Fr. Tomasz suggested I speak to Mrs.

Dmochowska; she was a member and formation director of the Carmelite Secular Order, A secular person living within the world, but following the spirit of the Carmelite order. For the first meeting, I went with Theresa Listek, a young student who had been living with me since the beginning of October. We had become as close as sisters even though she was an atheist.

After my first meeting, Mrs. Dmochowska asked me about my impressions. I told her that they were unpleasant. The sisters impressed me as being artificially ardent, praying with their arms extended like Moses on the mount, for ten minutes. Later, I understood their need to mix physical trial with prayer as a sign of devotion. Theresa, after this first time, would not accompany me any more, but I continued going.

One of the meetings was meant for Sr. Magdalena, who longed to enter the monastery but couldn't because she had to take care of her old parents. I didn't know this at the time and though that the conference had been arranged for me. In her talk, Mrs. Dmochowska taught about the possessed man of Geraza who was healed by Jesus. When he begged to follow Him, "he was told to go back to his own people and testify to the healing." I was shocked. What was I supposed to understand about myself from this talk?

I had a moment of great doubt. Perhaps I wanted to enter the monastery only for my own selfish reasons - for peace and self satisfaction far away from my own Jewish people. Now, it seemed as if Jesus was saying, "Go back to them." For whom was I going to Carmel, for Him of for me? What was the truth? Did He need me for their sake, as a testimony of His love for His people?

I always thought that going to Carmel was my own personal sacrifice to my people. When God did not see fit to send me, I was frightened by this revelation. Giving up my dreams seemed as great a sacrifice as Abraham offering up Isaac.

I felt I would have to go to the Jewish people and preach to deaf ears to be scorned, abused and stoned for my labors. I didn't know how I could actualize this commandment my God asked me to do? But as soon as I agreed that this was what I had to do, my peace of mind was restored. I felt that if I would be able to give to the Jewish people the same love that I had given to those in my immediate surroundings, and that the Jews would probably believe me when I told them Jesus loves them.

I confided my struggle with the angel to Mrs. Dmochowska and to Fr. Tomasz. Both of them told me to follow my inner voice. I didn't

know how I was going to do this, but in the quiet and peace of the church, I trusted in God to guide me. I felt I would do as God willed, even if it meant not entering the monastery. As I spoke to Mrs. Dmochowska, she thought maybe a new order should be founded to solve the Jewish problem, even though an order already existed, the Sisters of Notre Dame de Sion, but they were few and they lacked initiative.

For a whole year I wandered about between hope and belief, like a blind person trying to find his way, trying to find out what God truly wanted from me. It is not easy for most twenty year old young women to accept the idea of founding a new order.

After praying together Basia Zelazo asked to be my friend. She was a fellow student who studied philosophy with Leszek Kuc. I agreed with pleasure because I had often seen her in church and in days of meditation.

Basia, who confided in me, told me that she often prayed for the Jews, Her father was a Polish Socialist and her mother had been Jewish, but was baptized before her marriage. When she returned from the marriage ceremony, she needed a police escort because her Jewish neighbors wanted to stone her. Like many children of mixed marriages, Basia was the best student in the class as were her four sisters.

Meanwhile, aided by Mrs. Dmochowska's instruction, I learned to love St. Joseph and the Holy Spirit. She told me that in Wadowice there was a Jewish boy, Br. Daniel, who though ostensibly working for the Gestapo during the war, saved 310 Jews. I traveled to Wadowice to see him, because I was curious to meet a fellow Jew who had converted to Christianity. I always thought I was the only Jew left in Poland. In the flee market, I bought a pair of shoes which were too small for me and they bothered me.

Fr. Rudolf, his teacher, received me very nicely and helped me to fix my shoes - but Daniel was in Krakow. Nonetheless, I felt better because I was no longer alone, there was a Jewish Brother praying and suffering for the Jews.

I was the best pupil in our religion class which was taught by a priest of the Societas Jesu. He taught us about St. Bernard and his apostolate to redeem the Holy Land from the non-believers. I didn't know that in Israel, children are taught that the crusaders, when they marched out to redeem The Holy Land, caused the death of many thousands of Jews in the city of Jerusalem.

Chapter-13

Once, Mrs. Theresa Dmochowska asked me if I spoke Yiddish. I did not. She explained that they had to abduct a Jewish child from a Jewish orphanage. The Jews had taken him out of an orphanage home in Zakopane, where he had felt very much at home and had been baptized. He was about to receive his first Holy Communion when he had been kidnaped. So, I went to Cracow to retrieve him, by ruse if necessary. Fr Tomasz gave me his blessing and some money and commanded me to be very causious. In Cracow I went to Kazimierz, the old Jewish part of the city. The boy, Andrzej, went to school there in Esther Street. Pretending to be his cousin, I asked the children about his whereabouts. A big boy of about ten told me that a cousin of his had taken him away by taxi about a week ago. This was in the Autumn of 1947.

Many children gathered around us. Most of their faces were swollen and strangely misshaped. This was the first time I came face to face with the result of the German occupation on children.

So, I understood that Andrzej was in a safe place. Still I traveled to Zakopane to make sure.

I arrived at night, but since I had reasons not to take my identity card along, I could not rent a room in a hotel and nobody seemed to know about an orphanage. I spent the night in the railway worker's home. He told me that there is an aunt living with him. The picture of St. Theresa of Lisieux, was on the wall, so I slept in peace. Next morning, I found the children's home and talked with the principal, Mrs. Olenka. She told me that during the three weeks Andrzej was with the Jews, he had lost 11 kilos. He was not allowed to pray. He was also told that Jesus was a Jew. He said, "Yes, but the Jews had Him crucified."

Once he was back in the orphanage, Andrzej said, "I am so young, why do I have to suffer so much?" He was happy to receive Holy Communion and he intended to become a priest. Meanwhile, Mrs. Olenka had to hide him. I wanted to travel to Warsaw to settle Andrzej's fate with the Jewish community. The train to Warsaw left in the evening and Mrs. Olenka gave me a book to read in the time. It was called **History of a Life** by Prof. Hirszfeld, who taught in the Warsaw ghetto and afterwards escaped with the help of some Polish friends. His daughter had died. He ended his story with a parable, "There is a jug in front of God, filled with Jewish tears. When the jug overflows God will pity the Jewish people."

I thought that God really did not need any more tears. God was merciful and needed no more sacrifices. St. Paul writes that salvation was in His blood and everybody had contributed to the fullness of salvation. If I could have added a drop of my own blood to the suffering of Jesus, I would gladly have done so to tip the scale in favor of the Jews.

In Warsaw, I understood that Andrzej's case was well known in the Jewish community. I introduced myself as a Jew, explaining that because my father was beholden to Andrzej's father, I wanted to take care of the boy. Some official told me that he had an aunt in Lodz, but refused to give me her address.

Andrzej had spent some time with her. They were not interested in him if he was really a Christian child, they said.

At this time, I entered my father's name to the long list of missing persons. My mother's family had ceased to exist-even though I still feel today that she lives within me. I hoped some day to write about her, so that everyone could know and love my mother.

When I returned from this journey, Mrs. Dmochowska was worried about me because I had been gone for such a long time.

I told her that Mrs. Skwarczynska had asked me to visit her friend in Warsaw who had been in Kazachstan with her seven year old child

during the war. During the long nights, she was told many stories. Mrs. Watt, one of the neighbors, loved to hear about God; her husband was in prison. She liked to pray for him. After the war she found him. He had grown a long beard and had a cross dangling from his neck, her own mother had been betrayed by Poles and killed by Germans. Ola Wattowa didn't write about this in her memoirs. She was interested in finding an intelligent priest who was not an antisemite. She wanted him to prepare her and her husband to receive the Sacrament of Baptism. I felt uncomfortable because their 14 year old son was present during our conversation. I told them the story of my happiness, and I felt that they understood. I told them about life at the University. I thought most of the students there were interested in politics or sports or even religion but they weren't really interested in their studies.

Two weeks later, Mrs. Dmochowska told me that my talk had so impressed that 14-year old boy, Andrzej Watt, that he had received Holy Communion without telling anyone nor waiting for Baptism. I wasn't surprised, because I felt this thirst for God.

One of my best friends in class, Irma Windisch, told me that she and her nine cousins were saved by the sisters of "The Nuns of Nazareth." Her mother came to visit and was

afraid that the sisters knew too much.

She told her, "Mother, the more they know the better it is for us, they will understand we cannot live without their help."

Her father had escaped to Romania during the war and from there to South Africa. Soon after the war, he brought his family over to South Africa.

Irenka Landkopf, another classmate of ours, went through four concentration camps. She thought that Irma was perfect. Irenka was very intelligent, but lazy, and she called herself an atheist. Her father, a socialist and a physician had died before the war. Her mother was a dentist and this was the reason that Germans, who needed their expertise, transported the family from one concentration camp to another. They were in Ravensbruck, Mathausen, Dachau and another camp whose name I can't remember.

Irenka and her mother were on their way to Paris a few months later. On their way, they spent 3 weeks in London. From there, Irenka wrote me, "The young Englishmen are so phlegmatic and lazy, sitting in their comfortable chairs with pipes in their mouths, near the heating stove. They are so uninteresting." She could not forget the days in the concentration camps when she was so hungry. Once, she decided to pretend to be ill in order to rest in the

block and be the first one to be served the thin gruel of the day. She took her portion but couldn't eat it, there was a dishrag in it. Yet she found hope to live in this hell by writing songs. People helped each other stay awake and not die.

Another classmate of mine came from a little village where the people were ardent Catholics. During the war they helped many Jews, not because they liked Jews, but because mercy is an obligation of the Christian religion. When I visited her at home, I told her that Jesus and Mary and the Apostles had been Jews, she was shocked. I don't suppose she had ever thought of this aspect of the matter though you don't have to be an intellectual to understand this simple fact. In Mrs. Dmochowska's home things were different, their minds and hearts were open to the truth. She was glad that her son John took care of others. He used to come home from school and say, "Mother, put a little more water in the soup because I have invited a poor friend to dinner today."

John married Olenka, a Jewish girl. I don't know how Olenka and her parents, Eva and Stanislaw, escaped with their lives from the concentration camps. But I do know that after an illness of three months, Eva died and Stanislaw fell in love with John's sister Marzena and they got married. They had no children. A

few years later Marzena died and Stanislaw Zylewicz was once more a widower.

When he came to visit me in Czestochowa, he told me that he was sorry he had not gone to Israel after the war. It hurt him sometimes to hear antisemitic hate being spoken at work in his presence during the Holocaust. He looked so Polish, no one guessed he was a Jew.

I didn't know what God wanted of me. If, I told myself, He doesn't want me to be a Carmelite nun, I won't. Eventually, Basia was accepted into the Carmelite order in Lodz, and finally, I too was told that I would be accepted in a year's time. This seemed an interminable period to wait and Mrs. Dmochowska sent a letter to the Carmelite monastery in Kalisz on my behalf. The answer was negative. A month later I went with Mrs. Dmochowska to the Carmelite monastery in Zakopane. The little chapel was made of wood; there was a picture of the Madonna in the chapel, as graceful as a swan. I loved it. Although Sr. Joanna understood my desire to pray for grace for the Jews, she told me I would have to wait for an answer. She asked me to restrict my need to love others a little. "Suppose everyone was like you?" she said. "Then," I answered, "I wouldn't need to love so much."

That summer there was a camp for university students who belonged to the

"Marian Sodality," in Zakopane. Since I was a student at Lodz University at the time, I joined them there for three days and went to the Carmelite monastery there to inquire about my fate. They too turned me down. This was not pleasant but I, since I so needed to know what God willed of me, I kept my peace.

There was a Communist student in the camp who was not accepted because he was an outsider. We nicknamed him "mole." No one wanted to join him on an outing, but once I agreed to go. We took the cable car to Swinica and easily walked to the top. I wanted to see the mountains before being enclosed in Carmel. I was talking and unaware that my comrade was leading me to ever higher terrain, to Morskie Oko, "Eye of the Sea," a lake among the mountains. I couldn't cope with the vastness of it all and I decided to make my way home by myself. Alone, I didn't follow any of the signs, and soon I found myself on a steep precipice, some fifty meters high, looking up from an abyss. I could only climb up.

