

Shlajme

By Shlomo Graber

From Hungary to Israel through Auschwitz-Birkenau, Fünfteichen and Görlitz.
A Jewish family history from 1859 through 2001

Translated by Marcel Andai

Shlomo Graber foreword

As though it did not happen until yesterday

Menachem Michelson of the Hebrew daily newspaper *Yedioth Aharonot* interviewed me in June 1983 on my times in the concentration camps. The journalist asked me in the course of the interview, why hadn't I written down my experiences during the Shoah. He believed it would be important to report them, before the memories fade.

I accepted this challenge. I decided, to tell my life's story, starting with my childhood in a small Jewish town. But I did not succeed in more or less completely reconstructing my family history up to the start of the Holocaust until years and years of painstaking research. Unfortunately only a very few of my relatives had survived the Shoah.

On my father's side, two members out of a family of 34 survived, my father and I,
On my mother's side, out of the 55 members of the family Silber 10 survived.

It is not easy to trace back 60 years. This is especially true if there are neither documents nor eyewitnesses. But something like a miracle happened. The more I strained my memory, the more details of events and occurrences came to my mind, as though they happened only yesterday.

My late mother told me some of the things I recalled here. Others I heard from my Uncle Zwi, one of my mother's brothers who immigrated to Israel in the thirties and took with him some documents and family photos. I found at his place some letters my mother wrote to him at the beginning of the Holocaust, and some pictures representing her and my brothers and sister.

I dedicate my memoirs to my children:

Rami, Hanan and Judit; my grandchildren: Roy, Liran, Idan, Nir, Michal and Noah;

And my partner in life Myrtha. Without her encouragement these memoirs would not have been completed.

Basel, November 2001

Majdan

The small town of Majdan is located approximately 50 miles south east from Ushorod (Ungvár) in the Ukraine, thus on the other side of East Slovakian border of today, in the district of Máramaros of these days. Mount Werchobina is rising 4200 feet high on the one side of the town and the stream Rifinka is flowing at the other side of it. The appearance and the characteristics of this little town is very similar to the small places described by the Jewish writer Scholem Alejchem **1)** in his books.

Unfortunately, I cannot describe Majdan from my own view. My family had left it already when I was five years old. As far as I know, 73 Jews lived in Majdan in the year 1830. These Jews founded the Jewish Congregation and in the following years they constructed there the first synagogue as well. Previously to that they performed their prayers in a simple hut. The census of 1941 shows that at that time 830 Jews lived in and around Majdan.

Shortly before that Hungarian troupes occupied Karpatho-Russia with German support. The Hungarians even surpassed their German partners by deporting in 1941 most Jews to the Polish city of Kamenetz-Podolszki **2)** where most of them perished.

The local language was Ukrainian. The Jews conversed between themselves in Czech or Yiddish. Many non-Jews understood Yiddish.

The district had a varied history. Prior to First World War, it belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Following the Peace Treaty of Trianon, it was transferred to Czechoslovakia **3)**. In 1939 it was occupied by Hungary and after the II. World War it was attached to the Soviet Union. Since the decay of the Soviet Union it belongs the area belongs to the Ukraine.

I was born in the little township of Majdan on July 13, 1926. I received the name Shlomo in memory of my great-grandfather, Shlomo Silber

1) Schalom Rebbinowitz (1859 Perejaslav-Chmenitzkij/Ukraine – 1916 New York)

Classic of Jewish literature

2) City is the Ukraine (southwest from Winniza) scene of mass-executions; the victims were mainly Hungarian Jews

3) June 4, 1920

Grandfather Itzhak Silber (Reb Itze)

My grandfather on my mother's side Reb Itzhak Silber was better known by his pet name "Reb Itze". He was born in 1859 in Berzan (Galizia, Poland). Orphaned at the age of eight, he grew up under the care of the Rabbi of Berzan. In the course of the time he succeeded in securing the benevolence of the Rabbi's supporters, as he devoted himself to the intensive study of the Talmud. In addition, he studied the elegance of the holy language. Although his mother-tongue was Yiddish, he conducted his correspondence mainly in Hebrew. As a youth, he slept on a bench and got up quite early to take part in the lessons given by the Rabbi. Already as a young man he was honored and respected because of his erudition and learning. In worldly subjects my grandfather was a self-thought person and proved his increasing inclination to the art of foreign languages.

He married Sara Leah, daughter of Abraham-Josef Steinmetz from the small town of Dibowa (in the district of Majdan). They had nine children:

Alter, Shlomo, Jakob, Ezra, Hana, Malka, Zwi-Hershel, Baruch and Rivka.

The sons soon left the house of the parents in order to take up study in a Jeshiva. IN addition to the studies of Talmud, they also obtained worldly educational qualifications and knowledge of foreign languages.

My grandfather was an extremely handsome man, I remember him when he was sixty. With his portly appearance he fascinated everybody, including the non-Jewish neighbors. His long, well cared-for white beard gave his appearance especial dignity. His sparkling blue eyes radiated benevolence and kindness. He was well respected and popular in the neighboring small townships. Grandfather wore the attire of the Chassids **4**). He had a broad-rimmed black velvet hat, with the seam of his small black cap just protruding from below his hat, a black caftan with the small tallith **5**) below it, and trousers stuck into white socks. He always took care of his clean appearance.

When in the Twenties the Rabbi of Majdan passed away, the congregation did not look elsewhere for a replacement. They did not need one; "Reb" **6**) Itze fulfilled all the requirements. He also acted as a (kosher) butcher, sanitary meat inspector and mohel, a man qualified to conduct circumcisions for Majdan and the district.

4) The "Devout", a member of the Chassidim, a religious movement founded by Israel ben Elieser, the Ba'al Shem Tow (approx. 1700 to 1760 in today's South West Ukraine)

5) a white shawl with fringed corners worn under the outer garment

6) "Sir"; Jewish form of address applied to men

If he was asked to perform a kosher butchering in a village in the district, he usually rode there on horseback. He stuck the knife box into the leg of his boot. On cold winter days he wore a fur coat and a fur hat, like the local peasants.

Grandfather had the reputation to be a versatile person with a multitude of functions. For example, he mixed herbal medications from natural ingredients and had prepared a powder to stop bleeding. He used this powder when he performed circumcisions as a mohel. During the First World War, the same powder came to good use in the treatment of the wounded. Whenever he passed the streets of the town, he was greeted by Jews and non-Jews alike, like a “holy man”.

Among East-European Jews it was customary not to call immediately a doctor to a sick child. First, the opinion of a highly respected man – a Rabbi, a person well-versed in the Thora, or the kosher butcher was asked, in order that he should exorcise the possible effects of a curse, the malicious glance. Mostly my grandfather was called. He sat down next to the sick child, and threw glowing coals into a glass of water. If the coals rose to the top, then this indicated that the child was not suffering from the effects of malevolence. But it was bad news if the coals sank to the bottom. People tried to protect their children against the malicious glance. At every expression of praise or compliment, they hastened to add a formula of speech “without malevolence”. (“Unberufen”.)

Grandfather had a handbag, similar to the one doctors take with them to house visits. The bag contained a set of cupping glasses and other utensils. He placed the cupping glasses on the back of the patients suffering from bad colds or backache. The wise comments among the Jews went somehow as follows: “S’ wet helfn wie Toiten Bankes” (It will help like cupping glasses for a dead man) however, the Goyim considered him as a wonder healer who was the only one who was able to help the sick.

One day, a peasant turned up at my grandfather’s house, accompanied by his daughter. The young girl sobbed and groaned with pain, she was hardly able to stand on her legs. The peasant asked my grandfather for his help. My grandfather referred them to town’s doctor. But the peasant insisted upon my grandfather, He should treat his daughter. As my grandfather realized that he cannot simply get rid of them, he asked the girl to lay down on the wooden bench. He immediately saw that the girl was suffering from a dislocated foot. He rotated her foot left and right, constantly probing. “Does it hurt?” Does it hurt?” He got hold of the aching foot , rotated it and heard it to crack. The girl stopped crying. My grandfather suggested to her to rest for a week and promised her she’ll soon get better. The peasant

wanted to pay for the treatment but my grandfather refused to accept anything. Next day, the peasant's wife turned up with a basket full of foodstuffs that she put down in front of my grandfather's door as she knew it very well that he would not accept it anyway.

My grandfather was also a talented artist who could draw very well. One of his many works was a map, showing the occupation of the Holy Land by Joshua, drawn on a piece of parchment in 1883, when he was 24. On one side of the map he described the 108 locations from the Desert Zin to Jafo. On the other side of the map he represented the area of settlement of every biblical tribe with a different color. He made up the dyes himself from natural ingredients.

At the time when he still visited the Jeshiva, he had to get up very early to benefit from the Rabbi's words. As he did not possess an alarm clock at that time, he decided to make one for himself. He carved the components of the clock out of wood, inserted an alarm mechanism and attached to ties to it. One of them was tied to a clock's weight, the other to his own wrist. The weight dropped at the preset time and the tape pulled his wrist, so he knew it was time to get up.

He visited the Jeshiva when he was 15. The Head Teacher recognized his abilities. One day he told him he wanted to show him something. He conducted him to his room and pointed out to him one single grain of wheat with tiny letters written on it. The Head told him a story. A Jewish traveler came to the Jeshiva from a faraway country and instead of a "Kwittel" (a slip of paper) he handed over this piece of wheat. (It is to be known that a Jew on visiting a Rabbi, brings along a slip of paper with his request and hands it over accompanied by a small donation .)

The Rasbbi asked my grandfather: " Itzele, can you too make such a work of wonder?" Itzele remained silent but one week later he handed over to the Rabbi another grain of wheat with even smaller letters written on it.

Many years passed since the story with the grain of wheat. My grandfather became the kosher butcher of Majdan. On reading a religious book, he came up an intriguing question. Is it allowed to keep in the house a grain of wheat as a decoration during the Pessach-week? True enough, the wheat corn was not for food, nevertheless... Then he suddenly remembered the corn of when of his youth and decided to make a similar corn. He wrote on it the Hebrew names of each day of the week, the 12 tribes, the three forefathers and his signature.

Altogether 114 letters. He kept this piece of miniature work in a glass display cabinet.

Majdan was occupied by Russian troops during World War I. The soldiers searched for food in every cottage. Had they found anything, they confiscated the lot. They also called at my

grandfather's house. The officer leading the search party discovered a trap door in the floor and asked my grandfather what was hidden behind it. "Old books", answered my grandfather. The officer commanded his men to evacuate the hiding-place. In doing so, he discovered the glass cabinet with the miraculous corn of wheat. The officer immediately realized what kind of treasure he discovered. He took away the cabinet with him and remarked: "This will be passed on to the Museum in Kiev!" ⁹⁾ To be sure, Kiev was the capital of the Ukraine.

His son Shlomo served in the Austro-Hungarian Army, of His Majesty's the Emperor's Franz Joseph ¹⁰⁾ during World War I. He fought in the front lines and received the appropriate military medal. Having not heard anything from him for a long time, the family was very concerned lest he became a prisoner of war. At long last a telegram arrived from him telling the family that he received a short absence of leave but not allowed to come to Majdan as the front lines moved very close to the little town. At any rate, he was allowed to travel to the Hungarian town of Sátoraljauhely where his brother Alter lived.

My grandfather decided to travel to Sátoraljauhely as well, in order to see his son.

Grandmother said she wanted to come too. After all, she was also entitled to see her son. But Grandfather did not want to take her along. In that year the winter was exceptionally severe, heavy falling snow, snowstorms were impairing visibility. In addition, their little daughter Rivkale was still breast-fed, so she would have been taken with them as well and the next railway station was 30 miles away from Majdan.

9) In the meantime, a splendid, spectacular Museum had been opened in Kiev in the honor of the "Great War to protect our Mother Country" (the Second World War).

10) 1830 through 1916 (1848/ 1967)

But all the efforts to persuade her came to nothing: my Grandmother and Rivka accompanied Granddad on his travel to Sátoraljauhely. The only possible means of transportation was a horse-drawn sleigh. Grandfather hired a two-horse one. Bricks heated up in the fire were placed on the floor well wrapped up, to keep the passengers warm.

They arrived to the Railway Station Voloz by the evening. It turned out that there was no place for them in the train as all seats were taken. With the aid of some acquaintances, which they met at the railway station, they obtained seats in the I. class compartment. The Jews belonging to the passengers of this carriage got together to say their evening prayer. My Grandmother used her chance to breast-feed Rivka. My Grandfather went to the toilet before the prayers, and by opening the toilet door he heard a loud whistle. In the next moment, the train collided with the one coming the opposite direction. Grandfather was thrown out and hurt his leg. The cries of the injured people were terrible. Grandfather crept along among the people expelled from the train by the force of the collision. He discovered Grandmother's robes but when he saw her body, he realized the full extent of the dreadful tragedy. A little farther alongside, he heard a little baby crying. He crept along in the correct direction and found his daughter Rivkale. As she was well wrapped up, she survived the fall.

The news of the tragedy soon reached the two sons Shlomo and Alter. They arrived soon to the scene. They wanted to accompany Grandfather to the Hospital but he declined to go. He was afraid that he'd be forced to desecrate the Sabbath and/or to eat unclean, not kosher food. In addition, he wanted to take part in his wife's funeral.

Observant Jews dislike to see a respectable man, like Reb Itze live without a woman for a long time. After three years of being a widower, he was suggested to remarry and to take Haja-Etja Prisant, born Eisner, a war widow and a mother of six children as his wedded wife. Shortly before this marriage, Grandfather gathered around himself all his family and declared that he'll now remarry and asked his children to accept his new wife and to call her "Mime" (Aunt).

Grandfather Itze dressed himself in a festive attire on the day of his wedding, He put on his festive fur cap, his "Streimel" and traveled to the little town of Lipshina in order to go under the wedding canopy i.e. baldachin. He returned home after the wedding with his new wife and her smallest son Mendele. The rest of her sons visited already the Jeshiva and her only daughter lived with her aunt. Mime's six kiddies immigrated in the Thirties together with my Uncle Zwi to Palestine and opened a prosperous joinery that became later the well-known factory of cabinet-makers, "Prima". Grandfather's marriage was blessed with three more

children; Mottele, Sassil and Dresel. Everyone loved Mime, like a real mother. My own mother was in close contact to her, until the start of Shoah.

I was brought up at the house of my Grandfather until my age of five. I can still recall some of the events that occurred. I had great respect for him and I was full of joy when I heard that Grandfather shall visit us in Nyirbátor and that I can see him after such a long time.

Grandfather had first visited his son Shlomo in Debrecen and then came to spend the Sabbath with us. My mother was livid with excitement because of the expected visit, she polished the house until everything sparkled and prepared Grandfather's favorite meals. On Friday, we went to the railway station to pick up the guest. My mother was moved to tears when Grandfather exited the train. We got his luggage and rode in a horse-drawn carriage home. After a short rest, I went with my Grandfather to the Mikve **11)**. Having arrived to the Synagogue to be present at the Divine Service, my Grandfather's old friend Rabbi Naftole said a few hearty welcoming words to him and offered him a place of honor,. During the traditional third Sabbath meal at the end of Sabbath he was honored by Rabbi Naftole's request to talk about the Weekly Section. **12)**

Short time after my Grandfather's return to Majdan, I found my mother in tears upon my return from the Cheder, the Jewish elementary school. First, I could not understand what was the matter with her, why was she so upset, until she told me that my Grandfather died.

My Grandfather died at the age of 74 years. Blessed be his memory.

11) Ritual bath to submerge

12) Section from the Five Books of Moses to be read on that certain day

Malka is getting married

Malka, my mother's pretty little sister was to marry her choice, Meir Aaron Teichmann from the small town of Volova near Majdan. The wedding took place in the groom's place of residence in the cold, snowy time of the year. I was five years old at that time and remember quite well the wedding and especially the cold weather of those days. The organizers were looking for a festive hall that allowed for the ritual separation of both sexes but still allowed the reception of all the wedding guests. They solved the problem by erecting a tent for the women next to the community rooms.

Almost every member of the Majdan Hebrew Congregation traveled to the wedding. It was obvious that every one wanted to take part in the celebration of Reb Itze's daughter's wedding. Many people turned up from the small town of Volova as well. The festivities lasted for seven days, in accordance with the seven blessings. My mother helped a great deal in the organization of the catering and I kept her place free for her i.e. unoccupied. There were not enough chairs and I fought for her like a lion. I clang to her chair like to the protrusions of the Temple's Altar and refused to let it go even when someone wanted to remove it by force. We all traveled to Hungary after the wedding, to the small town of Nyirbátor, where my father's family had lived.

Malka gave birth to five children. Unfortunately they could enjoy their good luck only for ten years. The family was deported to Poland in 1941. With the exception of two children, who were able to escape, the entire family was murdered. Jossele was taken up by our family and his sister by a family in the little town of Satmar. **13)** But their life was short too. They ended up in Auschwitz some years later from which there was no return for them.

Malka's wedding was a turning point in my life. I did not know anything about my father's existence up to these celebrations. At this point in time, he turned up with my mother's brothers, my uncles Alter and Shlomo. My two uncles wanted to use the occasion and to make peace between my parents. They invited him to the wedding for this reason. They told him that he had a son! It was there and then that I first saw my father. As I heard from my Uncle Zwi much later, my parents had separated shortly after their wedding. Following their separation, my mother returned to her paternal home and thus I was born in Majdan. I couldn't stop thinking about this story, but whenever I tried to question my father about it, he evaded the matter so I could not get anything out of him.

But when I visited my father in his home at Bne Brak **14)** approximately two years before his death and he was on his own, I used the opportunity

and confronted him with the request to tell me more about my mother. How did it happen that we only met each other when I was five? My father told me that they had a fight shortly after their wedding and my mother decided to return to her father's place. My father had no idea that my mother expected a child. This remained a secret later on as well as my mother's family never told him about me. As a result, I grew up at my Grandfather's house that was to me like a father.

13) Satu Mare/Rumania, in the North of Transylvania, southeast from Ushgorod

14) Large city near Tel Aviv, founded by Polish Chassidim in 1924, the home town of religious Jews

The small town of Nyirbátor

The small town of Nyirbátor is located in the North East of Hungary, approx. 20 miles distance from the Rumanian border. The town's name is a combination of two elements. "Nyirfa" means "birch", a tree most common in that district and "Bátor" stands for Stephen Bathory, the Fourth, a warrior who fought the Turks and became in 1575 the King of Poland and the Prince of Transsylvania. Bathory did a great deal for the development of the little town. He supported the development of the Protestant Church in the town and had erected a wooden belltower next to that church, a scheduled property to this very day.

The first Jewish congregation was founded by Simon Mandel, the offspring of a noble Jewish family in 1816. The Mandels applied strict standards to the economic development of the town and the entire district by founding their first industrial enterprise in Nyirbátor called "Bóni". These works bought the produce of the local peasants and produced bread, spirits, tobacco goods and other articles.

The Jewish congregation grew fast and gained much influence upon the economic life of Nyirbátor. Approx. 40 per cent of the inhabitants were Jewish before the Holocaust. The relationship between the non-Jews and the Jews were passable. At first the Jewish-Orthodox Congregation came into being that became dominant. Liberal Jews founded later on the so-called "Status Quo Congregation". Both Synagogues were located next to each other and had a common fence between them and that was about the only thing common between the two congregations.

In the ritual house of slaughter only poultry was butchered, no ox. **15)**

The Orthodox Congregation possessed all necessary institutions. Rabbinat, Talmud-Thora School, Jewish School, Ritual Baths, Kosher Slaughterhouse and Funeral Institution (Chevra Kadisha). In addition several circles of study and work functioned within the congregation, for example the one of Charity, mutual aid and financial management. The Board of the Congregation consisted of the President, the Cashier, the Bookkeeper and the Auditor.

15) According to the ritual laws of Kashruth

The Board was elected by the Congregation every few years. The Congregation occupied a number of paid employees. Next to the Rabbi these were especially the teachers, (Melamed) but also the kosher butcher, the synagogue servant (Shames), the Bath Supervisor and of course the “Sabbath Goy” **16)**

The entire organization of the congregation, all localities such as the Synagogue, The Talmun-Thora School (Cheder) the “Stiebel” (a small room to pray) and the Jewish School were located altogether in the same street in the city center. The Rabbinat, Slaughter House, the Ritual Bath (Mikwe) and the dwelling place of the synagogue servant (Shames) were all located in the courtyard of the Synagogue.

In addition to the two Synagogues there was thus another room, the aforementioned “Stiebel”, also called “Klaus” a small room where mainly Jews from Satmar and Chassids from Belz (Poland) said their prayers in private.

The Status-Quo Congregation had its own dignitaries; a Rabbi, a kosher butcher and a servant (a Shames).

First, I suffered from resettlement difficulties after our move to Nyirbátor. I was unable to speak Hungarian and even the local Yiddish sounded strange to me, as it was different to the Yiddish dialect spoken in Majdan. Our first dwelling place was rented from an assimilated Jewish family called Fon, who also possessed a printing place. The Fons lived at the entrance of the yard. Next to their place four rented out properties followed for four other Jewish families, similar to railway carriages. We were the last in the row. Our neighbors were the families Kraus, Ellenbogen and Reich.

Our next door neighbors were the Reichs. They had a very pretty daughter called Leah. Later on I heard it that my father and Leah had something to do with each other. She traveled with him to Budapest to avoid the gossip. But the news spread. It became known in Nyirbátor that a boy was born to Leah. My classmates pulled my leg at the Cheder and said I had now a bastard brother. The story went round the town like wildfire. The main victim of the story was of course my mother. She locked herself in and wept bitterly. Loud cries and the sound of arguments accompanied by my mother's sobbing were heard from their bedroom, when my mother demanded an explanation from my father. Finally, we moved out from the first flat in order to avoid the Reich's. I was not allowed to talk to them. As a child I did not understand why. I loved Leah's mother like my own Granny.

Leah stayed in Budapest. I met her after our return from the concentration camps to Nyirbátor. She too went through Auschwitz; she survived and returned to Nyirbátor in the hope to find surviving members of her family. She was just as beautiful as in her youth. Leah

married an Orthodox Jew and immigrated to the States. Later on, when I discussed with my father the separation from my mother, I also asked him to tell me more about this Leah-story. Much against his will he admitted that Leah had a son. But the son was not his but that of Laci Fon, the printing press owner's son where we first lived. Our new flat was in the neighborhood of my grandfather's house. We lived in the property of a peasant called Hatházi, first in a small flat in the courtyard next to the sheep's pen and the cows' byre, with an external earth lavatory. The flat had two rooms and there were five of us. My brother and I slept in one bed in the kitchen. A baby's cot was put into the parent's bedroom. The kitchen's wall had no tiles. Before the Sabbath with smoothed the floor with clay. We had no electric current. A paraffin lamp was hanging down from the ceiling, for lighting. The kitchen stove was wood-fired and served as heating and cooking. Our firewood we stored in the shed which we also used as a tent. Prior to the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkoth) we removed the bricks from the shed's roof , covered it with twigs and decorated it's inside. **17)**

My mother had some non-Jewish woman friends as well; The first two houses away, the last in a villa opposite Grandfather's house. We bought all our milk and dairy products from Mrs. Baracsi. As we faced the deportation at Passover 1944, Mrs. Baracsi begged my mother to leave my little sister behind in her care; she'd look after her well, until we return. My mother did not realize the horrors waiting for us just around the corner and did not want to give up her smallest. She only handed over to her friend some bedding and other unimportant things. When Father and I returned from the deportation, Mrs. Baracsi gave back these items on the spot and said how sorry she was, not having demanded more resolutely that my mother should leave my little sister behind in her house.

Mrs. Molnár was an exceptionally pretty childless woman. When we were deported to Poland in 1941, she did everything in her power to help of financially and in other ways as well.. She applied to various authorities for the cancellation of our expulsion she provided us with the necessities while we were in the custody of the authorities and sat with us for hours and hours trying to cheer us up in our impossible situation. During my travels to Hungary in 1965 I made a special point of visiting Nyirbátor to see my late mothers former friends, to the

16) A non-Jew who is allowed to perform certain duties during the Sabbath not allowed for Jews.

17) The tents used at Sukkoth must not have tiled roofs but a transparent cover made up of twigs.

ladies to thank them again for their kindness and all that they have done for us during those hard times. First I visited Mrs. Baracsi. Upon entering their house, I was received by her son and daughter who told me that their mother, Mrs. Baracsi is next door on her deathbed. But Mrs. Baracsi recognized my voice from next door and called me quietly: “Shlajme, is that you?” I went in her room. She got hold of my hand and asked me how were things with me. Two hours later she died. The second house I visited was Mrs. Molnár’s but I could not find her. I found out that the Molnár’s were expelled from the town by the Communists i.e. deported to an unknown place as they were considered to be “Capitalists”.

After a while we were able to relocate from the Hatházi’s place and to find a larger and more comfortable flat, not next door to the byre. I became very ill a few weeks later, around the time of the New Year Festival **18)**

The physician, Dr. Balogh diagnosed diphtheria. This contagious disease was very dangerous. My worried mother left the Synagogue and ran home. The local health authorities posted the dreaded “red notice” at the entrance prohibiting the entry to our premises because of the contagious disease. My condition grew from bad to worse with every hour. I was choking. The Doctor ordered a new medication from Debrecen, not yet available at the local Chemists in Nyirbátor. He asked my mother to pray that the new medicament should arrive in time. It arrived in the last minute. Shortly after the doctor administered the Diphtheria Serum, my condition started to improve and my life was saved. Dr. Balogh who was not Jewish, refused to accept any payment for my treatment. He would accept no payment from a poor family, he said.