From one rock to another, there was a crevice one centimeter wide. My blood turned cold as a fish. I had no choice but to go on climbing. I put my toes on the top of one rock above the crevice and my fingers on another, and slowly made my way. I could so easily fall and be forever lost. I was halfway up, when I

saw at the very tip a group of young boys from Niepokalanow. They looked at me encouragingly, shouting that I was a heroine. I automatically continued to climb up thinking how stupid they were. If they had a little more sense they would have thrown me a rope instead of shouting down to me. Luckily, I reached the top and followed them past the guide signs to safety. After I spoke of my adventure to the members of the camp, they made it mandatory for girls to be accompanied on the trips up the mountains.

Thanks to Mrs. Dmochowska, Bishop Tomczak's sister offered me work in Caritas, which I was happy to accept. At the beginning, I worked in the office organizing the index file and when that was done, I worked in the storeroom with an old priest who was less than devoted. I was often late for the lectures at the University because someone always came at the last minute to get something from the storeroom. Mrs. Lazarowa, the teacher, understood and excused me.

In spite of all this I never gave up my ideal of joining the Carmel monastery. Basia is already happy, I told myself but I must content myself by waiting. Mrs. Dmochowska did not just wait, she wrote nine letters to each Carmel Convent in Poland, all except one. All the answers were similar: We regret to inform you

that we do not have the conditions necessary, etc. I knew nothing about this activity.

The one monastery to which she did not write to was in Poznan, because the city was so antisemitic. She was sure that there would be no hope for me there. She told me that retired Miss Medarda, living in her home in Poznan, was very close to God. She told Mrs. Dmochowska that God told her that I was a dove who did not necessarily need to sit in the nest itself. This letter made her believe that I was to try to find my nest in Poznan, despite all. Fr. Joseph, in charge of the Carmelite Order in Poland, told the Prioress in Poznan that I was a worthy candidate. In the novitiate there were ten novices who said they wanted to accept me. I went there to introduce myself personally. I spoke with Sr. Joanna, the Prioress, and with Sr. Carmela, the Novice Mistress, they agreed to admit me. On the tenth day of January, 1948 I entered the monastery. The doors of the cloister closed behind me. Mrs. Dmochowska accompanied me on the first of January and stayed with me for three days. We stayed in Mrs. Janina Tomaszewska's home. We made the last shopping tour and once more came to visit Sr. Medarda. Inside her modest home I found a very ugly old woman. She received us kindly and asked if I would like to know anything about anyone. I knew nothing about my father

so I asked with a little fear in my heart if she could tell me about him. She shut her eyes and in the silence said, "Shalom, Shalom, peace."

The name of my father was "Shulim," Salomon, meaning peace. I felt better, but I didn't know much more than I had known before. She invited Mrs. Dmochowska to come to visit her again the next time she would be in Poznan.

When we left I had a very bad feeling. I didn't understand why the Holy Spirit needed such unattractive people.

I still don't believe that the Holy Spirit spoke to her when she answered my questions. This time, Mrs. Dmochowska agreed with me.

Chapter 14

On the morning of the 10th of January, 1948 after Holy Mass and breakfast, I stood at the cloister door. I kissed Mrs. Dmochowska, and the door opened for me. She embraced me, and then Sr. Carmela took me to my cell.

There was a modest bed and a book case, three pictures and a large cross on the wall. I exchanged my dress for the black postulant's habit, and then I went to the parlor to see Mrs. Dmochowska one more time. She had tears on her face; she was so happy that she had been able to help. We were very close spiritually. She understood me better than my mother, who had not instructed me to believe. Throughout, my whole life God sent me such good and clever people. How could I repay Him?

The novices were very nice and young, and they needed two hours of recreation to express their joy. I too laughed with them, but I also made them laugh. I realized that I either had to make a place for myself among them or I would feel forever like an outsider. I also understood that I had to win their trust and not be too polite. Only this rough and tumble style would do. Before the war, the sisters built a very beautiful, big monastery in Niegolewskich Street, which the Germans used as a storehouse. The Communist Government also refused to

give it back and instead gave the Order an old, little, desolate house whose walls were grey with dirt which made it look so sad. During the holy communion, I looked through the little window of the chapel which was clean and beautiful and had a garden of violets around it. I began to paint the walls of the monastery before Passover and finished in time.

Sr. Carmela wanted me to read the books written by the founders of the Discalced Carmelites, but I wanted to read about the fathers of my people first, because the "Old Testament" is eternal.

When I read about the dispute between Abraham and Adonai over the city of Sodom, "if there were even ten righteous souls among the sinners." I laughed with joy and with pride at God who is my Father. For the first time in my life, I felt that Abraham was so close to me and that I, "belonged to the family." But Teresa of Avila was my beloved mother.

Before Passover we began reading the prophet Jeremiah in the Breviary, with his grim depiction of desolate mothers with their children dying from starvation at their breasts. I felt like I was back in the Warsaw ghetto streets and mothers' cries rang in my ears. "People, my people, what have I done to you?"

Twice a day I ran with our dog. I explained that the dog needed exercise. In truth, I needed

it more than he. With the coming of spring, we worked in our garden for one hour every day. With the first green leaves, I felt the turgid blood race through my veins; it was an uplift of great pleasure to put my hands in the humid earth and to plant a flower and vegetables.

Six months later, on August 22, 1948, on my father's birthday, six years to the day we, the Jews, had been driven from the ghetto in Losice to be liquidated with the remaining population of those people still left in the other ghettos in the small villages around, I received the habit of the Carmelite Nuns and the name Sr. Emmanuela of St. Joseph. Mrs. Dmochowska came to the ceremony with her youngest daughter Monika and Mrs. Listek, Theresa Listek Gorczyca's mother, came all by herself. Only years later, did Theresa tell me that she was so angry that I had left her for Carmel that she couldn't bear to come to the celebration. But nothing disturbed my happiness.

The time flew quickly soon it was Advent. I read the prophet Isaiah. I felt at one with him and from this first year on, I have read Isaiah every year at Advent. In the center of my humanity, I need God and I wholly expect His coming. This is my Jerusalem.

During the four weeks before Christmas, mother Carmela made little manger scenes; each one depicted the grotto at Bethlehem. I

thought that surely she was making these scenes either to sell or to give as gifts to our friends. Imagine our joy on Christmas Eve, when we came to supper - at every place setting in the refectory, there was a little grotto! This was a lovely week in Carmel, with much singing, letters and presents.

On August 24th 1949, I pronounced my temporary vows for three years, I felt so much at home. My friend Sr. Jadwiga, who had been a Ph.D. scholar and history professor, urged me to return to my original name. "Your parents would have liked that," she said.

"Maybe my parents would have liked it but as far as I am concerned, I am now 'Sr. Emmanuela,' and Sr. Emmanuela is what I shall remain."

But I finally decided to write to Mrs. Dmochowska, and she paid 200 zloty to get my birth certificate, I only needed a new passport. We asked a photographer to come to the monastery and he photographed each one of us. When the oldest sisters looked at their pictures, we all burst out laughing. They couldn't believe they were looking at an image of themselves. There are no mirrors in Carmel, and some of the nuns hadn't seen their faces for over 50 years. Sr. Katherine had never traveled by train. She was so good and I loved to help her and the other sister in the kitchen do their

ordinary labors.

Sr. Bernadetta was the nurse, she had studied medicine for four years before she converted and entered the monastery. Once she came into the kitchen and saw a rooster with its slaughtered head near a plate on the table. "And has this huge fowl grown from a tiny chick?" she mused. We loved to laugh about silly things. Our house was small and intimate, God's joy was with us.

One of our sisters fell ill with tuberculosis and one of her legs had to be amputated. The physician decided that she wasn't contagious anymore. I took care of her until I also became ill. I was put into isolation, and I lived like a hermit. Sr. Bernadetta was sure that I had caught this illness because I was predisposed to it. My mother had it after I was born and so I didn't make too much of a fuss over it. But when Sr. Bernadetta came to visit me she told me that Fr. Tomasz had been imprisoned and that he was living under much more difficult conditions than I. "God," she said, "in His mercy has found nothing better to give you than this disease."

I understood that I needed to pray for mercy. How true Sr. Bernadetta's words were. Each time God had given me a trial, it was simply the best thing He could have given me and I had to learn to believe that this trial too

was a gift given with love. This was wonderful and I cried.

A student of Archaeology was tired of taking exams and had decide to commit suicide. His friend knew of his intention and took his revolver away and brought it to Fr. Tomasz. The Communist Party wanted to cut out the influence of the Church and that night the police came to Fr. Tomasz's room, found the revolver and he was sent to Wronki, the worst prison in Poland, for seven years. Many other priests were incarcerated there as well as in other prisons all over Poland. I had to admit that my situation was better than theirs.

As a result of my illness, my sisters thought I should prolong my temporal vows, but Fr. Anzelm, who was in charge, didn't agree and on the twenty fourth of August 1952, I pronounced my perpetual vows. A few months before, on the 28th of June 1952, Fr. Daniel was ordained a priest. On the twenty sixth of July he came to celebrate his first Mass with us. After breakfast, I was allowed to speak to him in private. He was thin and unable to eat because of his great happiness. His Godmother took him home for a time so he could get back his strength but he needed more time. He spoke to me about his longing to repay Christ for the suffering his people had caused him. He would go to Israel and work there. His brother had

arranged everything.

All the way to the church and up the aisle to celebrate his first Mass in the church in his hometown of Zywiec, Fr. Daniel repeated the lines about Abraham offering his son Isaac as a sacrifice. I once asked him to put his Isaac on the altar.

"What are you suggesting?" he asked me.

I knew what Fr. Anzelm expected from him so I said.

"We must make sacrifices of our desires." We spoke for two hours. Fr. Anzelm, he told me, wanted him to become a teacher of history and mathematics. Fr. Daniel refused. He was obstinate and had a will of steel, so father Anzelm gave up trying to influence in this way. When I returned from the meeting, the sisters said I looked as if I were flying with ecstasy. I smiled but my answer was serious, "It was the second Council of Jerusalem," I said, "the first took place two thousand years ago."

I was happy and with sister Helena, we prayed together for Fr. Daniel in Hebrew. From the first day I met her, she was my friend, taking care of me and helping me compose my letters to Fr. Daniel. We read his answers together. He was given a barn in which to build a chapel. This was in Szopienice, in Silesia. The village was wonderful but there were so many worshipers that they needed this chapel. One day the

clerk of the Party came and against the will and the bodily force of the women and children, destroyed the altar and closed the chapel. Fr. Daniel was now free to go to Israel.

I spent my convalescence in the garden. I was allowed to repare little things, to read and to write. I was glad I had free time to be with my God. I tried to respond to Him. Fr. Daniel healed me with his letters. He would go to Israel but I though that I would be able to pray from my place here just as well.

The ceremony of receiving external vows disturbed my solitude. I revealed my disquietude to the priest Woznica very fervently and spiritually. He guessed my problem and said, "It is the external signs of your vows which disturb you, you will be the essence of your conversion." This was true.

When I was released from my imposed isolation, I prayed with Sr. Helena. I loved to pray with her. She loved Jews. Her brother had married a Jew. During the war, neighbors had taken in many Jewish children who had come to their door and saved them. We shared joy and sadness between us. Even now, many years later, I can't believe how she could have given up her love.

After Fr. Daniel's first letter from Israel, I concluded that he was restricted to a life of contemplation. In Israel, he asked the High

Court to give him the status of a returning Jew. Five judges were present but three refused to accept his plea. One declared that he remained a good and loyal citizen of Israel and finally received his citizenship although from his point of view citizenship is not the same as belonging to the Jewish people. Everyone who came to see us, told us about Fr. Daniel.

In every Carmelite community there should be a maximum of 21 nuns. We were 22. We had to find new lodgings. We went to the Carmel at Wesola to see what differentiated us from a "normal" community.