Old Molnár lived a few houses away in the same street. His house stood at the street corner, opposite of that of my Grandfather. When he retired, he transferred his flourmill to his two sons. One of his sons, the one hard at hearing, was the husband of the previously mentioned pretty Mrs. Molnár. The old Uncle Molnár, as we called him, was small, he had a bald head and was never seen without his cigar in his moth. Most of the times he was sitting on the bench in front of his door, dressed in a three-piece suit, with the fob chain dangling from his waist pocket. He greeted the passers-by with a broad grin and passed his time with the kiddies of the neighborhood. I was most impressed especially by his cigar lighter and by his pocket watch.

On one occasion, I asked him to leave me these two things in the event of his death. As an answer, he just shook his head and smiled. On passing his bench, I used to ask him: “Uncle

18) Rosh Hashana, at early autumn

Molnár, are you still with us?” He just kept smiling.

Molnár’s Flour Mill was in the next street that was leading to a small wood, a veritable “lover’s lane”, a witness of many young couples’ romantic actions. Old Uncle Molnár inspected every young couple upon their returns from the woods and said: “Well, these have done something!” Or: “No, these have not!” He explained his logic with the following wise words: If upon the return from the woods the man walked briskly in front of the woman, his result was positive, but when the woman was leading on, then the result was negative, i.e. nothing had happened.

Most Nyirbátor streets had been unpaved. The only exception was the central market place and a few streets leading to this actual center of the town’s business life. Most business premises were located at the market place and were mostly in Jewish hands. For this reason, business and trade stopped on Saturdays and on the days of Jewish Festivals. Peasant markets, artisan’s workshops and small mechanics’ shops were located at the outskirts. The Town Hall was the largest, most significant building in the town center. It had a high tower with a clock visible from each side. This tower had a wide balcony around it used by the fire brigade guarding the town. Once a fire was noticed, the fireman gave alarm with a bell dangling over his head and signaled the direction of the conflagration waving his red flag, pointing to the proper direction.

On the Market Place, in front of the Town Hall, in the center of a small park, a Heroes’ Memorial had been erected to commemorate Nyirbátor’s sons who lost their lives in World War I. A marble tablet listed the names of the dead, 14 Jews among them. On the other side of the place, the second tallest building of Nyirbátor rose, the only commercial banking corporation in the entire district. It belonged to a Jew named Elek.

After March 19, 1944 the German Army took over this building and set up their Headquarters in these premises. After the defeat of the Germans, the Russians took it over and it became the Russian “Commendatory”. The Guard’s Room was located in a former store at the entrance that belonged before the Shoáh to a certain Jew called Gálet. As it happened, the Russian Officer of the Guard was a certain Sergeant Major of the Red Army, called Buchstein, who forbade me to call him by his family name and expressly demanded that I address him as Sargent Major. The Russians wanted to renovate the store to adapt it to the new use. For this reason they arrested the passers-by at random and gave them the task to clean the localities. I visited the Russians after my return from the concentration camps a number of times. They had a number of Jews among them with whom I could conduct some conversations in Yiddish language. Sometimes I assisted them in translations, too.

I was there during the aforementioned renovation jobs. Suddenly I noticed that the old Mesusah **19**) was still attached to the doorpost. I detached it with my penknife. When I returned approx. one hour later, I saw Sergeant Major Buchstein hitting one of laborers with a stick while crying out loud: “Where is God?” I went up to him and tried to quell him down by explaining that I was the one who dismantled God. I’ll extract now the parchment roll from its capsule. I’ll return the Mesusah to him if he can read the text. He looked at the piece of parchment, turned it upside down and back again and was obviously much distressed. He never saw Hebrew letters before in his whole life.

Thursday was the usual weekly market day. In addition, there was an annual market each autumn, when the peasants could sell their own produce. Rows of tents were erected for this purpose at the market place with broad passages between them so that visitors could inspect the goods on both sides at their pleasure.

Most artisans who offered their products for sale were Jews, especially in the rag trade, i.e. clothing, shoes, furniture and haberdashery. At the edge of the market place peasants sold hen, geese, and bundles of firewood.

The manual workers had months and months of hard work behind them to make up a proper selection of their goods for the annual market. Even we, the children of Nyirbátor had our little jobs. We were employed by the stallholders as look-outs – I at the tent of a tailor. My special duty was to keep an eye on the “gypsies”, the members of the Romany tribe who came to the market with the sole intention to steal. I did not earn a lot of money but it was an experience, I can tell you!

The sales were conducted by well-versed salesmen, belonging of course to the Jewish race. They knew the nature of their customers, the peasants and spoke their dialect, too. Almost every sentence they uttered was colored by Jewish wisdom, impressive curses, and hidden jokes. One of the tailors was stuck for a long time with a faulty three-quarter long overcoat with oblique i.e. slanting pockets. By accident or mistake, the apprentice attached the pocket slanting in the wrong direction and as a result, it was impossible to put the hand into the pocket. This tailor had a salesman, a genius called “Patyi” who was asked to get rid of the overcoat which had been dragged from one annual fair to the other. “Sell it at any price,

19) Hebrew for “door post”. A capsule on the right-hand of the door post of Jewish houses and dwellings, containing the text 5 Moses, 6, 4-9 and 11, 13-21

Patyi, the main thing is you get rid of it!” Patyi did not hesitate for long when he saw a farmer coming to the market stall with a whip in his hand. He greeted him as an old acquaintance:” Uncle Jánosh, have you seen the latest overcoat, the American design?” Before the farmer could utter a sound, Patyi took off the farmer’s old overcoat and dressed him in the new one. He made the prospective customer stand in front of the mirror, pulled tight the overcoat at the back so that at the front it looked like made to measure, he got hold of the farmer’s right arm, guided it along the pouch and finally stuck the farmer’s hand into the pocket slanting in the wrong direction. He pushed the whip under the manipulated arm and said: “Do you see it now? If you travel in a wintry day, you won’t feel the cold!” The price, not more than... he said, he added to the original price five more per cent and asked him not to show the overcoat to anyone , not for the time being, as it is only a trial effort. The next shipment shall arrive from America in one month’s time! The overcoat with the originally wrong pocket had to be made in series and became a hit.

My father had an entire collection of pocket watches at home, left over from his watchmakers’ business. Some parts were missing, as they were used to replace faulty parts of other watches. The salesmen purchased these old shabby watches according to weight. They equipped their overcoats and jackets with them, by putting always one watch in the right hand pocket. If a peasant tried on a piece of clothing, he liked to put his hand into the pocket. Whenever he had the feeling of an apparently forgotten watch, he wanted to know how much the price of that piece.

Nyirbátor's orthodox Shul

The House of Learning (Bet Midrash) was part of the Synagogue building. One could recognize the room for prayers by its high round arch windows, instead of the pointed arch windows usually employed in churches. Over the main entrance there was a round window with a David Star. A neglected yard stretched in front of the building. All functional units mentioned before, the kosher butchery, the ritual bath, and the dwelling places of the Rabbi and that of the Shames were located in the courtyard behind the Shul. One could enter the Bet Midrash via a small gang where a washbasin was located for the ritual rinsing of your hands, including the obligatory bowl with two handles on a chain. From this gang one arrived to the passage, the so-called "Palish". One entered the room for prayers via a separate entrance. The modern furniture of the room of prayers was made of first-class timber. The places alongside the eastern wall were reserved for the Rabbi, the Rashekol (the president of the congregation) and the most respectable citizens of the community. Simpler people, like manual workers, artisans, small traders and coachmen, had their places at the back, by the entrance. To arrive to the Thora Shrine containing a great number of Thora Rolls, one had to ascend a number of steps. On the right hand side there was the desk for the person to lead in the prayers, In the middle of the room, on the podium, the so-called "Bima" (blemmer) stood the large table on which the Thora is rolled out and read. The Shamash i.e. Synagogue servant Reb Aaron Scheinfeld ("Aaron the Shames") made the announcements for the congregation and sold prior to the reading of the Thora on Sabbath and Holy Festivals the "Alijot" (the calling-up to the Thora) **20**) The Women's Gallery **21**) extended over one part of the room. As a result, the roof above it was lower. The easterly direction of the gallery facing the room of prayers was covered up with tight wooden slats preventing the men to cast a glance at the women. The ascent to the gallery was possible via some stairs in the yard. The busiest place was the Palish, a meeting place of men, congregation in various groups to study the Thora. One group studied Talmud **22**) the other Chumash (The five books of Moses with the additional sections of the Prophets). Still another group studied the Mishnah **23**)

20) "Calling up to the Thora" means the invitation to read the weekly section of the Thora which is considered an honour

21) In orthodox, conservative congregations men and women sit separately, in liberal or progressive congregations they sit together

22) Study/learning, having its origins in the Thora

23) Verbal tradition attached to the Thora, which is the basic part of the Talmud

Bookshelves filled with literature stood next to the walls together with a small Thora Shrine. Rows of desks were placed alongside in the middle of the Palish for the purpose of study. A samovar was steaming away in the corner. One of the jobs of Aaron the Shames was the brewing of tea. Whenever we went to the Cheder on cold wintrily days, we made a stop at the Palish to drink a cup of hot tea. An oven was placed between the desks. Next to the oven, Hersch-Beer, a lonesome “nutcase” was warming himself. He wore a shabby feathered cap to his worn-out overcoat, he murmured and complained for himself and never talked to any one present. We kiddies had our fun with him from time to time. The “Rebbetzin” (the wife of the Rabbi) gave him a room in one of the chambers and looked after him out of kindness. In the Mikve there were some cabins with bath-tubs, used by the non-Jewish population as well as in Nyirbátor there were hardly any dwellings with bathrooms. The bathing facilities for women were in an entirely separate section. Women visiting the Mikve at the end of their periods entered the baths direct from the road via a hidden path between the two synagogues.

Rabbi Naftali Teitelbaum (Rabbi Naftole)

Rabbi Naftole, the Rabbi of the Orthodox Congregation of Nyirbátor came from the Family Teitelbaum, known for their vehement anti-Zionistic attitude. He was a cousin of the famous Rabbi Joelish Teitelbaum of Satmar (Satu Mare). Rabbi Naftole conducted the congregation in an authoritative style, straight, and without any compromises. He was always seen in his traditional attire, wearing a broad-rimmed velvet hat, a nice beard streaked with gray, and a pair of specs on the tip of his nose, over which he cast a glance at you. His was an impressive personality who demanded respect.

The so-called Shier-Stiebel **24**)-was located next to the Rabbis dwelling place, a sizeable room well furnished with tables, desks, benches, book shelves full of volumes of Talmud and other religious and moralistic literature. This room was used by the young Talmud students to study in addition to their standard learning plan. Rabbi Naftole spent most of his time in this room. This was where he studied himself and where he received his visitors. At the mealtime, his Chassidic adherents congregated around the Rabbi's table to snatch some "Shireiem" (leftovers). The Chassids believe that it brings you luck or it will be in your favor if you finish off the Rabbi's meal.

Whenever Rabbi Naftole turned up in the House of Learning, silence spread out and the congregation rose. While the prayer leader repeated the previously quietly recited "Eighteen prayer" at a loud voice, Rabbi Naftole used the opportunity to go round among the praying people, his hands hidden in the arm sleeves of his Kaftan. Once in a while he stopped to preach morals or to criticize someone.

On a certain Day at Atonement **25**) he approached one of the praying, because he saw that the man had put on clean socks. It was clear to the Rabbi that this person disregarded the law not to wear leather wear on this day, had shoes on and only took them off outside the Bet Midrash. For this, he reprimanded him. Another event occurred on a New Years Day. This time, he attacked a woman sitting on the gallery because she dared to come to the synagogue with additional hair i.e. she used her Sheitl i.e. a traditional wig, but she dared to comb some of her natural hair over her wig, in great fashion by the not-so religious women... he walked up the stairs leading to the Thora Shrine and demanded that she left the Women's Gallery.

24) Hebrew: Shiur (measure) lection, reading; Yiddish Stiebel (dim, German Stube, Swiss: Stübli a small room

25) Yom Kippur, strict day of fasting, the highest Jewish festival

In summertime, the tradesmen turned up at the Bet Midrash for the afternoon- and evening prayer, before they went home. On the long summer days they had to wait for a long time after the afternoon prayers until they could say the evening prayer. Some used this time to study; others were just standing about in the yard and discussed politics.

One day, a visitor turned up around that time of the day with a handbag in his hand. He approached the group of men who greeted him with the usual “Sholem alejchem!” (Piece with you!) The visitor pulled out a pad from his handbag and tried to sell Shekel for the Zionist congress. But someone told Rabbi Naftole that a good-for-nothing Zionist entered the Holiest realm. Rabbi Naftole jumped from his seat; he rushed to the scene and cried out a loud “Wu is der Meshimmed?” (Where is the heathen?) Arriving to the visitor, who, by the way, belonged to the religious Zionists “Misrachi” **26**), he spat on his face and demanded that the Talmud students should expel him from the yard – in front of the non-Jewish passers-by! Rabbi Naftole returned from the Holy Land as a bitter, disappointed man. He, who believed that in Israel only observant Jews resided, had seen other ones as well. After his return he said he saw the “Yiddish Goyim” in Israel. His experience made his negative attitude towards Zionism even stronger.

On Friday evenings following the family Sabbath meal my father and I went together to the Rabbi’s table. Sometimes we took part next day in the third Sabbath meal and stayed on until the “Havdala” **27**), the separation blessing at the end of Sabbath, Many people congregated to celebrate “Havdala”. It was usual that the youngest child had to hold up the “Havdala” candle. It was believed that the higher the boy held it, the taller his bride shall be. I held up the candle higher than any one could and announced: “My bride shall be sooo tall!” The Rabbi, who obviously did not have any sense of humor, remarked: “Well, you shall not hold the Havdala-candle again in my place!”

Rabbi Naftole possessed a specially small and light Thora roll. This one he took out only at the Thora’s Festival of Joy” **29**) in order to dance with it ecstatically, whereby the Rabbi had to hold it high above his head. His dancing around the Bima was a spectacle

Almost the entire congregation took part in Rabbi Napftole’s funeral. Many non-Jews also came and made their way into the courtyard when the procession started off to the Jewish

26) Short for “Spiritual Center”, a religious-Zionist group founded in 1902, Hapoel Hamisrachi 1922

27) “Separation” i.e. that of the Sabbath and the next weekday

29) Simchat Thora, a feast of joy celebrating the Thora at the end of Sukkoth in the autumn.

Cemetery. On his grave i.e. the grave of his family a tent like construction was erected, with a case and slots through which the visitors could insert their “Kvittel” (notes of requests). The grave and the tent is preserved quite well to this day and his grave is still visited. Rabbi Naftole was a respected person even in the circle of non-Jewish who considered him a holy man. My father wept bitterly at his funeral. The Rabbi’s passing left a gap in the life of the community.

After one year, they requested his brother, Rabbi Aaron Teitelbaum who acted as the Rabbi of the little town of Voloba, to come and to take over the duties in Nyirbátor. Rabbi Aaron looked like the twin brother of the deceased. He was my Grandfather’s, Reb Itze’s friend and his daughter; Pessil-Leah was my mother’s good friend. Pessil –Leah was together with me during the Shoah in the concentration camp Görlitz. Rabbi Aaron entered the Ghetto together with us and was deported to Auschwitz from where he never returned.

Rabbi Abraham Lemberger, DD

I had only met Rabbi Lemberger on one single occasion. But quite frankly, our exciting talk put me through frenzy. I discovered it only much later, what a permanent, unforgettable impression it made on me and I was not able to fully appreciate the extraordinary personality of this rabbi until that time. He was a small man, who wore a nice long white beard commanding special respect; He had an elevated round back cap and a black frock coat. He was around eighty at that time.

Doctor Lemberger was the Rabbi of the Status Quo Congregation of Nyirbátor, since its foundation by Simon Mendel in the Nineteenth Century. No successor was appointed after his passing away. The orthodox Jews kept their distance from this congregation.

My encounter with the Rabbi took place as follows: When one day, on my way to Cheder, i.e. the Talmud-Thora School. I passed Rabbi Lemberger’s Shul, he came up to the door and beckoned me over. He greeted me and asked me how old I was. I told him: “Twelve”. He was a little disappointed as he was looking for another Jew to make up the quorum **30**). As I had not reached the required age of 13, I was unable to help him. Nevertheless, he invited me to his study to my great joy and let me take part in an unforgettable event. His study was at the entrance of the house of prayers. He spoke to me in Yiddish but his language had a German slant, so I had to pull myself together if I wanted to understand him. He asked me: “Do you study Chumash?” (The Pentateuch) “Of course”, I replied. “And what does Chumash

mean?" I kept silent because I did not know the answer. Our "melamed" (teacher) did not spend any time on such questions. Rabbi Lemberger, full of patience, explained the answer: Do you know what 'chamesh' means? It just means "five" and here you have the origin of "Chumash" for the "Book of Five" i.e. the five books of the Thora!" (Moses).

There was a large portrait on the wall of his study showing Herzl. How can anyone be so naïve, I don't know but I asked the Rabbi: "Who is that Jew with the beard without a hat on the picture?" "That man is Theodor Zeev Herzl" explained Rabbi Lemberger. In order to explain Herzl's personality, he opened his chest of drawers and pulled out some letters in German he received in the course of his correspondence with Herzl, and he read out some lines to me. When I admitted that I do not understand any German, he put the letters away and talked to me about the Zionists' Congresses. Proudly he remarked that he took part in one of them. He proceeded by telling me his "Credo": "Do you know, my son, he said, one day there'll be a Jewish State – with Jewish men, Jewish soldiers, Jewish policemen & cetera. This Jewish State of the future has still no hymn." He pulled out a sheet of paper on which the "Hatikva" (the Hope) was printed from another drawer and re repeated the song with me until I learnt it and I could sing it on my own.

I left his study as in a dream. On my way to the Talmud-Thora School I repeated everything Rabbi Lemberger told me. When I entered our classroom, I was in luck, because our melamed had not yet arrived. I told my adventure with Rabbi Lemberger to my classmates and repeated his words parrot-fashion: We shall have a state! Jewish secretaries of state, Jewish soldiers..." I pulled out the sheet of paper with the text of the "Hatikva" from my pocket and started to teach the rest of the class to sing it.

At this moment in time the melamed turned up and heard us to sing the Zionist Hymn. The disaster was perfect. Almost as if a Cross had been erected in the classroom. And no one else, but Reb Abraham Elieser's, the Kosher butcher's grandchild caused this disasters! The teacher tied me to the windowsill, and beat me until I almost lost consciousness. The matter became known not only by Rabbi Naftole, the Rabbi of the Orthodox Community but also by my Grandfather. Both wanted to punish me separately to beat the Devil out of me. Finally, my mother stopped the beatings and refused to allow any one to get close enough to me. "Don't worry" she said to me, "we shall arrive to Eretz Israel (the land of Israel)!"

When I was called up in 1948, I had to attend a medical examination in Tel Litwinski, today's Tel Hashomer near Tel Aviv, to prove that I am fit to serve in the Israeli Army, I remembered Rabbi Lemberger and his words: "There shall be Jewish soldiers...". His words came true. Tears were running down my cheek. The doctor was worried that I'm unwell. But

I explained the situation and told him about the late Rabbi Lemberger. He was so deeply moved that he too joined in my crying and he had a good old cry together.

30) Certain prayers may only be said in the presence of 10 men (“minjan”) older than 13. In liberal congregations women older than 12 also count.

The Talmud-Thora-School (our Cheder)

Nyirbátor’s Talmud-Thora-School was famous in the entire district. For this reason we had many students coming from the outside. Similar to other schools, this school too was divided into classes that were distributed in the two-story building. The teachers came to Nyirbátor from the neighboring villages. The names of their places of origin were added to their own names. For example: Moses Schwarz of Vasvár, Mendel Weiss of Ecsed, and Rabbi Meshullam Friedmann of Megyes. Private teachers were also available: Mordechai Wächter and Shlomo Steinberger. The smallest kiddies started at the age of four to learn the Hebrew Alephbes (alphabet) They were taught by the melameds Itzkowitz and Moses Weiss.

When I arrived to Nyirbátor, I started to study with the melamed Moses Weiss. However, I was already able to read the book of prayers as my Grandfather Itzhak (Reb Itze) already taught me to read in Majdan. “Chumash” (the five books of Moses) I had to learn from the new melamed Reb Moses Schlosser, who joined us from Poland a short time ago. He was an exception among the melameds because he was dressed in a standard gent’s suit with a tie and he brought along his violin in order to teach us the traditional art to recite the Thora, by the accompaniment of a violin. We loved his kind of teaching and made good progress but the strict orthodox circles were not very impressed. They suspected the incursion of modern times among the holy walls of the Jewish Cheder. But they remained in the minority and Schlosser continued to play his violin.

The daily timetable was overfull. We had to get up at the break of the dawn. The school started at 8 am. After a two-hours lunchtime break, we continued our study until 8pm. In the darkness we lighted our way home with a lantern with a burning candle inside. One of the melameds tried to put our minds to rest with the words: “If you are attacked by a dog, repeat the Thora verse: “But no dog shall point his tongue against all Children of Israel!” The dog shall run away!”

Thursdays were the trials of the examinations that took place on Sabbath afternoons. I had to present myself to be tested by my father and my grandfather. Whenever I got stuck by father, I immediately received a box to my ears. The most worrying weekly section was “Vajechi” (Genesis 47, 28-50, 26). Here we had to recite the verses “But to me, when I came from Padan, died Rachel in the Land of Kanaan” (1 Moses 48,7 ff.) and “Shimeon and Levi, brothers” (1 Moses 49,5 ff.) by heart, complete with the appropriate melody. The intensive study of the Bible and the Talmud with the many sharp-witted discussions gave me an early training and helped me in my life.

The “Israelite Elementary People’s School”

In Nyirbátor, segregated schools existed for the individual religious communities, thus one Jewish school as well as a general comprehensive school for every one. Just when I enrolled in the 1st class of the Jewish school, a teachers’ change took place there. Mr. Ármin Szilvási came to an end of a long section of life and retired. He was the founder of this school and that of the Status Quo Congregation. When I saw a picture representing Elieser Ben Jehuda, the innovator of the Hebrew language, he immediately reminded me upon the teacher, Mr. Ármin Szilvási. A perfect similarity. Szilvási handed over the office to his daughter Miss Marishka (later called Mrs. Marishka Blau).

The seven schoolclasses had on four teachers. For this reason sets of two classes used one room. The teacher Marishka took the first class. Miss Idushka (later called Mrs. Idushka Leibowitz) took classes 2 and 3, Mr. Tihanyi classes 4 and 5 and the two highest classes, 6 and 7 were taken by the headmaster, Mr. Gondos called earlier on Gottlieb. Class 7. Was a novelty it did not start until that year.

Two remarkable incidents occurred during my school times. The first concerned Miss Idushka in the 4th class. I don’t recall the reason but I still remember the beating I got. She grabbed hold of me very hard and banged away hysterically at the top of my fingers with her ruler. I became hysterical as well for pain and in my efforts to escape from her iron grip, I kicked her in the stomach and jumped out at the school window. I left the rest to my mother to settle.

The second incident occurred at Mr. Tihanyi’s class, the 5th. We simply could not get on with each other. Tihanyi was a gifted painter and extremely painstaking. We had to copy down his

sketches from the blackboard, without any additions. On one occasion, he drew some grape leaves we had to copy. I used my own initiative to add all kinds of details to make the drawing more realistic. Mr. Tihanyi passed the classroom and stopped at my place. He looked at my work, took my sheet, tore it up into shreds and demanded I begin again from the start. Stubbornly, I draw once again the same image. That was how the war continued between us. I drew the leaf, he tore it up. Who was the winner? Of course teacher Tihanyi. He did not want to allow me to enter Class 6. This was the reason why I left the Jewish School and went to the general comprehensive school where I was one of the few Jewish students they had.

The headmaster, Mr. Gondos who was originally called Gottlieb but changed his name by a deed poll to the typically Hungarian-sounding name Gondos, demonstrated Hungarian patriotism whenever he had a chance. Under his orders we had to sing every morning the Hungarian National Anthem. On Hungarian national holidays all students had to be present at the school yard where he related his wonderful stories about his service at the Hungarian Royal Navy under the great naval hero, counter admiral Miklós Horthy **31)** during World War I.

On my return from the concentration camps to Nyirbátor, I heard that some other Jews, also survivors, asked the help of the Russians to have Mr. Gondos returned to town. Mr. Gondos was in hiding in Debrecen and did not dare to show his face. As it turned out later, he was a

Capo in a German concentration camp and had treated there abominably the Jewish prisoners, among them even some members of his own congregation. An officer of the Red Army contacted the Russian Military Commandatory of Debrecen. They succeeded in arresting the man. They returned him to Nyirbátor where he was imprisoned. Some of his old students visited him in the prison and spat in his face through the small hatch of the prison door. The story has it that some people succeeded in gaining access to him and they beat him up. Gondos was transferred to Budapest and sentenced to two years imprisonment.