The monastery was big, old and had a large garden. One of the sisters took care of the animals. I loved to go with her to see the animals. We were young and strong and able to work. The sisters in Wesola were older and there were the several sick nuns who lodged with them who were unable to work. So, it was quite natural for the hard work to fall upon us. We loved it, because the work is done healthfully and happily. We couldn't get tired because we only worked for two hours at a stretch. Afterwards there were ten to sixteen minutes of prayer, dinner or supper and one hour of relaxation and time for recreation. All together we worked eight hours, but because it was divided systematically, it became a pleasure rather than a chore.

During recreation, I was asked to tell the story of my life. Like our Carmel at Poznan, there were several nuns here at Wesola who came from aristocratic families; Rostworowski, Czarnecki and others which I don't remember. I said that "I was also born to a very high-born family, I was born on the fourth floor, which is pretty high up." I had everyone's attention and so I went on. Sr. Michaela, the community poet, became my best friend. I loved her frankness and profundity of thought, I moved closer to listen to her story. She told us that her uncle had been jailed during the war. The family decided to wait until he was released so that he could be present at her christening. She was four years old when it finally took place. The family prepared for the ceremony. They explained that when the priest would ask her if she wanted to be baptized, she must say, "yes," otherwise she will be Jewish. In church when the priest asked her "Will you be baptized?" she cried, "No, no, I will not! I want to be Jewish."

Everyone laughed at the story except me. Twenty-five years later, the fact that with the years Sr. Michaela had became less willing to love Jews, makes me cry.

Frequently, for holidays, Fr. Daniel was invited to pray with us. His sermons were original and we liked them. The Carmelite Father's parish was quite big - the church seated

5,000 people. The church was filled with those who had come especially to listen to his sermon. People came from all around. His sermons were very popular in Poland. When the old priest Fr. Zieja heard him, he said, "Nunc dimittis servus tuus in pace." the song of old Simeon. And I thought how strange, a Jewish priest and Jewish nuns. In the Poland of that time, there was very little to do of interest, so listening to Fr. Daniel was an attraction.

Fr. Joseph, the superior of the Polish Carmelite order, who loved and trusted his protege and who had given him his name, Daniel, asked Fr. Daniel to find a suitable house with a garden in for us, the seven sisters from Poznan, in Czestochowa, the city of the Black Madonna, to accommodate our new monastery. It took him two years to find the place which he felt was just right. When he finally found it, he announced, "there is this property, it is a spring of Elijah, a veritable paradise of Eden."

Finally all the papers were signed and the house was ours. It was one week after Easter, the countryside was in blossom. We looked forward to our garden of Eden. When we got there, the contrast between Fr. Daniel's description and reality made us burst out laughing; a two story house near a crumbling stable surrounded by an overgrown garden

where a few apple trees stood. Our apartments were under the tool shed, there was no water and no toilets, but we did have electricity. We were young and fervent. Hardships only made us laugh.

On the other side of the stairs, there was a little utility room which we used for a wash room and a store room. A lady called Mrs. Rakowa lived next door. She was tall, fat untidy and loved to cheat. In the basement, under the utility room, lived a lady Kalinowska and her mother.

Mrs. Rakowa's son was an engineer. She took one of his new pair of shoes and went to a college in another part of the city, to sell it. The customer said, "What can I do with one right shoe?"

"Take it and I shall bring you its mate," she said. Then she went to the opposite part of town where there was another friend and sold the left shoe, making the same promise. Unfortunately, the two college students met and exchanged stories, and the swindle was brought to light.

We overheard Mrs. Rakowa complaining to Hanka, "I am so sorry, I no longer have the possibility of cheating, everyone knows me and my tricks by now." Hanka laughingly suggested she travel by train to a far off destination and there, completely unknown, she

could try swindling someone.

We loved old mother Hanka very much and if we had a cake or a piece of chocolate, we used to give it to "grandmother." But once Hanka said to me, "before you nuns came, we could sit in the garden, but now it is your exclusive delight."

This made me so unhappy that I cried. Upstairs our "palace" was envied, for each one of us in the attic we shared, had twenty centimeters of her own near her bed behind a partition made of a large sheet. There was no place for a washbowl. We put it on the bed in order to wash and then placed it under the bed until we could wash ourselves the next morning before going to holy Mass in the Church of St. Vincent Palloti. Since we didn't have any place to keep the Eucharist at home, I was ever cautious to keep Christ in my heart and spent whole days thinking of Him. I was happy to be poor, but I realized that our garden made these poor people feel even poorer. I shall be as poor as my Master who had nowhere to put His head at night, and I made the poverty of our tenants my own responsibility.

As she had done each year at Christmas, our Prioress M. Carmela, made a little Beth-lehem scene for our friends. There were plenty of trees and papers. On Christmas eve, M. Carmela said to me, "within the hour, Jesus will come here.

You must prepare this place for Him." I felt like St Joseph preparing the stable in Bethlehem. I swept the dirt into a corner, "cleaned" our humble home a little and we were ready to receive poor Jesus and the Holy Family.

Many friends sent us cakes. Fr. Edmund Boniewicz came and brought us figs. We laughed because we had cakes and figs but, because we had forgotten that the shops were closed on the holiday, we had no bread. Fr. Boniewicz went back to his monastery and brought us bread.

The first Mass in our chapel, fashioned from the only room at our disposal, moved me very much. Our lives became one of thankfulness. We no longer needed to walk to church. Every morning, a priest would come to celebrate Holy Mass in our chapel.

Every year, I renewed my Baptism on the Sabbath before Pentecost. This year, the priest said in his sermon that the Holy Spirit is like a mother and child. He is neither the mother, nor the child, but love that flows between them both. This idea was dear to me.

At another time he said that now the world is divided into two camps, those who believe in God and those who do not. I suggested that in our world there are also those in search of God. "Yes," he said, "but the sin of believers is that they cannot understand that faith is grace, and

they don't work to achieve this grace."

Sometime later, we were visited by Jesuit Fathers who asked us to pray for their work in the villages. They also told us some humorous stories. Fr. Alexander visited the old and the ill. One old man was sick and Father badly wanted to help him but had no money. When he put his hand into his pants' pocket, he found 500 zloty .He was so happy, he gave the money to the poor man. That evening, during supper, he told his host, the priest with whom he shared a room when he visited the village, his miraculous story.

"No wonder," the village priest answered, "you put on my pants by mistake."

Another joke was told once by our Bishop. He remarked once that Communism existed even in the garden of Eden: because no one had any clothes there and everyone had to steal apples.

But not everything was a joke. Among the priests at St. Vincent Pallotti Church, there was a pediatrician named Dr. Adam Wisniewski. At the time, it was difficult to emigrate from Poland. The doctor declared his desire for further study in Paris in order to update his practice. Instead, he studied tropical diseases. From Paris, he traveled to Bangalore, in India where he ran a hospital for five years. There was a terrible drought in India at the time, and people died of

starvation. Because the people were dying at such a high rate and because wood was so expensive, the same coffin was used over and over again to transport the cadavers to the cemetery.

In Dr. Wisniewski's Hospital there was a leper, Br. Augustine who had lost both legs, both hands and finally his eyes to the disease. Despite his infirmity, he was the soul and spirit of the hospital. He recognized his visitors from their footsteps and he had a good word for everyone with good advice and a promise of prayer. When he died, they didn't bury him as they did the others. Because they wanted to do something extraordinary, they decided to bury him in that lone coffin. This story taught me the importance of the soul over matter in this world.

After having spent three days in the Warsaw ghetto, the picture of people dying of starvation never left me. I organized my sisters and we agreed to send many things to India, many things which we felt we could live without. The letters we received from Bangalore stimulated us to pray and to work harder in order to help the destitute.

Sr. Roza was one of my best friends; we were like one person in two bodies. We both asked permission to be sent to India to found a Carmel there. The letters from Dr. Wisniewski were a great source of nourishment to us. I

went back to the monastery in Poznan. Sr. Elizabeth joined us there; she, too, expressed her desire to live near the leprosorium in Jeevodaya, India, in order to pray and to help the needy. I felt very happy back in Poznan with my elder sisters. Sr. Helena, my special friend from the very start, was now the Prioress of the convent. After some time, she asked me to show her the respect due to a Prioress. I found it difficult to change my way of relating to her, because, I told her, I felt that "God does not create Prioresses according to a mold."

Like in Czestochowa, here too we sent many things to India. St Teresa of Avila said: "Poverty is for us and wealth for God." And the church was full of beautiful, expensive things. I wrote to the Pope having persuaded our sisters that God does not need this luxury - but the Pope never answered. I dedicated most of my time in the monastery to packing food, clothes and medicine for the poor and I didn't really help out much in the community.

In Communist Poland, a law was passed by a Catholic member of Parliament, Jerzy Zawiejski, that these packages were tax free and we were only to pay for the transport. The fact that we could send so much was very profitable for India.

In 1968 Mrs. Maria Kalinowska from Torun came to see me. She was one of three Jewish

sisters who had been converted to Christianity.

"Sister," she said, "I am afraid that God in heaven will find nothing more to reward me. In this life I have had so much joy from what I have been doing for your poor Indians." She owned two suits, she sent one to India. She sold little pictures from house to house and sent the money to the poor children.

Fr. Teofil, today of the Carmelite Mission in Burundi, told me once that an old woman came to him with a gift of three zloty for the poor. He asked her, "How can you give away three zloty when you yourself have need for the money?" She answered, "Three times I didn't take the bus, and the money is yours."

Mrs. Kalinowska told me that in their village near Vilno, in the north of Poland where Lithuania is today, there lived a few Jewish families. The daughter of one of the families expressed a desire to convert to Christianity. In order to keep her from doing so, her father cut off her nose, but Mrs. Kalinowska's sister, Maria, wasn't afraid.

The priest, to make sure her desire to convert was real, put her to the test with hard labor in his house. Two years after her conversion, he helped her to marry and he arranged the wedding. She had several children and she was very happy; but her husband died, the children married and she remained a lonely

widow. During the war, a group of gangsters forced themselves into her house at night, robbed and tortured her. They pulled her from under the bed, where she was hiding, with such force, that they scalped her. "God," she prayed, "let me be their last victim." Throughout her life, she had worked hard not to consciously commit even the smallest sin.

Maria, Mrs. Kalinowska's sister, was 80 years old when she came to Czestochowa to visit me in 1967. We spoke a little, and then she went to church and promised to return for dinner. She lost her way, and found me only much later. "Jesus," she said, "was so tired looking for me but he did not give up. He made me find my way. What happiness to be secure in His love and tired too."

Her last years were spent with her son who was divorced and remarried. Maria suffered from the conduct of his second wife. But she had a wise saying. "Silence breaks rocks."

After Holy Mass, when the Catholic church celebrates the purity of the Mother of Jesus, Maria went out of the church and fell in the snow. A passerby brought her back into the church, where she died in the arms of five priests; hers was a holy death, befitting a holy life.

The person in charge of the Carmelite Order in India was elected to be the head of

Carmelite Order worldwide. Sr. Elizabeth and I were sure that he had been chosen in order to facilitate our going to India. But he refused to let us go, writing to us that there were already enough nuns there. I was so distressed to learn we couldn't go to an "asharam," our Indian monastery, that I almost went mad with disappointment. I cut my hair, which I had been growing so I could resemble a native women in a sari.

Soon after, Dr. Edward Szymanek, our New Testament professor and my confessor, returned from his pilgrimage to Rome and Israel. He persuaded me during a two hour talk that my place was where my forefathers came from. I took this idea to Sr. Helena, who immediately agreed and asked permission from Fr. Otto, the superior who was in charge of the Carmelite nuns in Poland. He was about to finish his term of office when he agreed to send me to Israel to found a new Hebrew speaking monastery. "It will be clausura?" he asked. I promised it would be cloistered.

Sr. Raphaela from the Polish Sisters of Jerusalem visited us in the monastery in Poznan and took a letter back to the Latin Patriarch in Jerusalem. The Carmel in Bethlehem was willing to accept me.