31) 1868-1967, Governor of Hungary, exiled by the Russians in 1945, who lived and died in Portugal

My time of youth

On the first Sabbath after my 13th birthday I was called up to the Thora and the congregation was invited to Kiddush **32**). Thus my **33**) Bar-Micvah Feast was celebrated.

32) Blessings said over wine (prior to Sabbath over bread as well)

33) “Bar Micvah” Son of Duty, a feast in the synagogue and at home when a Jewish youth has come to age for all religious aspects. “Bat Micvah” in liberal communities, a 12 years old “Daughter of Duty”

My uncles on my mother’s side, Shlomo and Jacob came to visit us on the occasion and presented me watches. Uncle Jacob of Munkács whom I never saw before brought me a pocket watch, Uncle Shlomo of Debrecen a wristwatch. In those days, these presents were incredibly expensive. I was so excited that I wanted to show them to the whole world to prove that I have not only one watch, but two!

When my father returned from his business trip, I ran up to him to show him the watches I had received. My father said: “ Look here, these watches are very valuable and luxury items for you. As we are financially in a very tight spot at present, we ought to sell them.” My mother was strictly against it and demanded that my father returned my watches to me, but my father sold them all the same. I was very bitter about it, I was unable to forgive him for what he did and took a decision, to get a new watch one day, a watch no one can take away from me.

I had to leave school the same year. My father was called up to do auxiliary forced labor (“Munkaszolgálat”) instead of military service to which Jews became inadmissible in the anti-Semitic world of Horthy’s Hungary. I had to contribute to the family’s financial existence. My mother had two good reasons for wanting me to learn a manual trade. If I ever get to Israel it’ll come in handy if I have a practical trade and until then I could make myself financially useful to the family. She believed that the trade of a glazier can be learned relatively quickly. For this reason, she applied to Reb Doved Österreicher, who had a good name as a glazier and picture framer and asked him to take me on as his apprentice. As he agreed, we drew up a contract of apprenticeship. Reb Doved Österreicher a big man with a long red beard, belonged to Nyirbátor’s orthodox Jews, he wore a high round cap to go with his frock coat and had the reputation of an excellent workman and a Thora expert.

Being an apprentice, I had to help out Mrs. Österreicher around the house I had to chop her firewood, clean the floors etc. I disliked doing these chores. In addition, I did not hit it off with his wife. She was treating me like her servant and I could not bear the humiliation. Thus, I decided to put an end to the matter and refused to do the housework. I told the woman to employ a *Shickse* (a non-Jewish woman) as a maid and threatened her to make public her disgraceful behavior towards me within the entire community. Apparently my threats worked, as I was no longer obliged to go to work in their household.

Upon my taking up the apprenticeship, my Mother and Reb Doved had agreed that every last Friday of each month I should receive a sub. When the first payday came, I was quite excited by the prospect of my bringing home some money I had earned myself. I was very diligent on the Friday in question, I finished all the jobs I had to, I cleaned the shop and the pavement, and waited for the payout. A few minutes before 2pm, I presented myself in front of Reb Doved, sitting behind cashier's desk. He asked me: "What are you waiting for?" (We talked mostly in Yiddish.) I answered I was waiting for money. He yelled at me: "What kind of money are you talking about?" I made an involuntary movement of my body like a wounded animal and acted under an impulse. I got hold of a weight from the desk and hurled it with all my power against a very expensive porcelain service displayed on a shelf. Almost everything broke to bits. I caused considerable damage and escaped from the shop as quickly as I could. Full of anxiety and shame to come home without money, I wandered aimlessly around the town. Finally I turned up at home with red eyes, after the Sabbath candles had already been lighted. My mother put my mind to rest. She pointed out to me that everything was prepared for the Sabbath and that we shall definitely not starve. She promised me to settle the matter on Sunday. On Sunday, I saw Reb Österreicher sitting with my mother in our house. Ghee brought along the money he ought to have paid for me. I burst between them and asked my mother to stop talking to him, as I had no intention to work for for him. But my mother had her ways. She managed to convince both Reb Dovid and myself as well.

Upon my starting to work for Reb Doved Österreicher, he had asked my name. I answered that I'm called *Shlajme*. Instead, he gave me the name Shamu which sounded more Hungarian. Of course, a protested against my new name. Every time he called for this Shamu, I pretended to be deaf. One day a Baroness turned up in the shop, accompanied by a number of maidservants. A carriage with a team of four horses was waiting in front of our shop. The Baroness brought along a large Goblin tapestry weave picture to be framed. To frame such a tapestry was tricky business. One had to take care that all lines run in the same direction. I was a specialist in this job. For this reason I ought to have looked at the tapestry and to adjust

a frame accordingly. I have heard Red Doved calling “Shamu, Shamu!” I pretended to be deaf, as usual. When he noticed that I won’t answer, Reb Doved started to call me by my correct name Shlajme. Upon arriving to the boss, I asked him in front of the high-born lady: “Rev Duved, if you are not ashamed of wearing your beard, why shall I be ashamed of my name? If you are prepared to cut off your beard, I’ll be ready to be called Shamu instead of Shlajme.!” From that moment on him always called me by my proper name. **(This is the reason why I gave the title “Shlajme” to my memories.)**

Unfortunately, Reb Doved, his wife and his daughter had been murdered in Auschwitz.

I could not help a great deal in contributing to our family’s existence with the wages I earned at Österreicher’s shop. For this reason, I had to look out for some other sources of income.

I helped my mother on the evenings to boil washing soap she sold to the peasants. In addition we fattened geese, whose liver, a delicacy, was sold to Budapest traders. The meat we kept for ourselves, free of charge. I also found evening work at Klein, the locksmith. I fitted out shoes with iron nails and learnt a number of elementary blacksmith jobs too, such as sheet metal work and to repair water pumps. As I knew now how to repair pumps, sometimes I succeeded in getting private jobs as well.

My hardest work was servicing the Mikve. My father had asked me to do this job for him and to keep up this job for him until his return from the forced labor military service. I got up at the break of the dawn to prepare the Mikve for the members of the congregation who came very early to duck under the water before they took part in the Morning Service. I had to clean the dressing room and the bathing cells, to scrub and to rinse approx. 60 wooden stools, to heat the water for the baths, the heat the boiler serving the bathtubs, to start up the wastewater pumps and to fill up the water tank on the roof which supplied the bath tubs. The hardest task was to heat and to clean the oven, standing in the middle of the baths. For this purpose I had to fetch some firewood in a basket and to balance myself like a circus artist over a narrow wood gangway and then to clean the oven, to get rid of all the ashes and the soot. I also installed a hair-stylist’s corner and cut the customers’ hair on Fridays I soon learned to do quite well. I earned good money with all these activities.

My grandfather Reb Abraham Eliezer (Reb Avrum-Lezer)

My grandfather on my father's side was born in Poland on 1878 (see page 130). Orphaned early, he lived in Hungary where he visited several Talmud schools and received the qualification of a kosher butcher. He married Scheindel Stern of Stropkopf, a small town in Slovakia. They had many children but only six of them were brought up: Dov-Berish, Moses-Moshe, Zwi-Hershel, Sarah-Gittel, Levy and Zeev-Valvisch.

As far as I know, my grandfather had a brother called who was called Chaim who lived in Poland and a sister whose name I don't know. My grandfather looked older than his age. He walked somewhat hunched up; he had a gray beard and neglected his appearance. He only wore good clothes on a Sabbath or on festival days and then a streimel on his head. His working day kaftan was shiny with fat, especially because it was his habit save bits of meat rests in his pockets for his many cats he loved. He was a humble fellow, who did not want to accept his due place of honor in the synagogue, although he was often asked to do so by the leaders of the community. He preferred to pray in the company of simpler people, near to door. My grandfather was known as a Thora scholar and many people wanted to take part in his hours of study. Although he lived for more than 50 years in Hungary, he spoke no Hungarian, only Yiddish. He took my grandmother with him as an interpreter if he had to deal with the authorities. He was Rabbi Naftali Teitelbaum's (Reb Naftole's) true friend. Grandmother Scheindel (page 130) could neither read nor write. She could not even read her Book of Prayers. My mother sat with her in the Synagogue and they said their prayers together. She settled down next to my grandfather on Sabbath afternoon that read out for her the weekly section in Yiddish.

After their wedding my grandfather received an appointment as the official Kosher butcher in the small Hungarian town of Nyirgyulaj. This was my father's birthplace. My grandfather moved later to Nyirbátor together with his family and became kosher butcher of the congregation. He remained there to the end of his life. He had to give up his profession because of an accident at work when he lost a number of fingers of his right hand, he became prayer leader at the synagogue and an expert in problems concerning Kashruth **34**).

His "office" was in one of the corners of the "Palish", the study in the house of learning, and people brought to him the gullets of the slaughtered animals for inspection, pulled out immediately after their slaughter. According to the Halacha, the Jewish religious law, the

gullet must be inspected for scars. Had he found a scarred tissue, he scratched it away with his thumbnail. If a hole was left, the goose was ritually unclean and it was not fit for Jews.

Nyirbátor had another ritual butcher, a Reb Ezra Finkelstein. An ancient war separated the two kosher butchers i.e. Reb Ezra and my grandfather. They did not forgive each other, not even on the Day of Atonement. The reason of this feud is unknown to me. But I was not even allowed to talk with Reb Ezra's grandchild Gedalja, my schoolmate.

Grandfather's house was a large corner building with many rooms, in which he lived only with my grandmother most of the time. The drawing room was well furnished and clean but no one was allowed to enter. In winter they lived in the hallway where they kept a small fire going. They lived frugally. It was their nature. At the other end of their house there was another kitchen, one step down. Alongside both kitchen walls there were boards, one for the copper pans the other for the heavy cast iron pots. My grandmother often sat on the kitchen step and cleaned these utensils although she never used them.

Their house had a garden as well, one I had to cultivate each springtime.

I sow mainly maize. I received for this a few pennies, not even sufficient to buy myself some sweets. I was very upset about it because my grandfather stuffed many coins into Rabbi Meir Baal Haness' collection box. This Rabbi Meir was a Wonder Rabbi. I believed I was more important than Rabbi Meir, especially as I had worked hard for the money. I decided to improve my wages. I pushed a knife through the slit of the collection box and the coins came pouring out. I hope the Wonder Rabbi forgave me.

When I was working away one Friday afternoon in the Mikve, my grandfather called me to himself and told me about a burst vein in his leg. I was much surprised as my grandfather never talked to me neither about his personal problems nor other recent matters before. This talk was like a talk between two grownups.

After the Sabbath Lunch we i.e. my father and I went to see my grandfather. He was very depressed, looked at us and said: "If I survive until next Tuesday, everything will be all right." I found out later that the Tuesday in question was the first day of the Jewish month Nissan. It was his father's birthday and the day of his death and he too was born on Nissan 1st. On Tuesday I was urgently called away from Oesterreicher's shop, to go to grandfather's house. I found him in bed, surrounded by many people, among them some of his sons. When I approached him, he was in the middle of his absolution prayer. He took my hand and said

that I was his oldest grandchild and he wanted to bless me. I bent down to him; he placed his palm on my head

and blessed me. Then he asked his oldest son, Dov-Berish. To retrieve his Last Will and Testament from the drawer and to read it out to the members of the family before the funeral. Shortly after he passed away. The Testament was read out by Melamed Shlomo Steinberger. I still remember a number of provisions made. It began with the distribution of the inheritance. The Tephillin (phylactery) according to Rashi's **35)** guidelines, was to go to the oldest son, Dov-Berish, the Tephillin (phylactery) according to Rabbenu Tam to his son Moses. The rest of the inheritance is not to be distributed during his wife 's lifetime. The rest of the testament demanded that his son's future wives must be bald-headed **36)**. The

The inscription on his grave was prescribed. The letters were to be in black, not in gold. This was typical to his humility. The men carrying his coffin should have first a full bath in the Mikve. While the funeral procession was passing the adjoining Christian cemetery, his coffin is to be hidden so that the Goyim should not be able to look at it. If Reb Ezra, his ancient enemy, would pass away before him, he did not want to be buried next to him. Reb Ezra died later but by that time no one remembered Grandfather's testament. When I visited his grave in 1965 I found the two graves directly opposite each other. My grandfather died at the age of 65. Blessed be his memory

34) Problems that concern the ritual cleanliness of food

35) Salomo ben Isaak (1040-1105). He studied in Mainz and Worms, taught in Troyes and wrote comments on most of the books of the Bible and most tracts of the Babylonian Talmud

36) Custom of the ultra-orthodox Jews

My mother

My mother, Anna Silber was born on 15. December 1898 in Majdan, Karpatorussia. (See page 131). She married on 2. August 1925 in the Hungarian town of Sátorajáújhely her five years younger betrothed, Moses Graber. She was a tall, slender woman with blue eyes. She always took a headscarf in accordance with the orthodox Jewish custom, and on Sabbath or festival days her well tended wig, the *Sheitel*. During World War I she lived in Majdan.

When she was 17, she lost her mother in the tragic railroad accident described before. It was her duty to look after the family from that time onward.

When she moved to Nyirbátor, she had communication and adjustment difficulties at first. Her Yiddish was different from the one spoken in Hungary. Only a few people understood her Polish accent. But she soon got over the difficulties; my mother spoke Russian, Ukrainian, Yiddish, German, Czech and Hungarian. On certain occasions, she was asked to act as an interpreter. Nyirbátor had a number of Bulgarian gardeners living there who laid out vegetable gardens and grew locally unknown vegetable varieties. They sold their produce on the Thursday market. As they did not understand Hungarian, they were very pleased if mother turned up to assist them as an interpreter. As a reward, she received a basketful of vegetables free of charge.

Just like her father, my mother too had artistic talents. The results of some of her efforts were on display in our home. A framed picture could be seen in the bedroom. It represented two doves painted on a black lacquered glass perching on a twig. Their outlines were filled in with shiny chocolate wrappers in various colors. Artificial flowers made by her were displayed in flower pots. Framed tapestries quoting wise sayings in Czech language were displayed on the walls. I still remember some of them, such as: “**Ruka ruku myje**” (One hand is washing the other) “**Komu se neleni, tomu se zeleni**” (Idleness does not make your garden green) For Sukkoth, she prepared colored paper stars, to decorate the Sukkoth tent, and she suspended birds made of eggshells from the roof, with wings and tails made from colored paper strips. On a certain occasion I had to stay away from the school for a few days as I was sick. My mother wrote an excuse to the melamed in Yiddish whereas in Hungary the women almost never wrote in Yiddish. The teacher asked me who wrote that letter. I replied, my mother. He flew into a rage and tore up the letter of excuse in shreds and yelled: “How can a woman dare to write to a melamed in such manner?” On another occasion, a fire started at the

Nyirbátor banking corporation's building. The slabs of slate that were used to cover the roof were flying in every direction, like firework. I was hardly six years old at that time. My mother rushed in to the Talmud-Thora School in desperation, covered me in a plaid she brought along and took me in her arms. She ran along with me amidst the glowing shingles. The memory of this image is fixed in my memory forever.

I'll always remember the hours of twilight at the end of a winter Sabbath as well. My mother sat with us on the bed standing in the kitchen. To drive away our fear caused by the growing darkness, she told us tales and legends in Yiddish or real events from her own childhood. She also sang Yiddish songs such as "Margeriten", "In the Temple", "A fire is glowing in the oven". We loved these homely hours and were sad when they came to an end. Before the Separation Blessing she recited a prayer that women used to say in Yiddish at the going out of the Sabbath. In that prayer she asked *God of Abraham, Isaak and Jakob now that the Sabbath has come to and end to protect the People of Israel from all evil and to bless every true believer with a good week, a good month and a good year.*

Although my mother was religious, her religious observance had its limits and especially she did not accept any commands. My grandfather Reb Abraham Eliezer had occasionally attempted to interfere with our religious upbringing and demanded more "Jewish ness". But my mother guarded her independence in these matters. Her rules defined fore example: temple locks (*payers*) no longer than the lobe of the ear; standard dresses instead of orthodox-Jewish attire. My mother did not accept any regulations in her choice of books to read either. She used to read the books of Shalom Asch **37)** whose writings were forbidden in orthodox circles, even his book, *The Nazarene*. Mostly it was I to pick up her books from the lending library. She wanted us to have general knowledge and a good trade so that we'd be prepared for the immigration to Israel.

As a "Yiddisher Mamma" she looked after us to have enough to eat. She fortified us with spinach, cod liver oil and what else, I don't know. She was especially worried about the late development of my growth of beard. She wanted to see me growing up quicker.

All her hopes and efforts were directed to see us developing a large, well-established family and enjoying the company of her grandchildren in Eretz Israel. The Nazis and their allied prevented the realization of her dreams. Mother, what I have to tell you today is this: Mother, much to my sorrow you have no grave with a proper grave-stone I would be able to visit, It is still weighing on my mind that at that time, at the "selection" in Auschwitz you were separated from me in the chaos. You were dragged away from me without a word of

farewell. I see you and the children hanging on to you, frightened to lose you in the turmoil. for ever. You moved away and I followed you with my eyes, until you disappeared. I did not know at that time that you went on your last way.

Mother, unfortunately I was unable to hold you a funeral speech and to express my love to you. I loved you more than anything else in this world. You were to me the “Yiddische Mamme” and more. I would gladly offer some years from my own life if I could see you again for just one second.

I shudder at thinking at your last walk and the Hob’s sufferings upon your entry to the gas chambers. Whenever I hear the song “Yiddische Mamme” , the song they wrote for me, I get goose-pimples and I’d like to cry.

If I could stand at your grave I’d sing for you a song we sang together and which represents your character

“Who’ll find an able woman? She is more valuable than pearls
She is good to him, never bad, all her life long...
Honor and shine is her attire
She laughs as she thinks of the future
Her mouth she opens with wisdom, her tongue transmits kindness
Many able women exist but you surpass them all.”

37) 1880-1957, Jewish writer of short stories, playwright

My father

My father, Moses Graber was born in the Hungarian town Nyirgyulaj on 17. December 1903. He was brought up in Nyirbátor. I was not very close to my father in my childhood. This has changed when the persecution of the Jews started and our survival depended on our co-operation. This improved our relationship. We understood each other and maintained our good contacts in the concentration camps as well. We had to rely on each other and we survived mainly because of our mutual care for each other.

As a child I thought my father was a pedant. Himself a dominant, busy and assiduous character, he could not stand idlers. He was not too religious during his youth. Despite of pains and persecutions, he was always bright and cheerful. His small stature did not cause him a special inferiority complex. Just the opposite, he always got on quickly and very well with his fellow men. His sparkling black eyes and his well-kept black beard gave him an impressive appearance (see page 134). He mostly wore fashionable gent's suits, to his shirts hard collars and a suitable tie. Before he went to the Synagogue on Sabbath evening, he removed superfluous hairs from his face with a pair of tweezers. His shoes were shining. My mother always inspected his appearance before he was allowed to go.

His friends were often younger than himself. They plaid a game of rummy at our home at the weekends. This game of cards fascinated me and I asked my father to teach me the rules. He aid: " You are far too stupid for it, it is no use trying to explain it to you. In addition, will you please remember that any occupation outside of praying your psalms is a pure waste of time?" (For one reason or another, psalms occupied in his mind the highest position for which he constantly reminded to recite psalms.) As in his view I was unable to play rummy, I wanted to learn to play chess. I joined the chess club, where most of the members were of course, Jewish. I watched them to play for many hours until I grasped the rules so far that I could play myself as well. I asked my father at a suitable opportunity: "Are you prepared tp play a game of chess against me?" He answered: "Chess is only played by Goyim!" **38)**

38) Non-Jews.

My father was had an introverted personality. He never told me anything about his own childhood; He was not interested what I was learning at school. Bringing up children was an area belonging to mother's responsibility. But, he was very much interested in my progress at

the Talmud Thora School. On Sabbath, he questioned me about the respective weekly section or he tested me on a problem dealt with by the Talmud. What is more, I had to undergo testing by my grandfather too.

My father was accident or disaster-prone. He was liable or disposed to suffer. All this started with an idiotic, fateful decision of my grandfather. After the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire after World War I., the inhabitants were entitled to select their citizenship of the respective successor state they wanted to live in. My grandfather applied for Hungarian citizenship for himself, for his wife and for his oldest son Berish. His two minor sons Moses and Zvi-Herschel he simply forgot. This resulted in a Kafkaesque situation. My grandfather, born in Poland, became a Hungarian citizen, while his two sons born in Hungary, Moshe and Zvi-Hershel became Polish citizens, at any rate according to the views of the Hungarian authorities.

When in 1939 the Hungarians under Governor Miklós Horthy passed the first anti-Jewish legislation, Jews with a foreign citizenship, or “stateless persons“ were hit first. My father lost his license to trade. He had to close his watchmaker’s shop he managed together with a Moses Fetmann, he went into partnership with a non-Jew, a Mr. Szekeres and had to give up that partnership as well.

Any work to support his family was all right for my father. At first, he worked in the dispatch department of a wholesale trader. Mr. Lefkovitz, the Rashekol of the Orthodox Community. Next, he worked for his friend, a Mr. Kellner in his gent’s outfitters store.

The Hungarian gendarmes made life difficult for father. He had to go into hiding as the new law demanded the expulsion the entire family together with the head. Therefore, my father was wanted by the authorities. He spent most of his time traveling by train between Nyirbátor and Budapest. My mother went round the Jewish tradesmen in Nyirbator and obtained orders from them to be supplied from Budapest. She received the parcels at the railway station for the individual customers and handed over my father the new orders. The railway conductors were mostly bribed and were on the lookout. If gendarmes approached the train, the conductors helped my father to go into hiding. Gendarmes visited our house practically every evening to search for my father and they tried to catch him in the synagogue as well. If my father succeeded to sneak in for the Sabbath, the Jeshiva students were ready to rescue him. At the end, he managed to obtain a residence permit in Budapest for a heap of money.

He now found a job at the lame Mr. Weiss’ tannery. This was the hardest job in his life and he could not do it for a longer period of time. Following that he bought a bicycle and sold small goods house to house in the surrounding villages. He made not much money so he

looked for a new job and was employed by the orthodox congregation to look after the Mikve. This was previously a job for non-Jews. When father was called up to do forced labor, I took over these duties, as mentioned before. He continued looking after the baths after he was discharged from the forced labor company, until his deportation to Auschwitz.

His brother Zvi-Hershel was also on the most wanted list of the gendarmes. He went through a form of a divorce to save his family from the expulsion. As a precautionary measure, his family took up his wife Hanna's maiden name and was henceforth called Kohels. Hershel wandered from one Jeshiva to the other. However, he was caught by the gendarmes at the end and brought to the Polish border, to be expelled from Hungary. As the Poles did not recognize his alleged Polish citizenship, the Hungarian gendarmes made a short process of the situation and shot Herschel on the Polish-Hungarian border.

After our return from the concentration camps, my father started a new life. He remarried and had four children. He opened a watch repair shop in Nyirbátor and moved with his family to Israel in 1957. First he lived in Beer-Sheva, later in Bnei-Brak.

While I was working on the first version of my memories, I read out to him some sections.

On arriving to the sections on the concentration camps he cried out: "How can you remember all these things?"

My father died in the blessed age of 91 on the 8. Sivan 5754 (7. June 1994, with his passing I lost not only a father but also a friend. Blessed be his memory.

Family home impressions

The festival days in our family home remain unforgettable. I would like to tell you especially about Purim, **39)** Pessach and Sukkoth.

Purim

On the first day of the month Adar (February/ March in the middle of which Purim is celebrated) we suspended a banner over the entrance door which said: “When Adar comes, plenty of joy comes along”. We were asking ourselves, how come that Purim is celebrated only one day long while Pessah, Sukkoth and Chanukka (the festival of lights in the winter) eight days long are celebrated.

39) A feast of merrymaking early springtime to commemorate the saving of the Jews by Queen Esther in old Persia from evil Hamman, a precursor of Hitler

Purim is celebrated by the Jews the world over, but many communities developed their own customs. At our place, the main festivities took place in the Synagogue. A carnival atmosphere developed, equipped with rattles for reading the Esther Roll. Whenever the name of the evil Hamman sounded, people trampled with their feet and made a noise with the rattles. Boys dressed as girls, girls dressed as boys. Some people dressed up as Chassids **40)** with fir-lined *Streimel* hats.

Several days before Purim, my mother baked all kinds of pastries, laid out the goodies on the bed and distributed them on plates to be presented to our friends and relatives (*Shlachmones*) for which they gave us kiddies Purim money,

At Purim evening there was a big meal at home but the main meal took place at the Rabbi's place. The Talmud *Bocher* climbed over the table and read out prepared lectures in rhymes. A Jewish Purim play was also performed. I still remember a number of Yiddish songs and a number of Yiddish Purim-sayings. Here is an example:

“Purim lasts only one day but a *Kabzan* (a poor bloke) you are the whole year long.”

The Yiddish language and culture was not widespread in Hungary. There were neither Yiddish school, nor theatres like in neighboring Poland and other East European countries. For this reasons it was a sensation in Nyirbátor, when a Yiddish Purim play was announced.