In 1968, after a period of antisemitic politics, Jews were allowed to leave Poland. In two

weeks' time I received my visa, but I had to renounce my Polish citizenship. I had no choice but to agree, and so I signed many forms. Afterwards, I cried all the way home. I spent two days with Mrs. Dmochowska and one night with Theresa Gorczyca to say my goodbyes. I visited my Wanda and her last words were, "I do not believe in God, but I believe in light, and it shall be."

There was no longer an Israel Embassy in Poland in 1969; instead the Dutch Embassy represented the government of Israel. I asked the clerk how to dress for the journey. He answered, "Better go without your habit. Why cause a sensation?"

As I was leaving the Dutch embassy, a man of about 60 years of age approached me in the street. He looked cautiously in every direction to see if anyone was listening to him.

"You have good eyes," he said. "I must tell you. I have been a Communist for thirty years and now I am through with Communism. I am going to Israel to marry a widow, any widow, in a kibbutz." I felt that he was in despair, at his age unable to build any other life for himself, any other ideology.

In the middle of the night, I came to Gienia Fajge in Czestochowa. She didn't know what to buy and what to do for me, but she accompanied me to the railway. I suppose she

was jealous that I was going to Israel, because her family had decided to stay since their economic situation was very good at the time.

Actually, her husband wanted to convert to Catholicism because a Jew had informed the Germans about their whereabouts during the war but since his wife was not in favor, he gave up the idea. We are like sisters.

The train crossed the border of Czechoslovakia, and a conductor came to our car. Near me sat an old couple on the way to Argentina, a young man named Wojtek and a young woman, Kasia.

The conductor took our papers and baggage. In my suitcase I had a heavy winter habit, a big wooden rosary and a large wooden crucifix. He put his hand inside the suitcase but didn't feel anything of importance. I had dollars hidden in my belt but he didn't bother looking.

Only when we crossed the border to Austria, did everyone's tongue loosen up. We felt as if we were finally able to speak openly with one another. We began to chatter like little children. "Now we are free, we can speak," we felt.

Wojtek said, "I have a rosary."

Kasia said, "And I, I too have one." They told their tragic stories. We were all Jews or part Jews.

Chapter 15

Fr. Daniel and a German Elisheva Hemker, his associate, working with him from 1962, met me at the airport. On our way from the airfield to Haifa, I was amazed to see how normal life was because I expected a state of emergency. We traveled by night and nobody seemed to pay much attention to us. I told Fr. Daniel about all my adventures. Elisheva, Daniel's assistant, being very tired, took the wrong turn to Haifa. On the Carmel, we left Fr. Daniel at the Stella Maris monastery which is his home, and Elisheva took me to her house. That morning, as the sun was rising, I looked out at the view from the balcony and saw the golden Bahai dome surrounded by trees.

Instinctively, I kneeled to thank God for this moment of beauty, for having come to this land. Elisheva drew me out of my ecstasy by saying, "here in Israel, we do not kneel." Later, Fr.Daniel came to visit and again upset all my ideas by telling me that I should ask for an indult of temporary exclaustration so I could learn Hebrew. I refused, since I had planned to study Hebrew at the Carmelite monastery. Fr. Daniel left us quite angrily, but he promised that he would come back at noon to take us to the Muhraqa high on Mt. Carmel where it is believed, Elijah fought the priests of Baal and

destroyed them.

Years before, Fr. Daniel had sent us photos of his work. He had "cleaned" the church at Muhraqa. In place of the Byzantine icons and antique ornaments, he had put a simple wooden cross on the altar of twelve stones, symbolizing the twelve tribes of Israel, he had had built in the spirit of Elijah the Prophet. For twenty years I had longed for Muhraka and now there I was looking at the wall of sea green and blue ceramic tiles with inscriptions from the **Book of Kings** written in Hebrew and in Arabic. In Israel, I was told, the prophet Elijah is well-loved by Christians, Moslems and Druze as well as Jews. Fr. Daniel prayed in Hebrew for Roman Brandstaetter the Polish author who wrote four books on the life of Jesus; he was a Christian whose father had been a Jewish journalist in Poland. After my first prayer there, Fr. Daniel placed his hands on my head and I knew it was a beginning. I felt that I must be a sacrificial lamb to my people. As we left we saw an ugly statue showing Elijah treading on the head of one of the Baal prophets.

The following day Sr. Marie-Liesse took me to see Nazareth. Sr. Marie-Liesse greeted Jews we met with "shalom" and Arabs with "sal'am." So I asked her how she could differentiate between them. She simply knew. In Mary's house, underneath the basilica, I felt at peace

and thirsted for God who was willing to visit such a humble abode. I felt I would come back to this place. Upstairs, in the basilica there were so many images so full of symbolism, there was hardly anywhere left to pray. Maybe because of my great love for St. Francis, I dislike rich and over decorated churches. Only simple places can attract me. We then ascended Mt. Tabor, which didn't greatly impress me.

On the bus going back home I cried for joy when I saw a Jewish child, healthy and handsome and totally unafraid. In my soul, I pictured Jewish children in the ghetto. I was most impressed by the freedom I found everywhere, and I was even more impressed when I saw our soldiers. I had to wave to them, I was so happy to see them. Later Sr. Henrietta took me to the Sea of Galilee and on to Tabgha, Capernaum and the site of the Sermon on the Mount. I was most impressed by the hillside where Jesus taught. Lake Tiberias seems to be full of love. The water is the same water upon which the eyes of Jesus rested.

Elisheva made me a present of tiny rolls two days later, and put me on the train for Jerusalem. I was very grateful for those delicacies. On the way to Jerusalem, we passed forests and a little stream Soreq with white foam in it. "Jerusalem, which has always killed its own prophets and saints", was so beautiful. That night, I lodged in

the monastery of Notre Dame de Sion which was founded by the Ratisbonne brothers. There is now a center of Jewish studies. In the morning, I visited a Jesuit priest named Fr. Semkowski, the head of the Papal Institute Biblique. He told me that when Jerusalem was occupied by the Trans Jordanians, the native Bedouin were so poor that for a little bread they would tell you the whole history of the place and the legends attached to it thrown in.

He sent me to the chaplain of St Joseph's monastery, in order to help me get better acquainted with Jerusalem. Fr. Norbert in turn, took me to see Fr. Bruno Hussar, an Egyptian Jew of Hungarian descent, a naturalized French citizen who became a Dominican Brother living no in Israe, who has written a book called **The Moving Cloud**. He founded the House of Jacob ,the Just in Jaffa, and Isaiah House in Jerusalem both of which have a very different outlook from the wealthy Institute Biblique. He wrote a book called **The Moving Cloud** where he describes his nascent dream ofa village for Jewish, Christian and Muslim families, which later developed into the Neve Shalom Jewish-Arab peace village near Latroun.

I told him about my plans to found a Hebrew speaking Carmelite monastery where Hebrew would be the language of prayer and we would become Israeli citizens. He said, "all

right, but there must be more than only Jews there. Jews," he added, "are like salt; it is tasteless to eat food without it, but if there is too much, it is equally impossible to eat." Then Fr. Norbert took me to see the Little Sisters. They lent me Andre Chouraqui's **La Pensee Juive**, a book that proves that originally there was no dogmatic imperative for separating Jews from the new Christians. The author also states that Judaism has always been pluralistic, and that the differences of outlook between the Pharisees and Saducees were greater than those between Pharisees and the teachings of Jesus, both of whom believed in the resurrection. The Jewish and the new Christian communities were separated only by historical factors. While the Jewish destiny was to safeguard the Holy Land, the Christians had had to disperse in order to preach the belief in one God amongst the nations. In another passage, Chouraqui states that it is impossible for the Jewish mind to believe that God could be born and die.

I was so impressed by the many outstanding personalities Fr. Bruno, the Little Sisters, Sr. Bernadette and Fr. Semkowski - that I told Fr. Norbert that "instead of being shown holy places, he had shown me holy people."

I went to Qumran to drink from its fount airs of wisdom and looked long at the lonely caves, at the mountainside where the Essenes had

experienced God's presence. I visited Jericho, and in Jerusalem I was enchanted by the miniature model of the second temple in the Holy Land Hotel.

When I first went to the Wailing Wall, I cried. One of Fr. Ratisbonne's songs says, "Some people have a heart of stone and some stones are more loving than a human heart."

The next morning I went to Bethlehem. I felt very much at home in the grotto with the young poor Woman who had given birth to Jesus. Sr. Joanna, the Prioress of Carmel, received me with friendliness and warmth and listened to me attentively. I felt that she understood and was supportive of my intentions. She suggested that I see Israel, and then return to her.

I saw ancient Jaffa. There I stayed at a French monastery. The next morning I went to Tel Aviv. I saw many wonderful things in Israel, traveling north and back again. Two weeks later, I entered the cloister at the Carmel in Bethlehem where I was expected. Physical beauty always fascinated me, Sr. Joanna was beautiful and the devotion to God I felt in Bethlehem seemed to me deeper and more serious than in other communities. So whenever I needed help, I turned to Prioress Joanna. My French was poor, but she always understood me.

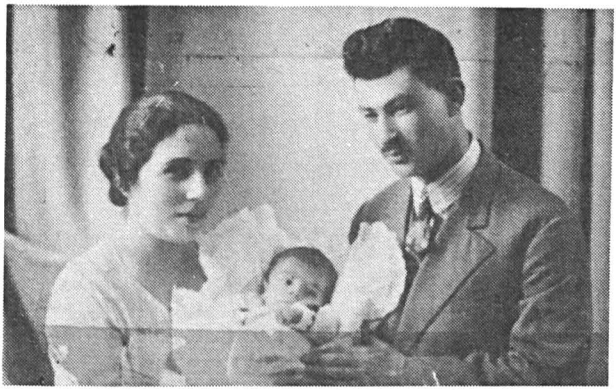
The Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, however, threw me out of the Carmelite monastery in Bethlehem, saying he did not know who I was and that I had no right to be there.

While waiting for the indult of exclaustration to learn Hebrew, I was given an apartment in Givat HaMoreh near Afula, in the plain of Esdraelon by the Jewish Agency just like any other immigrant.

Six weeks later, I received a note from the Superior of the Carmel in Rome telling me that my request for admittance to the Carmel monastery in Haifa had been approved.

When I was accepted to the Haifa Carmelite monastery, I'd said I had no family left alive after the Shoa. But on my way back to Afula from Haifa, I took the wrong bus to the central bus station. The woman seated next to me engaged me in conversation, and seeing that my Hebrew was rather uncertain, she asked me in Polish where I came from. I soon found out that she came from Przytyk. She knew my aunt and her husband Pinhas the doctor - both of whom, she told me, lived in Tel Aviv.

I hesitated to believe her. I asked Fr. Daniel to call them. He did and shortly after, I went to visit them in Tel Aviv. My aunt was afraid to believe that I was really her close relative and she took out the family photos. Only after I had identified most people in the photos was she



Aunt Esther, her husband and Isaac

Isaac and Felicia

My Grandfather

Before leaving Poland - 1969

Carmel monastary, Haifa

convinced and then she told me about my aunt Esther, who had been in the Warsaw ghetto. The Germans promised bread to whoever agreed to leave the ghetto and go to Treblinka. My aunt Esther and her family, who had nothing left to sell for food, accepted the proposition. At that time it was still possible to buy food in the ghetto.

My newly found aunt Sala said that when the mail and every means of communication broke down, she could no longer send them any parcels from her ghetto in Radom. She told me that my uncle Pinhas, who was a medical doctor, and the director of the hospital in the Lodz ghetto was permitted to leave in order to combat the epidemic which was spreading in the villages. This was August 1944, very close to the end of the war. The Russians had already advanced into the center of Poland. At this time, uncle Pinhas and my aunt had already been selected for the crematorium shower room in Auschwitz. My uncle had a diamond hidden on his body which he gave to the guard. The guard let the family jump out of the window before the crematorium and creep back to the barracks.

My cousin was in the group of one hundred children kept by Dr. Mengele as guinea pigs for his experiments. The Russians liberated the camp before he and the other 99

children were used. On the train from Auschwitz to Lodz after the Russians liberated the camp, a woman asked my aunt, "How come they forgot to kill you?" The family found each other and a year later they all went to Czechoslovakia where uncle Pinhas again worked in his profession. They arrived in Israel in 1948. There were many economic restrictions such as food coupons and an allowance of one egg a week. Their son grew up to become a doctor and the father of three children. My uncle Pinhas had a weak heart. Only a year later, my aunt was able to speak about the death of her husband.

When aunt Sala finished telling me her story, I told her mine. I could see that I had touched a raw nerve when I spoke of my baptism. I was largely unaware of the problem my conversion caused. My aunt, who claimed to be an atheist, suggested that I return to Judaism, explaining that I did not have to believe in anything and only to say that I am believing.

One day while praying in my special spot on the slope of Mt. Carmel overlooking the blue sea, I suddenly felt so strongly that this land belonged to me and I to it. But in the monastery, in all its splendor, I could not feel at home. I spent two years praying in this beautiful spot in the cloister garden and yet I

never could understand why we had to sing our psalms in French rather than in Hebrew. After all King David wrote them in Hebrew! and we are living in a Hebrew speaking country. I also failed to understand why I should spend many hours cleaning huge staircases, endless corridors and rooms.

In Poland, I always lived in very humble monasteries and felt very happy there. I was always aware that there were many families without a place of their own and here there were scores of empty rooms and anterooms which the nuns rarely used. My behavior, as well as my Hebrew studies, irritated the elder nuns - I was in the habit of dancing at Christmas. One year after I arrived, the sisters voted against me and I was asked to leave.

When I received the indult of exclaustration from Rome, I found a job in the Galileo town of Tivon. I became a companion to an elderly woman suffering from anxieties resulting from the Nazi persecution. The conditions I worked under were very fair; I had a room of my own, a good salary and food. I only had to spend afternoons and evenings with the old lady. I never had a grandmother, so after I gave her her bath and tucked her in, I tried to kiss her good night, but she was sure I meant to strangle her. Her daughter was a good housewife and tried to teach me some cooking. Once, after a

lengthy lecture on cooking and baking her husband, the professor said, "you left out just one little detail, you didn't tell her to light the gas before putting the pot on."

Luckily Esther, the old lady, was also afraid I might poison her so I did not have to do any cooking at all. Now and then some neighbor would drop in. Tova Shkedy, a very wonderful woman lived in the house in back. Whenever Esther called her for help, she would come immediately.

Two weeks later, I went to Haifa on my day off. Fr. Daniel told me that my lips kept trembling. Esther never allowed me to sleep because of her fear of strangulation. I spoke with her daughter very seriously which did not help much. I started to learn Hebrew in the mornings in an Ulpan, a Hebrew school.

When I told Alfred, the Belgian priest, about my plans, he jokingly pointed out to me that the verb "to have" does not exist in Hebrew only the verb, "to be;" an idea which I liked.

Initially, I found my Hebrew studies most difficult, but with time, I fell in love with the language and even found certain similarities between Polish and Hebrew; Polish, as a written language, has been influenced by the translations of the Bible.

During the holidays, I invited my aunt to Tivon. I had never expected to feel so good

about finding an aunt. In spite of our differences, this relationship gave me some roots and a feeling of belonging. This time, she spoke more openly about uncle Pinhas, her husband.

It seemed as if everyone spoke Polish, including the grocer and the butcher. One day the grocer told me about his empty flat in Haifa. Elisheva informed me that as a new immigrant, the Jewish Agency would buy the flat for me. At the time most flats were empty in Neve Josef. It was a neighborhood where few wanted to live. I could have chosen any flat for the taking, but I decided on the grocer's because it had the best view. Since there was no water, no electricity and the roof leaked, I let it to a young couple in return for work. They stayed for about six months and made all the necessary repairs.

I finally found a couple from Argentina who agreed to take over my job looking after Esther in Tivon, and so I was free to move to Haifa. I attended Ulpan in Haifa and immediately began working in my very own neglected garden. I found a half dead plant which slowly grew very beautiful. It seemed to me that this plant was like the Jewish people; as long as it was kept in a dark corner, and no one took notice of it, it was miserable but given its own space and light, it blossomed.

My first job in the Hebrew language was as

a social worker. I asked Rachel, the director of the social welfare office, how I could possibly work there when I had no family of my own. But she only said "Janush Korczak never had a family of his own and he did wonders" with orphan children in Poland during the war. She sent me to the office at Or Akiva, a small town built on sand near Caesarea. I saw trees and flowers growing in the sand. All they needed was water.

Soon after my very wise and intelligent Rachel announced that she was going to Germany on a visit. I told her that I could never step on German soil. Our secretary, a Jewish Yemenite woman invited me to her son's marriage, it surprised me to see the men and the women dancing separately. I enjoyed working there but eventually I was dismissed for lack of knowledge of Hebrew. So I went back to the Ulpan in Haifa. A few months after, I once more found a job as a social worker and worked for a period of three years. I left to study Jewish philosophy and the history of the Middle East at the Haifa University. My aim was to understand the Holocaust and the people among whom I lived.

Chapter 16

Several years after I arrived in Israel, I received a letter from my best friend Theresa with whom I shared the only available bed when we were both students in Lodz after the war. She wrote that her husband had died and all she could do now was to wait for her own death. I invited her to come to Israel. Seventeen years had passed since we last met. She had matured. But we still had our love and friendship in common for Fr. Chojecki with whom we both continue to correspond.

Ezekiel Romaniuk, whose wife had taken me to the ghetto in Warsaw, asked Theresa to plant, on his behalf, a tree in the Yad Va Shem "Memorial for the Righteous among the Nations" in Jerusalem. She did so and that evening at a gathering in Jerusalem, Julek Dobrzynski, a Polish Jew, questioned Theresa about antisemitism in Kielce where there had been a pogrom in 1946. She told him quite truthfully that she knew nothing about antisemitism. But, she said, "if you keep on insisting that everyone in Poland was antisemitic, you'll turn me into an antisemite."

As a child during the war, Theresa had been forced to hide in a isolated village because her father was a teacher and an intellectual and therefore a target for persecution by the

German. In addition, Theresa's brother-in-law was Jewish.

She once told me that when the war was over she had invited a friend of hers who was German to sleep over at her family home. Obviously, she never spoke to her about her aunts and uncles whom the Germans had incarcerated in their concentration camps.

Julek, I tried to explain to her, only wanted to be reassured that there was no longer any antisemitism in Poland.

Theresa organized my life for me during her stay, and every evening between 7:00 and 9:00 p.m., we wrote my biography. She kept insisting that I pay her a return visit to Poland. I had never thought of visiting Poland. I was proud of Israel and always preferred to have people from Poland visit me in Israel. Instead of going, I sent two hundred dollars to Kasilda, Hieronim Kalicki's daughter. He had helped me so much during the war. Not only had I no contact with most of those who had hidden me but neither did I have any addresses and going to Poland to find them would be very expensive, the rate of exchange was very unfavorable. So I decided not to go back to Poland, for the time being.

Then I got a letter from Mrs. Helena Gruszka Kazmierczak:

Dear Stella,

I do not want to send the "Warsaw Institute of Jewish Historic Studies," any documents. They want to know the names of the Jews I helped. Whatever I did, I did simply as a human reaction to someone in need and not for profit. My father used to say that whoever tried to profit from other people's tragedies is simply a murderer. You know very well how much I respected and loved you and your mother. I visited you both in the ghetto so often because Ifelt so much at home with your mother.

Our friendship will last to the end of my lifetime. There is little enough time left and digging up the past is not worth anymore of my time. So I advise you, leave the past alone. During the holidays, I want to go to Warsaw. I have to run some personal errands. I should like to visit the "Institute," though I won't give them documents, I will talk to them. I shall write to you after my visit.

I kiss you,

As I read her letter, the thought suddenly struck me that if I postponed my visit until I reached the age of 65 when I was eligible for a reduction as a senior citizen, none of the people I was looking for would be alive. So Theresa went back to Poland and a month later I prepared to go to Poland on a visit. If anyone asked where I was going, I simply answered, "home."

I arrived in Poland on September 1,1987.

On my arrival in Warsaw, I was met by Theresa and her friends who had visited me in Haifa. They greeted me with flowers and great

excitement. I was taken to Theresa's home by Josef whose son Witek had spent the last two years in Libya with his young and beautiful wife. She heard that Israeli soldiers cut throats, and cut bellies open and she believed all the terrible propaganda about "Jewish atrocities." It really made me angry, and I wanted her to come to Israel and see how things really were with her own eyes. She said she wanted to but probably never would. In Libya, she had learned to believe in fate.

That afternoon we went to visit Theresa's sister Basia. The apartment was small and crowded, but there were lovely plants on the balcony. The table was beautifully set for dinner. Although there was hardly any food to be found in the stores, wherever I went there was a feast. After a short while, Basia's husband, Janusz, came in. One could see immediately that he was Jewish. He told us how jealous he was that Theresa had been able to visit Israel. I stayed for supper because I felt everyone wanted to hear as much as possible about Israel and our problems.

The next morning, I went to the offices of "The Organization of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy," where I was received courteously by Dr. Wilczur, the man in charge, who asked me to come back the following day. He wanted to hear more details of my escape and of the

people who had informed on my mother and those who had murdered her. I had lunch in an outdoor canteen and ate soup and to my surprise, gefilte fish. The soup portion was weighed and measured, but the food was cheap and tasty.

I then went to visit the Carmelite Monastery and I asked to see the Prioress. She would be able to give me information about the ghetto uprising because her monastery had served as the headquarters of the underground movement. I did not tell the Prioress about myself, so she was wary of giving me too many details. But she did tell me what happened to Jurek Wilner, Tadzik and Bruno Chaimowicz, leaders of the Warsaw ghetto uprising. They all died fighting for the cause. The Prioress told me that Jurek was officially an atheist and he promised her to repent when his end was near.

I went on to see Yola Andrzejewska, daughter of E. Jablonski who had hidden my cousin Nehemia and the two other boys hidden in his barn. Yola was an ophthalmologist and physiotherapist and earned only about eighteen dollars a month, so she had to take on as much additional work as possible to make ends meet. She wrote me her story in some detail:

"In 1939, when I was four years old and very happy, cruelty was something she had heard about in fairy stories like **Little red Riding Hood** and **Baba Jaga**, my childhood came to an end. War broke out.

I, my mother and her brothers had gone to visit their grandfather for the summer in his village near Treblinka in order to help him in the fields. My father had been recruited into the Polish army. Within days, Poland surrendered to the advan- cing Nazis and he came back home dejected.

Jews and Russian prisoners of war used to escape from the transports to the death camp in Treblinka day in day out and they could be seen round our dinner table. The children knew that there were three Jews hidden in a bunker under the cowshed because sometimes they too ate supper with the family.

My father became a member of the Polish underground and used to make up names for the papers of refugees which he forged. Once he forged documents for two Jewish girls. Their names were Lusia and Lodzia Pietrzak. Their sister Tania would have gotten one too if her head hadn't been bashed in when the Nazis threw her against a wall. I remember seeing the girls' mother being dragged by the hair down the street.

Whenever the Germans were expected, My mother threw "forbidden articles" in small packages covered in grey material into my bed. I fell asleep hugging her teddy bear surrounded by the packages. Once, when I was sick with typhus, the Nazis came into the house. They beat my father when he refused to answer their questions. I was in bed paralyzed with fear and helpless while they broke the eye glasses on my father's nose and pushed the slivers into his eyes. My mother, who came to help him, was also beaten and Yola saw her sleeping in a puddle of blood and then the Nazis let loose their German Shepherds which began to chew my mother up in front of her and then they tried to grab me.

The Germans never changed the expression on their faces, they seemed to be enjoying the family's fear. Before they left, the Germans shot me. The "secret packages" kept the bullets from penetrating and saved my life. I was left with only a scar-wound in my

leg. The real scars will remain with me forever. My mother never recovered from the beating, and her kidneys, which absorbed the punches of the Nazis, eventually caused her death.