The performance took place in the town's one and only cinema. Its title was: "The Sale of Joseph". The actors were all local youth. A small boy who played the part of Benjamin, went round and round on the stage singing a sad song: "Joseph, Joseph, where are you?" The role of Jachzel the Jokester was played by Srultshe Gutmann. He entered the stage with a stuffed sheep in which he hid a bottle of beetroot juice. Then he grabbed hold of a large butcher's knife, said the proper blessing and cut the sheep's dummy's throat. He let the beetroot juice run out which was so realistic that first everyone was shocked but later ended up laughing.

Pessach

I was especially impressed by the pretty crockery we only used at Pessach. **41)** My mother went up to the loft before Pessach evening, and very carefully collected the crockery. Every one of us had a plate of a different colour and shape. The glasses, for the four glasses of wine on the Seder evening, were also different like the deep saucers from which we ate our matzoh, the unleavened bread, in milk with a special spoon that looked like a small ladle or trowel.

Although we celebrated two Seder evenings, like customary outside Israel, the second one was always somewhat different. The main attraction was the pinching of the *afikoman*, a special piece of matzoh, without which the Seder meal cannot be completed and for the return of which special conditions were made. After our Seder at home we went to the Rabbi's Seder where almost all members of the congregation were present.

Sukkoth

A few days before "Sukkoth" the Feast of Tabernacles, our house was converted into an art gallery. My mother was excelling herself in preparing the masterful decorations for the hut. Our hut had the most beautiful decorations in the whole town. I am glad I had learnt this art from her. Some of her patterns are used in the decorations for my own children.

40) "Devouts", members of the religious movement, the Chassids

41) Jewish Easter, to celebrate the Exodus from Egypt with "Seder" (Ordnung)
referring to the prescribed order of the texts and meals

Margit Sarkadi

Margit was our household help. I have no idea how and when she joined us. I only know that her name was Margit Sarkadi and that she was born in the Hungarian town Hajduszoboszló. She was a member of the Protestant Church and a regular churchgoer. On Sundays and Christian holiday she always went to church. She was known in our town only as Margit Graber. She was a simple woman who never went to school and was of course unable to read or write. Margit got used to our way of life and helped my mother to run the household. She slept in the storage room. She squandered her little wages she received from my mother on my sister for whom she purchased all kinds of snack-snack and clothes.

Margit knew everything what went on in our house. She soon learnt the Hebrew Morning Prayer for children by heart and she made sure that we recited it each morning. If we dodged one of the blessings, she blabbed out the secret.

She knew all the Jewish ritual food laws and knew we were not allowed to ask her to desecrate the Sabbath by performing some tasks but she also knew that as a non-Jewish person she was allowed to do all things out of her own initiative, if she wanted to. For instance, to light a fire in the oven, if we were suffering because of the bitterly cold weather. If we asked her on a Sabbath to light the fire, she refused to do it, because she knows that we were committing a sin. One-day before the Seder evening my father sold her all leavened produce to be found in our house. **42)** My father set out a contract of sale, which was read out. She attended carefully to the text and she took the matter very seriously. She guarded the contract and the key to the pantry like a lioness.

When matters grew for the Jews from bad to worse and incidents especially those involving Jewish children became more and more common. Margit started to accompany my little brothers to Cheder and went to pick them up after school as well. Woe betides to the Goy who dared to trouble my little brothers. Margit responded with a hell of a cry and attacked him/her with a stick she carried. When we were deported to the Ghetto, Margit ran about the town quite confused. After our return from the concentration camp we found her a changed woman. She grew old and broken down in body and soul, especially after he heard that the rest of the members of the family were murdered. She continued to work for father's new family. After my father and his family immigrated to Israel, Margit remained in Hungary on her own, a lonely woman. She reached an old age and died in a home for old people.

42) During Pessach, nothing leavened must be kept in the house. For this reason, all these are symbolically sold to non-Jews, to formally escape the responsibility before God.

The first deportation from Hungary

The pro-Nazi Prime Minister, László Bárdossy, who took over the Government in 1941 (executed after the war as a war criminal), made the Hungarian Parliament pass a racist legislation on 2. August that got its bearings from the German Nürnberg Laws **43**). The first victims of the new legislation were Jews with foreign citizenship. They had now been declared stateless persons. We belonged to that category.

As recently as in the same month 16,000 or 18,000 Jews had been deported to Poland, the most of them from Karpathorussia, occupied two years ago by Horthy's Hungarian troupes. **44**) The Jews were deported to Kamenecz-Podolszk and most of them murdered on the spot. Our family, together with some other Nyirbátor-families, was locked up in the prison cells in the basement of the town hall. We were deported after ten days time under inhuman conditions in cattle trucks to a small town called Havasalja on the Polish-Hungarian border, accompanied by Hungarian gendarmes. This was the way most deportees had to go to Poland where they faced their extermination. A couple of hundred of us were kept in a closed-down sawmill. We had to sleep on the concrete floor that still had railway tracks in them. We had to use some padding, not to feel them. The local peasants sold us some foodstuffs, and occasionally we found "butter packages" i.e. balls made of rags with butter spread over them. After our arrival to Havasalja the Poles closed their border and no more deportees were let through. The Hungarians kept us in their provisional interment camp in the hope to be able to convince the Poles to open their border. My father belonged at that time to the Hungarian Auxiliary Jewish Forced Labor Service was sent to us, accompanied by a sergeant major. He succeeded in bribing the non-commissioned officer. As a result, he was allowed to take of his yellow discriminatory armband. He was even allowed to attach the sergeant major's insignia to himself and as a result, when he arrived to the camp, he managed to achieve our release. My father returned to Budapest where he obtained for his family a permission to stay in the country, while we traveled across Karpathorussia, in the hope to find a relative. Much to our sorrow, we found no one. They all had been deported earlier on. Thus we went back to Nyirbátor where we could stay till 1944. In summer 1944 we were again deported, that time to Auschwitz.

43) From the year 1935.

44) Viz. Eitan Porat, Stimme der toten Kinder – Voice of the Dead Children

From the Carpathes via Auschwitz, Nordhausen and Bergen-Belsen to Israel 1928-1996 Konstanz 1996, in German language

The Shoah 45)

45) Hungary was occupied by German troops on a Sunday, 19.March 1944. Eichmann's representatives, Hermann Krumej 46) and Dieter Wisliceny 47) turned up in the office of the Jewish Congregation of Budapest and demanded that a meeting of the leaders of the community should be called. On 21. March 1944 a Council of the Jews under the President of the Congregation, Mr. Samu Stern was constituted, comprising eight persons. On 22. March 1944 the new Prime Minister's, Mr. Döme Sztójay's swearing-in took place. Under his leadership, the Council of Ministers released a number of anti-Jewish laws.

At the same time, the Germans made themselves home in the building of the Nyirbátor Banking Corporation. Next day we had a renewed shock. The gendarmes stood in front of our door, to pick up mother and to accompany her to the German Headquarters. We had no idea why and when she'll be back. As it turned out to be, she was the only person in the whole town who could act as an interpreter between the Germans and the Hungarians. She came home by the evening and said: "I have now interpreted for the Germans: I hope I can do the same soon for the Russians!"

We, the Jews of our little town had no sense of foreboding what went on in Budapest. We were hit by the first compulsory measure. Every Jew had to wear a yellow mark in the shape of a David's Star that had to be sewn on the outer clothing at breast height. No Jew were allowed to be seen on the streets without this Jewish Star. As a result, the Jews' safety was endangered and the persecution and humiliation increased. Mob rule was introduced with the aid of the soldiers stationed locally and the number of attacks on Jews coming from the Synagogue drastically increased. The police turned blind eyes to them. Law and justice were abolished. As early as 1942, the Jews of the younger generation between 15 and 18 were called up to do auxiliary labour instead of the paramilitary service "Levente" meaning "young warrior", a title we apparently did not deserve. This was only an excuse and a sample what was to follow in the not too distant future... One day we had to turn up at the courtyard of the town hall where we were handed digging spades, hoes, and hammers. No more parading for us, Jewish lads, with the hitherto used wooden rifles!

45) Hebrew: the Catastrophe

46) Born in 1905, SS officer of RSHA, sentenced in 1965 to five years, 1969 to lifelong imprisonment

47) 1911-1948, Adolf Eichmann's authorised representative for Slovakia, Greece and Hungary. Executed in 1948 in Bratislava by hanging.

48) 1874-1947

49) Viz. David Guttman, Difficult Return – Life and Sufferings in Hungary... Konstanz 1997 in German language

We had to form a company and parade across the town centre with the gardening tools on our shoulders wearing a yellow armband as a humiliation, to indicate that henceforth the Jews will have to work. “Stinking Jews” and similar expressions were hurled at us. I felt like a zoo animal in a cage, observed by the public like an exotic creature. Jews did not dare to show themselves while our parade went on.

We were under the command of non-commissioned officers, some of whom only just now joined the Arrow-Cross movement, the Hungarian Pendant of the Swastika-Units. Their leader was no one else but my former class master at the general comprehensive school, a person who was only yesterday teaching me morality and now he stood in front of me in the uniform with the Arrow-Cross armband, behaving like a ruffian and not wanting to know me any longer. Our task was to tear up the asphalt road covering from the town center to the railway station, in a distance of approx. one kilometer, to lift it off, to provide the road with a stone covering and to fasten it with sand.

As our work was unsatisfactory, skilled road-builders had to be employed to finish the job. I don't know why, but henceforth we were left alone until our deportation. We were more or less completely isolated in our little town just as in the other small localities and we had no idea what went on and what contacts the leaders of the Jewish community and Jewish organizations maintained with the Germans. The Red Army stood at the borders of Hungary. Our only hope was a quick Russian occupation before the Germans did something evil to us. But the Germans did not allow themselves to be deterred by the military situation. They continued with their devilish work of destruction.

The Pessach evening of the year 1944 was the most dismal one in my whole life. The atmosphere was gloomy as it was believed that we should possibly be deported into another country. After the Seder meal we did not visit the Rabbi, as usual. Every Jew barricaded himself in his own den and awaited his destiny.

Amidst the Pessach festival lasting one week, Arrow-Cross troops dressed in civilian clothes but wearing the usual armbands turned up in town, led by a stocky fellow with a truncheon in his hand. They made themselves home in the Town Hall and demanded that the presidents of the Jewish Congregations report with the full list containing the names of the all members. As a matter of fact, such a list already existed. It was compiled by the local authority some time ago and contained the names of christened Jews and their descendants as well. The dreaded gendarmes (csendőrség) received the task to pick up the Jews. They called at the Jews' dwellings, checked whether all inhabitants were present or not, and commanded that everyone should report immediately in front of the Synagogue. We received one day

time to pack a few things, not more than we were able to carry. We had to assemble again at the Synagogue.

We collected our things in a hurry. I hid our family photos in my grandfather's loft. I buried my mother's diamond ring in the basement. Much later, on our return from the concentration camps, we found that all these valuables were disappeared. Immediately after the deportation of the Jews, the Goyim had searched their homes and stole everything they found. They even dug up the yards and lifted the floorboards to find hidden property.

No Jew dared to risk his life by escaping or to go into hiding. The Goyim did not hesitate to betray him. Having been assembled in the courtyard of the Synagogue next day, we were transported to the Jewish Community Center in the county town of Nyiregyháza. Jews coming from 61 villages and towns in the district, a total of 17, 580 people including 5000 persons from Nyiregyháza itself were concentrated in the Center. In a few days' time, we had been distributed in the area of three large farms where some emergency accommodations for the three ghettos were created.

We came to a large farm called Simapuszta, secured with barbed wire around it. Our accommodation was on the threshing-floor, in the cow houses and in the horse stables. The ghetto was guarded by the Hungarian gendarmes. There was no in or out for anybody. We were completely cut off from the world. We were in luck with the weather as it was nice and warm. We walked about in the area day after day. We even had a family event. My brother Dov-Ber reached Bar Micva age but no one took the slightest bit of notice of it.

Those having a beard decided to shave it off to avoid unnecessary trouble, as anti-Semites considered the Jews' beard a sign of the "evil Jew". Thus, beardless Jewish leaders of the congregations turned up, dressed in the attire of the Goyim. As a result, we hardly knew them any longer. This also applied to the Rabbi, Aaron Teitelbaum who kept only his bushy moustache and wore a fur cap to go with it, like a Hungarian peasant.

The day of destiny

On 25.May 1944 we received the command to pack our belongings and immediately after we were driven to the temporary railway station. I had some experience in 1941 with the deportation. I knew the humiliations and the torments in a goods wagon i.e. a cattle truck. This time too, we were on the way for several days and nights. But this time, I was three years older and had people around me with whom I grew up and had spent all my days. This made everything much harder to bear. On the other hand, I consoled myself with the hope that we shall escape hell again, just like the last time.