Towards the end of the war, I became critically ill .My mother went out to find a doctor. The front was right there in their yard. The German doctor brutally refused to come. In desperation, under bombardment, my mother went to the Russian side and asked a Russian doctor for help. Two hours later, there were two doctors bedside me, the Russian and the German one. They consulted each other with great respect and each went his own way.

The Russian doctor came back and brought a can of meat for me and the German doctor came back with a chocolate bar. It was the first and only chocolate she'd eaten since the war broke out.

At the end of the war a woman came to the house. My mother sent her to the yard and gave her the "forbidden packages." The woman asked my mother whether anything was missing. My mother was very upset. "That is Jewish thanks for you," she said. "Are you accusing me, do you think I opened up the package? Isn't it enough that I endangered my life and the lives of my children all these years?"

The woman's hands were shaking with excitement as she undid the string. In the packages there were some rags. The woman rocked them on her knees. She took a bracelet from her wrist and put it on me. Later, my mother explained that the rags were Jewish prayer shawls around a pair of silver candle- sticks."

On Christmas Eve 1945, Yola's father went out to buy cigarettes and never came back. They found him two days later, naked and dead and with a finger chopped off. Yola said that because he spoke German, he was accused of co-operating with the Nazis by a certain Jew

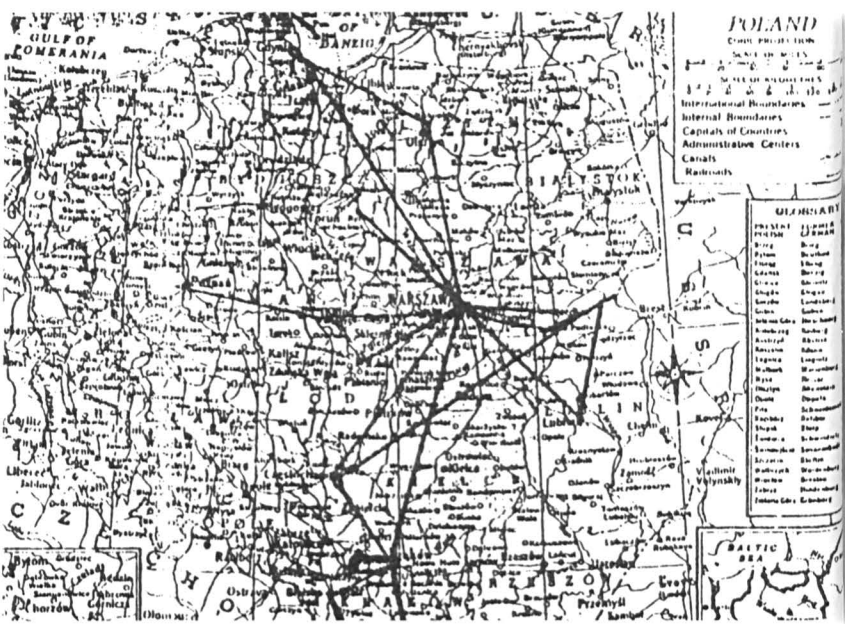
called Stein. Yola's mother raised the children as best she could.

"I don't remember anything else about those times," she claimed. I invited her to plant a tree in "The Forest of the Righteous Among Nations" in Jerusalem, but she said that she could not afford the cost of the trip. That evening, Fr. Daniel was invited by Leopold Lewin - a poet and translater, to lecture in Warsaw at the Writer's Club. Yola and I went. Artur Sandauer accysed him of doing a mission between Jews - but it was without reasons.

I was staying with Theresa and in the morning we were taken by car to the Benedictine sisters in Zbuczyn. The Prioress was my godfather Czeslaw's sister. She welcomed me warmly. She talked about Renia, the Jewish orphan she had saved. We then went to see Irena, my godmother in Choya. She took me to see her next door neighbor, Andrzej Zdanowski in whose house I had hidden for a time. He was ninety years old and in very good shape, though hard of hearing. He told me that he had heard too much of too many things during his lifetime and seemed quite happy with his infirmity. He did not recognize me, but I recognized him immediately. He told me that under my room, another Jewish family had been hidden.

"They live near Poznan," he claimed, "they

1987



In search of my rescuers

In Siedlce (25.8.1942) 17,000 were killed

I find them...

1987 - with Romaniuk and Piotrowski in Losice

With Waclowa Radzikowska

wrote to me after the war, but they did not write their address." He often wondered if any of the other people he had kept hidden were still alive.

"Everyone," he said, "is equal, everyone has to eat, Poles as well as Jews have to eat." When I suggested that his son go to the Yad Vashem in Jerusalem to plant a tree in the wood for the "Righteous among Nations," those Christians who had helped save Jews during the war, he refused.

Kazik took me home to Krysia, Czeslaw Gorzala's daughter. Theresa had told me that Czestaw had died three weeks before my arrival. I looked out the window and watched a long procession of people carrying flowers and fruit to the church in honor of the harvest festival.

We went to a nearby forest where Mass was being said for soldiers who had been killed by the Soviets during the First World War. It was a very impressive ceremony with a political bias against the present Communist regime. Fr. Drozd said that it is forbidden for us as Christians to hate, and we had to learn to pardon our enemies. He said I too was a war hero who had fought for her life against the Nazis.

I attended the memorial service for my godfather. Fr. Drozd asked me to address the congregation and say a few words about him. I

said that it is not enough to love your enemies, sometimes like Czeslaw did, it is a more difficult challenge to look around and find one individual who needs help and offer it to him. The church was full of people, and I was glad to see there were many children sitting in the first row who had come after their first day at school.

After the ceremony, Krysia invited Fr. Drozd and his mother for lunch. Since Krysia's home is quite sumptuous, I asked the Priest where the poverty in Poland was. I had heard him mention in church that on his pilgrimage to Rome, Lourdes and La Salette, he had seen many rich but empty churches in contrast to Poland where people were poor but had faith. After lunch we went to the grandson of the Piechowiczs in Malinowiec where I had spent the last six months of the Holocaust.

There used to be a forest around his house when I was in hiding and many Jews came out at night and begged him for food.

My old room was tidy but the barn had disappeared. The dog kennel had also been moved to a different place. The father of the family had died shortly after I left. Perhaps I had been the cause of his death.

The following day, I went to visit Leszek Mroz for whose mother and father I worked on the recommendation of the five policemen. I was served a wonderful supper. They were

hard working people, but they lived very comfortably. I remembered my days in the village in '43 when all we had was a communal plate of potatoes at one end of the table and another plate of vegetables on the other end and everyone ate out of the two plates with a soupspoon. His sister, Bogusia Zalewski, told me that her father had saved a Jew from a group of prisoners at the police station. All the others were executed the next morning. Her father died on Christmas Day 1943 when I was already living somewhere else. He left the three children, her brother Zdzislaw who was nine years of age at the time and became a shepherd, she who was seven and a baby. Her mother had had to sell their property and in order to support the family had gone out working in neighboring fields.

Bogusia was ten years old when she started school, and after the war she managed to enroll in another two classes. At the age of fifteen she got married, and soon afterwards her mother died - so she had to raise her brothers by herself. Bogusia told me that her own life was not easy. She worked wherever she could, and she was very poor.

Next morning after a magnificent breakfast. Leszek took me to the village of Rudnik. Helena Gruszka Kazmierczak, was not at home because, her husband said, she was standing in

line to buy meat. He was an old man who had come out to greet us, kissing my hand. We were shown into a little house with a lovely little flower garden. Leszek went to fetch her home in the car. In the meantime, Helena's grandson asked to bring his friend to meet me. He was writing a seminar paper about the Jews in Podlasie. Both young men expressed a desire to come to Israel to plant a tree in their grandparents'name in "The forest of The Righteous Among Nations" in Yad Vashem.

When Helena finally came home, I found the same goodness in her eyes that I recollected, only the wrinkles on her face had deepened. There was a long embrace and we shed tears of happiness and remembrance, she was the one who had helped my mother in her own time of trouble. I said that one of the reasons I came back was to return the 100 zloty I still owed her. She forbade me to mention it.
I asked her to tell me anything she could about my mother, and she was only able to say, "this wonderful woman, this human being." We took a snapshot to remember our reunion and I went on to catch a train to Poznan.

On the train one of the passengers complained that he worked hard but he did not earn enough money to keep body and soul together. Instead of progress, there was regression in the economy. He told me he had lost his mother in

Auschwitz and his father in another concentration camp. And now some higher up official, who had once belonged to the Hitler Jugend and was now a Communist party member, wanted to oust him from the Education Department. He was forced to defend his teaching methods against the Communist dogma but to no avail.

Another passenger complained that all the Poles were being exploited in every possible way, people worked and got nowhere. In order to console him I told him that in spite of everything, the West was no paradise on earth. At Poznan, I was joyfully received by the sisters of my first monastery, where I spent the night. This monastery had meanwhile become elegant and comfortable. When I saw how luxuriously they lived, I told them that I could not feel at home anymore in their sumptuous surroundings. I preferred to be poor. In spite of my point of view, they insisted that if ever I wanted to return to them in my old age, they would gladly take me in.

I stayed up to the early morning hours with Sr. Elisabeth discussing Fr. Daniel's ideas. He believes there is only one religion, Judeo-Christianity and not two. She said she thought his ideas were faulty.

It was after 3:00 in the morning when I went back to my room. I wrote to Elisabeth on

a picture postcard, "the difference between you and me is that you need to understand God, and I need to be with Him. That is my truth."

I wanted to visit Mrs. Jachimska in Lodz. She was a good friend of Mrs. Dobrucka which sent her a Jewish child during the war. One Sylvester night Mrs. Dobrucka's first husband Jezierski who died in Auschwitz because he helped Jews escape from the ghetto, went out for a walk in the streets of Warsaw. Passing a church, he saw a woman weeping. When he asked her why she was crying, she said there was a child who had been hidden under a dining room table of a family she knew. "It is Sylvester," she said, "and the family is going to have a party and they can't keep the child hidden under the table," and so she brought the child to the church. Jezierski understood that the woman was talking about her own child. He took the mother and the child, who looked so obviously Jewish, home. Three weeks later when the child's hair had grown long enough to cover his outsized ears, the Dobruckas gave him a dress to wear, pinned a ribbon to his hair, changed his name from Yurek to Irka and brought him to Mrs. Jachimska who then lived in Warsaw.

One day the Germans came and searched Mrs. Jachimska's apartment.

"How come," they wanted to know, "three

of your children are blond and only one of them is dark?"

"I had a dark lover," she told them.

They didn't question her further. This child Yurek, stayed with Mrs. Jachimska till the end of the war then his mother, Celina, took him with her to the States.

I wanted Mrs. Jachimska to be honored as one of "The Righteous Among Nations" in Yad Vashem but Celina refused. Mrs. Dobrucka later told me that I was to blame for her refusal. "How could I have written," Celina wanted to know when she met me in Haifa, "that her son had big ears." And she took out his photo. "Look, what a handsome man he is."

The neighbors of the Jachimskas welcomed me into their homes warmly, but I did not stay very long because I wanted to see my parents' apartment.

Chapter 17

The maple trees in my street were much taller than I remembered and the branches quite impressive. The Etingon factory, that used to belong to a Jewish family, was no longer in working condition, it was closed and the windows broken. I passed the Kopczynski bakery with great excitement. This was the first mechanized bakery in town and father used to lift me up to the window so I could see the rolls passing by on the assembly line. I went into the bakery, the Kopczynski family was still there. On the Sabbath, I was told, the bakery is closed. I walked into a smoky restaurant on the other side of the street. The tables were clean but the tablecloths much mended. I ate quickly and went to our apartment house.

A fair, blond young woman of medium height, who looked a little like my mother, carrying some vegetables was entering our apartment. I walked in behind her. My excitement was infectious. She understood my urge to look at those walls which still retained my mother's perfume, and also look at the windows where my mother nurtured such lovely plants.

I showed her some photos and we had a

very friendly conversation. She told me about Mrs. Krzeminska's leukemia of which she had died. Mrs. Krzeminska had been my first tenant after the holocaust. One day as I came back from a village her husband's corpse lay stretched out on my bed.

Among the things I still found in the apartment there were tablecloths which my mother had embroidered.

She gave me two pamphlets about the holocaust. We exchanged addresses and parted. I took photos of the entrance of the house, the gate and the court yard. The children in the courtyard asked me what I was doing? I told them that when I was their age I had also lived in that house.

In the neighboring electricity plant, I found one chimney left of the three I remembered.

I wanted to go as quickly as possible to Sr. Theresa at the Carmelite monastery in Radogoszcz. Midway, the tramway got stuck and I had to wait for two additional busses to get there and then walk down Theresa street. Sr. Theresa received me smilingly. She looked well, though I knew she had great trouble with her back. We reminisced about the last night I had spent with her before entering the monastry and we exchanged tales.

She said that Fr. Daniel had visited her a few days before and had told her that on the

way back from a trip to Switzerland he'd met a rich London Jew named **Jacob Fliederbaum**, who wantet to find a way to encourage understanding between the church and the Jews, the Poles and the Jews. Years later, he established at the Warsaw University a chair for the history of Jewish Poles with emphasis on the period of the holocaust.

On my way back to Warsaw, I met Theresa at the railway station in my hometown of Lodz as we had planned and we had supper at Theresa's daughter, Kalina, who received us cheerfully as ever. Kalina and her husband, Andrzej, were both university graduates living in a tiny cramped flat. Andrzej offered to drive us to Losice to see Ezekiel Romaniuk. On the way, we stopped off in Pienki to Wacia Radzikowska. She was working in a potato field when I approached her and was quite dusty. As she rushed to embrace me, she cried and I felt her heart pounding. When we entered her house, she told me that two other couples had been hidden under their cowshed - two pairs of brothers and sisters - who had come to her grandfather. He told them not to worry, "we shall either live or die together."

Together they dug a bunker underneath the cowshed, and they stayed there for two years. Wacia's mother, whom I know was a very good cook from my own experience, used to bring

them meals in a milk pail.

When the Jews left the bunker, they gave Wacia's mother gold coins. Her mother was afraid that those gold coins would only cause her spiritual unrest and so she gave them all to the priest so he could put a gold crown on the statue of the Blessed Virgin. She also told me that in the village of Rzazew there lived a Jewish family in hiding, a couple with daughters who were killed by the invading Russians.

Theresa went with me to visit Ezekiel Romaniuk, whose wife had taken me along with her to see my family in the ghetto in Warsaw. He told me that on the day of the liquidation of the Losice ghetto, he went to my uncle, his friend and begged him to escape and promised to hide him and the family. "The Germans", he told them, "were taking the Jewish people to Treblinka." My uncle refused and answered that "it wasn't true because the Judenrat had taken their gold as payment for taking them to the Warsaw ghetto."
They were shot to death, in Siedlce Square.

The next day I went on to Siedlce alone. I took the early train which went through Minsk. The train passed Halinow where Halina Lugowska lived. I couldn't stop to look for her because Kazik, Krysia's husband, would soon come in his car to drive me to Krzesk to look for the Zbuckis.

A young couple got on at the Halinow station and I asked them if by chance they knew who Halina Lugowska was. They said, yes of course, she was a seamstress and people at the Health Center would be able to help me find her. I would have liked to come back to see her.

In Siedlce while waiting, I bought the newspaper. There was nothing interesting in it for me. Mr. and Mrs. Zbucki had died of old age. Zbucki's sister and her husband were no longer alive either but they had a daughter. Some of the neighbors promised to tell the daughter that Stella was looking for her. Krysia's husband took the same road I once took to Blazeje to the Mroz family. On the way I took some snapshots of the Marchocka homestead which I used to clean when it served as police headquarters. In Blazeje people gave me the address of the Mroz daughter's family and then we drove on to Krysia in Kornica for lunch.

We resumed our search for the families that had helped to save me. In the afternoon, we went to Siedlce to get a new passport for Krysia, whom I wanted to accompany me back home to Israel. For half an hour she was cross examined by officials in the government office. We left that office exhausted. On the way back, we passed a lake in a public garden and then

found ourselves on Berko Yosselewicz Street.

There is a monument there and a small inscription in both Polish and Yiddish stating, "this is the spot where17,000 Jews were killed." Among those 17,000 killed on the 25th of August 1942 was my mother's family and all the people of the smaller ghettos around Siedlce. But the Polish families, who for three days witnessed the murder of those 17,000 human beings, they calmly went on living their day to day lives?...

Krysia and I returned to Warsaw by train. In our compartment, some intelligent looking youngsters were talking at the top of their voices about politics saying that the opposition to the Russian government was quite useless at that moment since everyone knew quite well what the outcome would be. They felt safe. I was surprised that they were not afraid to speak openly about the possibility of insurrection against the monolithic USSR as it was then.

I arrived one hour earlier at the new station which was so big that I was afraid to lose my way. The train was full so we had to stand in the corridor. In the compartment there was a priest and some girl scouts. The girls let us have their seats but the priest never moved.

I, once again contacted Dr. Wilczur who had promised to help me collect material for my book. He had been a teacher most of his life. In

addition, I needed his help with Krysia's passport. I asked him to write a letter on her behalf to the government office. At our meeting, Dr. Wilczur mentioned that his mother had also been killed for hiding Jews. He told me that he had attended the Demianiuk trial in Jerusalem and was writing a book about it, Dr. Wilczur also introduced me to Waclaw Bielawski, an 80 year old Judge, who shared his office; an intelligent man but a little hard of hearing. He dedicated to me a book he had just finished writing **The crime committed by the Nazis to those who had helped Jews.**

Judge Bielawski showed me letters from Yad Vashem stating that the testimonies he had sent were not enough proof that Poles had helped Jews during the "Shoa" and there were dozens of such letters on his desk. He had written his book at his age, he told me, not for money but for the sake of historical truth. He had made a list of 1,040 Poles who had been killed for saving Jews. and he gave this list to Zajaczkowski who eventually had it published in Canada. The number quoted there was 3,000 Poles.

Karolewski in Canada reacted to this publication by sending him a long list of names of Poles who had killed Jews. Bielawski found, after research, that any one of the cases could not be proved. However, he never answered

Karolewski's letter so as not to spoil their relationship. He had also written a book about the clergy who had saved many Jewish lives. I invited him to Israel.

On my first visit, I had told Dr. Wilczur about the Pole who had denounced my mother to the police. He'd promised that he would immediately undertake a search for him. He informed me that the person in question had already died of an accident. Neither could he help me with Krysia's passport.

He then contacted Mr. Michael Ginsburg of "The Jewish History Institute" in Warsaw. I found the Institute near the Lenin Museum. He was very polite but extremely sceptical about the subject of my research, telling me that should my theory prove right and that for every Jew saved hundreds of Poles were involved, several million Poles would have been able to save half a million Jews, which was not the case. He spoke with bitterness. He thought that not many Poles had helped Jews. As far as world opinion on Polish help to Jews during the Nazi occupation was concerned, he was indifferent. He said he would allow me to look for and photocopy the Losice documents in the archives, excerpts of which I put at the end of this book.

On the Sabbath, I visited a synagogue in Warsaw and sat next to a woman who told me

that there was a lot of antisemitism in Poland. I invited her to eat "flaki" on Monday evening and she agreed.

On Sunday, I visited the Yiddish Theater in Warsaw. The play was Izhak Kazenelson's, **The Song of a Murdered Nation.** In the last part of the play there is a scene where the Nazis enter a synagogue in Lublin. I was greatly impressed and the ticket was so inexpensive. My synagogue acquaintance met as planned. I wanted her to explain to me what she meant by antisemitism and she told me that her daughter had married a Pole and the family asked her to agree not to be buried in a Jewish cemetery. I told her that I was in a hurry because I was leaving soon and I was going to do some shopping. We parted but not before she told me, surprisingly enough, that she knew Mrs. Dobrucka.

I had promised to bring linen table clothes back from Poland to an old age home in Naharia, but the ones I saw in a shop were for decoration only. So I bought a few dolls instead.

Chapter 18

On the 23rd of September Krysia, by sheer miracle, was given a passport. Next day I proceeded to Czestochowa. I wanted to spend the Jewish New year with the Feige family but found no one at home. Josef Feige had died two months before. He and his wife and young sons used to visit me at the monastery and when I suggested prayer to him, he told me there was no need for that since in his heart he was praying all day long. He wanted very much to convert, he said, but how could he be a good Christian, he asked, if he entered a church against the expressed wish of his wife? I respected and loved them very much.

I went on to Cracow to see my beloved Sr. Roza with whom I so wanted to go to India. Although she was not well, she showed me warm hospitality and understanding in that enormous, dilapidated 100 year old monastery. From there I took the train early in the morning to the suburb of Biezanow near Cracow, to visit Mrs. Bochniewicz, whom I had helped cure of her morphine addiction. I found only her husband there. He told me that during the war, as a volunteer conductor in the railways, he had saved many people's lives. He had sent one Jewish looking woman to Vienna and another family he managed to send to

Switzerland. The Germans never noticed. He never kept the letters of thanks they wrote to him. He was old and poor. I couldn't wait for his wife to come back home because I wanted to get to Auschwitz.

Transportation to Auschwitz is bad and I had to wait for an hour at Chrzanow. I waited in the railway station building. I sat down next to a woman who told me a story about the "kosher" butcher who lived in her town of Auschwitz. He had left his seven year old son with her sister during the war. This boy badly missed his parents. He insisted on going to them. It was impossible to explain to him why he couldn't possibly go and join them. He was so insistent, her sister and her husband showed him the road to the camp and he disappeared forever. After the Holocaust his parents came back looking for their child. They believed the story and kept up a correspondence with the family from Israel for some time. And now this woman wanted me look up the family in Israel.

Out of the window of the morning train to Auschwitz, I saw the freight cars full of coal sprinkled with lime. I remembered the truck loads of deportees to the death camps. The wheels turning on the tracks sounded ominous.

We passed through Birkenau. I got off at the Auschwitz railroad station. A long avenue lead to the concentration camp. Near one of the

watch towers a slightly bigger building than the rest turned out to be the Carmelite monastery at Auschwitz. Though they renovated the living quarters, one could still make out the previous function of the building: storing Cyclon B gas balloons. There was a nice little garden in front of the building. I was invited by the Prioress Helena into the guest room, a friendly parlor newly appointed in gleaming wood. She received me with fruit and sandwiches, all of the ingredients home grown. She was very happy to see me again after eighteen years of separation. I thought how bizarre this all is.

When I entered the Order at Poznan, she was the one who had loved me best. She told me later that she used to envy her neighbors who hid Jews during the Holocaust and would have liked to have Jewish children seek shelter with her family. When I arrived in the Poznan monastery, she was happy to find out that I was Jewish. She had great sympathy for Fr. Daniel who used to write to both of us in the same letter. Her sister-in-law was Jewish and both of us used to pray in Hebrew, reading Fr. Daniel's phonetic transliteration. Therefore, I thought that of all people, Sr. Helena was most suitable to head a monastery at Auschwitz. However, in my heart, I was always against a Carmelite monastery at Auschwitz. I told her so. She said that only one of her nuns had left her because

she could not stand the sight of the watch towers in front of her window.

I had to see the museum so I promised to come back to her. The film I saw there was very impressive however the buildings itself were much too clean and decorated by various nations. I felt that by this time, every country had made a "sanatorium" out of its slaughter house. It no longer expressed the horrendous suffering of those camp inmates; in one of the cells some of the miserable utensils the camp mates used in every day life could yet be seen.

The custodian told me that after each German group of visitors, there were perceptibly fewer utensils left. They were trying to diminish the terrible impression left by Auschwitz. But the worn out steps to the crematorium speak their own language.

Visitors usually do not enter the archives but I was allowed to enter. The custodian understood my aim and promised to send Prioress Helena a list of Poles who had been imprisoned in Auschwitz because they had tried to save Jews. I left a gift of five tiny Pentateuch scrolls with a Mezuzah scroll for Helena and went on to Cracow.

I made Helena promise me to fix a "mezuzah," to the entrance of the monastery in order to make the place acceptable to Jewish visitors. She said that when they stopped

persecuting her, she would. Next morning I once again went to "The Institute of Jewish History" in Warsaw to search the Losice documents in the archives which I did. I found the correspondence between the Joint Committee of Warsaw and the American Joint Committee, . I received xerox of these letters. The people in the office looked at me strangely, as if to ask, what does she want with these old papers?

Shops in Warsaw were empty but I managed to buy a duck for our farewell party. Prioress Helena at Auschwitz had insisted I take the fruit and tomatoes back to Warsaw to Theresa who refused to eat them saying that they had been grown in blood.

I also bought a thermos for myself so as not to be thirsty again on the way back through Bucharest as I had been coming through.

I went up to Theresa 's flat. There I found Helena Gruszka-Kazmierczak. She had been waiting downstairs for over an hour and a half in order to say goodbye to me. I was very happy to see her, because she always reminded me of my mother. Halina Lugowska was there too. She said, "My little Jewess. How much I have thought about you all these long years." She said she would like to visit me in Israel and handed me a copy of a letter she had written to a Mr. Dziedzic where she mentioned me by the name I then used Wanda, the name of my

beloved History teacher.

My Wanda too came to see me off, more farewells and emotion. Other friends were there too. They had all come to say goodbye to a Jewess who had been saved by them and their families forty years ago. I was astounded by this spontaneous meeting. Late at night we said good night and in the morning Yola's husband came to drive me to the airport. On the airplane I read the letter Halina Lugowska handed me.

After the capitulation of Warsaw in 1939, she wrote, my husband, Mikolaj Zygmunt Lugowski, returned home after the battle to defend Warsaw. Before the war he worked in a gas mask factory and now it was closed. One rich German owned it. We were living in the village of Pruszkow near Warsaw. Our daughters were 3 and 2 years old. It was difficult to find milk and potatoes because the whole region near Warsaw had been destroyed by German attacks on the town. Piotr Domanski from Choja came to Pruszkow to take us to Choja to my husband's parents, it was a great joy to be among family and friends.

To make a little money, I took butter and cheese to Warsaw and I sold the produce to Jewish canteens. It was very difficult to travel because there was no room in the trains as many peasants from the villages came to sell food in Warsaw. I had to go home on foot from Siedlce, a distance of thirteen kilometers and only the thought of my children gave me strength. My husband and his brother worked hard in the building trade. Their salary was very low because so many people were being deported from the West of Poland, the Germans deported whole families to Siedlce and from there to Treblinka.

A year later my son was born. It finished my business. Everyone received a ration of 10 kilograms of flour and a little beetroot. My friend Helena Domanska was very good and always gave me milk for the child. It was a nightmare. I traveled around by bicycle. The Germans began to be afraid to enter the villages. In 1944 the mother of my friend, Zalewska came and asked me to take in a poor orphan whom she brought along with her. "She knits very well," she said .Bochenski brought this girl with him from uncle Skorupka in Stok Lacki. I myself was an orphan brought up by strangers and so we made room for her in the kitchen beside the three children. She said her name was Wanda and asked me to call her by that name. She knitted wonderfully and we got along well. When she finished her work I took her to Zdanowski, who lived alone with a housekeeper with whom I went to school. Afterwards I lost contact with Wanda. I don't know how she managed to save her life. Forty years later, she found me again.

I came back to Haifa. It was as though I had never been away. I felt that this journey had greatly enriched me. On holocaust Day I went to the ceremony of the ghetto fighters in kibbutz Lohamei ha-Ghetaot, "The Kibbutz of the Freedom Fighters of the Ghetto." There I met Hela Rufeisen, a former ghetto guard and her husband, Fr. Daniel's brother. The couple were both unsung heroes who had struggled against the Nazi regime. She had been active in the underground in Cracow. In Israel, she wrote her memoirs, **The Separation from Mila Street 18**. I told them that I had spent a month in

Poland and had not encountered any antisemitism. Hela told me a different story. She was in Poland when I was and on a visit to Cracow with a group of people, she met a former neighbor who expressed amazement at the fact that so many Jews had been left alive. The kibbutz ceremony was very impressive.

Since postal service did not always work properly in Poland, all my guest arrived in Israel at the same time. Among them were three members of the Mroz family, Jadzia Radzikowski's granddaughter, Krysia, Theresa and Kalina, her daughter and her niece, Wojtek, and Czarek and his grandmother Helena Gruszka and finally Yola came too. We were really a bit crowded.

I was in a great hurry to show them all the places of interest. Fr. Daniel took us to see Tiberias. We went to pray with the Little Sisters of Tiberias and everyone was very happy to have been able to visit all the holy places in Jerusalem and Galilee.

I escorted Mrs. Helena Gruszka Kazmierczak and her grandson back to Ben Gurion airfield and I found it difficult to say goodbye to her, rather like saying goodbye to my own mother.

And today on the eighth of February 1989, as I write these lines, my eyes fill with tears of joy. I am in Zion, in the Holy Land. I am happy. I never left the church though I am not as

happy in it, knowing the part the church played in the Holocaust, as I was before. But today we are free to criticize the church and ask for change. Yet, in spite of my loving criticism, I still feel the great happiness that awaits all mankind, when we shall all know God.

THE END

Reminants of the family

Aunt Sala

Her son Alexander

My translation, from the Polish, of correspondence between the Judenrat (the Jewish ghetto "self" - Government required by the Nazis) in Losice and the agency of the American Joint committee in Warsaw, which I Xeroxed in the Institute of Jewish History, Warsaw, 1987.

Losice, February 3, 1940

We, the undersigned, protest against the Joint Committee in Losice. From the beginning of this committee's activities it never fulfilled its commitments, it worked only for its own benefit.

This committee left us in a hopeless situation and caused many more deaths from cold and hunger, without any medical immediate help. All our requests to the members of the committee have been in vain.

When several refugees asked the committee for an allotment of a 1/2 kg bread daily because their children were dying of hunger, they were answered by curses and threats.

In the month of January, we received one kilogram of bread for every grown up. In the whole of February we received 42 grams, while the five percent received nothing at all, for lack of budget. This month we received 11 grams daily.

There is a kitchen in a private room where a few people receive lunch made of boiling water and some hard potatoes and no fat at all, which causes unrest and fighting. The sum of 5,000 zloty sent for winter help, disappeared within three days. Three of the best winter coats were sold for 1,500 zloty (immediately.) The other items are being worn by members of the committee's families.

We wanted to create a controlling board and suggested several names for it. It is essential to stop the present committee's activities and create a new one.

I thereby state that: a) in May there was no activity of the Joint Committee b) on June a sum of 800 zloty was collected and only once a week was there a distribution of bread for the Sabbath; c) the number of people who receive bread ration is about 1,300 of which some 900 are refugees from other cities d) no list was received of Mazzoth distribution or financial aid.

signed the head of committee
Abraham Weuman

From the American Joint, Warsaw
Warsaw 22.9.1940
To the Losice Committee:

We received your letter of the 15.9.40. From your protocol we see that your activities were restricted to the distribution of bread. The bread you received from the local municipality, about 2,5 kg per person and month.

The local population contributed nothing to help. Under these circumstances we cannot expect anything positive from your activity.

Your letter also emphasizes the need for help from Joint.

In order to prevent misunderstandings we want to make it quite clear that our subvention has to be limited and that first and foremost one has to rely on local help.

We therefore seriously advise you to reorganize your work and also organize a fund raising meeting, so as not to rely on our subvention only.

Yours faithfully,
The American Joint

Losice 21.9.40
To the Joint Committee

I settled in Losice two months ago and worked with the Joint Committee. I give medical help to refugees and the needy. About five hundred people here are entitled to medical help.
Hygienic and food conditions are awful and are becoming worse with approaching winter. Within its restricted limits the committee for refugees does everything in its power to help. The sick receive free treatment, the seriously sick are being visited at homes. Medication is being distributed through T.O.Z. at minimum cost. Unfortunately all this is not enough and should you stop your help it would endanger many families' lives.

There is a plan for a kitchen distributing meals and there will be a distribution of shoes and clothing.
There is a danger of epidemics amongst refugees, also of T.B. One must consider that in the bigger rooms there are more than 10 people now, and the houses are wooden and rotten, with cockroaches and insects everywhere. People are dressed in rags, dirty and need a place to wash and disinfect. There are no words to describe this terrible situation, and the urgent need of help.
In the name of all these miserable and sick people, I ask the Joint Committee for immediate help and quote the proverb, that whoever gives quickly, gives as good as double.

Sincerely yours,
Dr. Zaid

To Dr Zaid:

Answering your letter of the 21st last month, we have to conclude that the inhabitants of Losice do not add to our relief funds. Our subventions are limited and given first of all to the most active communities. We wrote the committee of Losice on the 22nd last month, and did not receive a reply.

We are awaiting a flour transport, and shall not omit Losice when distributing it. We don't have shoes and clothing at the moment. Concerning sanitary and medical activities, your committee must contact T.O.Z. directly (Warsaw Zlota str 32)

Yours sincerely,
Joint Committee

Losice 10.10.40

Last month we sent a delegate, Mr. Friedman Moshko to the Joint Committee to obtain help for the Losice population who are in a pitiful state, with no means whatever to support them. We were promised flour, and although this is very little compared to our needs, we were waiting for it impatiently, that flour never arrived. Since holidays are approaching soon and the population cannot expect any help from any other quarter, we beg you to send us the flour you promised us. We also beg you to send some money, because the situation is very bad.

Hoping that our urgent appeal will result in some help,

I am yours sincerely,
Aharon Wyman

My rescuers:

Ks. Czeslaw Chojecki and his sister Irena
Chojecka-Rzazewska
Gawinkowska Irena
Gawinkowska Stanislawa
Gawinkowski Franciskus and his wife
Rozalia Wielgorska-Gawinkowska
Gorzala Czeslaw and his wife Maria
Gorzala Leokadia, his sister
* Gruszka Franciscus
* Gruszka-Kazmierczak Helena and her husband
Izdebski (I can't find his address)
Jastrzebski Andrzej
* Kalicki Aniela and Hieronim
Kalicka-Folwarska Emma
Kalicka-Borkowska Kasylda
Kalicki Janusz and his wife
Miodunska Irena
* Lugowska Halina and Zygmunt
* Mroz Stanislaw and his wife
Pazyszek - policeman and his wife
* Piechowocz Lucyna and Marian
Mrs. Piotrowska
* Piotrowska Wladyslawa and her husband
Piotrowska Irena
Piotrowski Mieczyslaw, their children
* Radzikowski Ana and Waclaw
* Radzikowska-Jezierska Waclawa
Brother of Anna - Kazimerz Glecki and his

wife Anna
* Romaniuk Irena and Ezechiel
Her sisters Haraszkiewicz
* Ulasiuk and his wife
Ks. Wachulak Zygmunt and his sister Irena
Wnetrzak Agnieszka and Franciskus
Wroczynski Edward and his wife
Zalewski Julian and is wife Wiktoria
* Zbucka Josepha and her husband
* Zdanowski andrzej and his wife
Zdanowski Mieczyslaw and Jan
Zdzibichowska and her husband

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* Received the title of "Prightour among the Nations".

May, 1993

The University of Connecticut

Dear Ms. Tzur Kochawa (Stella)

I have read your memoirs with great interest. It is an important addition to the Holocaust literature...

(-) Nechama Tec

From "Israel Nachrichten", Friday 7, May 1993

Stella saw in the Ghetto a man dying near the steps of a coffee-house. He freezes.
She met many people suffering. Also from politic of Judenrath, in the Losice ghetto. She translated their letter from 3.11.1940.
The poor don't receive the help that was sent to them.
The same is also today. Children are dying while waiting...

But there were also righteous... memories of Stella is a monument for them: the light in the hopeless time.

(-) Heinz Schewe