The close vicinity of the Red Army gave further nourishment to these false hopes and illusions. Even to most clever, with the best education. had no idea what was awaiting us. The general view was, supported by the remarks of the guard, that we shall be transferred to a labour camp where we'll have to stay till the war was over.

The entire action was conducted by Hungarians and especially by gendarmes. I saw the cattle trucks I already knew. Their doors stood open, but this time the grated-up ventilation holes were covered to stop us seeing the stations' names and to find out which way the transport is going. 70 to 80 people were forced into each carriage.

Every transport comprised of 3000 to 3500 people and every day four trains left our district on the way to Auschwitz. Two buckets were placed in each truck, one with drinking water, the other to relieve our selves. Accompanied by much noise and yelling, the sliding doors were banged shut and bolted. I had the feeling of having hit over my head with a mallet. Everything went black in front of my eyes. It took some time to get used to the semi-darkness inside the cattle truck. The children started to cry for fear. We organized ourselves in such manner that the children and old persons could lay down while the younger ones took turns in looking through the gaps to know which way we were going.

Much later, I found out some more details about our transports. Occasionally, some preliminary selections took place and children were put into separate trucks in the company of old people. The Germans intended to break us in body and mind, to make us much weaker before we arrived to Auschwitz. They considered attacks of armed resistance fighters which were already active at some places outside of Hungary. For this reason they wanted to get each transport to Auschwitz within three days.

They also attended to the publicity work with their diabolical logic and therefore they pretended to take care of the humanitarian aspects to a certain degree as well. In doing so, they even mislead their Hungarian allies too. As a proof, they recorded a scene with their

movie cameras, showing Hungarian gendarmes brutally driving the Jews into the cattle trucks with cruel force. On the arrival of the same transport to Košice, German supervisors took over. The movie continued to show how kindly the smiling Germans treated the Jews. This movie was later shown to the representatives of the Red Cross, with the intention to malign the Hungarians.

Despite the German efforts to cover up our direction, we were able to recognize certain place names and to deduct that we were in Poland. But our exact destination we did not know. A number of old, infirm people died during the trip. They were not up to the strains of the journey.

Thoughts before the entry to hell

Our teachers in the Talmud Thora School had explained to us the connection between crime and punishment. The criminals and evils shall get their just punishment after their death.

Hell is in Heaven, behind the Mountains of Darkness, and the evils and the wicked shall burn in the fire of Hell.

I'm standing now at the entrance to hell and I'm still alive, in our world. I don't know what crimes I committed. But what were the crimes of the many-many thousands of little children who were innocently put to death?

Jewish folklore represents the Angel of Death as a frightful murdering figure. As a child, I imagined the Angel of Death as a monster with horns and protruding set of teeth.

I am now facing Ashmedai **50)** the horrible King of Demons but he looks like an ordinary man, the son of a civilized European nation. But still, he has the power to decide over the destiny of thousands of people. Who shall live and who shall die.

An unresolved question still torments me, why? Why have they destroyed my family and millions of others? We had not declared a war against them. We have never even heard of them and have not done any harm to them. Even today when I meet Germans, I put this question to them, but there is no answer.

Auschwitz, 28th May 1944 51)

50) Asmodeus, prince of demons in the Solomon's legend

Auschwitz-Birkenau (51)

„Arbeit macht frei“ („Work liberates“) was written above the entrance gate of the concentration camp. Our train stopped at the ramp in Birkenau. The doors were thorn open and the guardsmen started to push and hit the people that had just arrived, among shrill shouts “Out, out with you!” to get them quickly out of the trucks. People in concentration camp attire I saw here the first time talked to my surprise Jiddish. I cannot understand their silence to this day. Why didn’t they gave us the smallest sign? They helped the aged and the infirm in leaving. When I left the train, I could hardly see, the daylight was so dazzling. A band of musicians dressed in concentration camp uniforms played some music **52)**

Surely, another German ploy. We had to leave behind all our personal belongings. To set our minds at ease, we were promised that everything will be handed back to us later.

Somehow my eyes fell on an old Jew who climbed out of the wagon. He did not follow the instructions of the Germans but pressed the velvet cover containing his Tallis and the Tefillim to his breast. An SS-soldier noticed him, ran up to him, tore the velvet bag from the old man’s hand and threw it full of anger between the wheels of the train. I observed this desecration of the holy objects and awaited an answer to it from heaven. After my views of that time, the SS man should have perished on the spot. But nothing happened. I said to my father, disappointed, in Jiddish: “S ist kein Gott!” (“Father! There is no God”)

The milling mass was great, a real ocean of people. Families fought to be able to stick together. Lost children were searching here and there for their parents, crying bitterly, but no one took any notice of them in the tumult.

51) Viz. Danuta Czech, *Kalendarium der Ereignisse in Konzentrationslagern Auschwitz – Birkenau 1939-1945*, Hamburg 1989, page 787, in German language

52) Viz. Jacques Stroumsa, *Geiger in Auschwitz*, Konstanz 1993 (*A violinist in Auschwitz*) in German language

The Germans separated men from women. Now two columns moved side by side forward. We were driven with blows to the place of selection. They succeeded in changing us into a dull herd of cattle, obeying every incomprehensible yell of command. Had one not understood

the shouts, his comprehension was improved by blows and thrusts. We were driven along with the stream without knowing, where to and what their plans were with us.

On approaching the place of selection, I noticed that the stream parted into two. But I still not grasped the meaning of this procedure. SS-officers stood in front of us, who who carried out the “selection”, a conception that entered the Shoáh’s encyclopedia. As I said, this was my first direct encounter with Satan. With a sign of a finger to the right or to the left, many thousands of human beings were condemned.

I saw it in a flash that my father was sent to the left and I followed him instinctively. I turned round to look for the rest of the members of our family and I saw that they were directed toward the other direction. I could just see my mother to go away with my younger brother Levy on her arms. The other three kiddies with my cousin Jossele and my grandmother hold each other’s hands for fear to be separated from each other. I called loud after them: “Mamme, mamme!” but my voice did not reach their ears, This scene, as they disappeared from my view, made a permanent mark in my memory and it returns from time to time. I think it’ll never fade. The fact that I could not even take my leave from them, torments me to this very day. At that point in time however, I had no idea where they were taken and consoled myself with the idea that we soon see each other again. A second selection was performed at the camp area. Every one of us was asked about his profession or trade. I told them I was a locksmith and father said the same. They showed me a venire caliber. As luck would have it, I already knew this instrument as I had used one before at Klein’s, the locksmith’s in Nyirbátor so I could demonstrate how it works. I quickly explained the principle my father too. As a result, he too passed the examination and we remained together

Another ploy with the objective to ease our minds was that we made to pass a barrack with many children peacefully playing at the courtyard.

In the camp area everything was organized in a military way. When we moved from A to B, we had to form rows of three and follow the yells of military commands “Left! Right! One, two!” It did not matter whether you understood German or not – you had to obey or you were for it. The most frightful occasions were the line-ups for the roll-call. At every roll-call a further selection could have taken place. Sometimes they let us stand there for hours and hours without end, without knowing what was to be expected. I saw many people in prisoners’ dresses and thought, they came from somewhere else. They promised us to send us to work and surely, we were only waiting for the means of transportation. But then a new command came to form groups of three and we marched off amidst accompanying yells to a barrack called the “Sauna”.

In this empty and barren barrack we had to form a circle and we received a firm order to empty our pockets, to pull out everything valuable from its hiding place in our clothing, and to drop it into a big blanket spread out in the middle. The gangsters who surrounded us with their weapons pointing at us, behaved like real robbers. They made us tremble with fear. They warned us that any one who'd attempt to hide anything valuable or to leave it hidden in his clothing, is risking his life. I pulled out my hidden, sawn-in bank notes, money my mother saved up from her own earnings.

After that we had to undress and go to a neighboring room, stark naked. Our hair was cropped. We then had to climb on a bench going round along the wall and we underwent a treatment like on the conveyor belt. They shaved off our hair, disinfected us with a spray, especially at the formerly hairy spots. The procedures were accompanied by explanations that Jews are filthy and had to be instructed how to take care of their personal hygiene. The rinsing with disinfecting agent caused terrible burning of the skin. Next we had to sit down on a chair and barbers came, not quite experts, shaved a two feet wide strip off our hair between our forehead and our neck, which was called by the Germans "louse avenue". In the next room we received our prisoners' dress, comprising a pair of trousers, a jacket cum shirt, and a kind of a beret. The pieces of clothing had no pockets, we all felt humiliated in this prisoners' dress. It was not easy to see grown up, honest people in their humiliation. In order to overcome our embarrassment and to divert ourselves, first we made fun of how we looked like. At first, we were allowed to keep our shoes. We received a metal soup plate with a hole at its rim, to hang it to our waist, a can and a light alloy spoon.

As we did not stay long in Auschwitz, they did not tattoo a number on our arms like the rest of the prisoners. Instead, we received textile stripes showing our prisoner number and a triangle on a yellow ground, the sign for a Jew. Father received number ▼ 42648, I number ▼42649. One stripe had to be sewn on the left-hand side of jacket over one's breast, the other on the right-hand side of the trousers, over one's knee. Having completed all these stages, we had to wait outside, to await the next roll call.

A man joined our group who had the title of a count but was deported to Auschwitz because of his Jewish origins. This count had a number of I. World War military medals, among them the Iron Cross as well. The meaning of this cross was so great that the German soldiers were obliged to salute him. The count attached the orders to his prisoner's clothing, in the hope to receive proper, humane treatment. But when the SS commandant noticed it, he rushed to the count, full of anger and tore off the medals from his breast, yelling: "You humiliate and dishonor the German people and my country!"

The speech

The SS non-commissioned officer, who became our commandant, was a primitive person with unlimited powers. A simple, uneducated peasant type of a fellow, whose hatred and despotic allures had no limits. At his command, we had to line up in front of the barrack from which we came. He prepared the place by placing a packing case next to the wall he used as a pedestal. To demonstrate his superiority, he climbed o the packing case and he started his grand speech.

He declared in a loud voice charged with emotion: “From now on you ceased to be human beings! You are sub-humans! That is why you have no names only a number! If I want anything from you, I’ll address you by your number!” I thought the numbers were his salvation because the illiterate person would have been unable to read our names from a piece of paper. He pulled out his gun amidst his speech and said: “There is on God who is above me! I can shoot any one of you without having to answer for it.”

Having finished his magnificent address we had to line up again, forming three-fold rows and to march to our accommodation unit. It was a long barrack with living cells on both side the so-called “boxes”. These wooden boxes were located on the top of each other, like shelves in a storeroom. Several persons were forced to find place in each box. Inside a box it was impossible to stand or, to sit. You could only idly lie down. By stretching out on the wooden planks without any upholstery, we developed aches and pains in our entire body. This was the reason why I soon reported as a voluntary “shit carrier” for the disposal and emptying of the “toilet bucket“the “Scheisskübel” as the Germans called it. I carried out the bucket together with a mate. Not very far from our block had we discovered that a number of very similar buckets were standing there full with food. I gave my mate a hint to exchange the two buckets. Fortunately, no one noticed us hurrying to the block with the bucket. We distributed the nourishing soup between us all and managed to empty the bucket quickly and reinstate it s a toilet bucket.

The “Blockälteste” (the block commandant) who was the boss of the block in question was usually a Jew. Almost all Capos too spoke Yiddish, as it was important that the prisoners understood them. In cruelty, however, there was not much to chose between them and the German supervisors. The only visible difference was that the Capos carried a stick whereas the Germans had shotguns.

In the middle of the block, along the entire floor, there was a kind of a horizontal chimney. Its opening faced the block entrance. When a person faced punishment, this was the place where he had to put his head in, while his naked backside was thrashed.

After a few days we had to line up again. We received an extra ration bread (“a Razié Broit” in Yiddish camp lingo), marched through the concentration camp door and a waited for the trucks. While a waiting for our transportation, my father remarked: “ Do you know that today is the Weekly Festival? True enough, we spent the Weekly Festival of the Year 5704 (1944) in Auschwitz. **53)**

53) Weekly Festival i.e. Whitsun, Pentecost 1944. Viz. Danuta Czech, Kalendarium, Hamburg 1989 in German language

The Fünfteichen Concentration Camp

“Fünfteichen” **54**) was one of the many auxiliary camps of Gross-Rosen in Lower Silesia. The place does not appear on any map, because Fünfteichen was specially constructed for the German armament manufacture. The site supervision was responsible direct to the NS Minister for Armament and War Industry Mr. Albert Speer. Armament production was the task of Krupp.

We were brought directly from Auschwitz to Fünfteichen, to serve as slaves in the armament industry. We were divided in two groups: the Speer Group and the Krupp Group. We, my father and I, came to the Speer Group, doing construction work. The living accommodation in the concentration camp corresponded to these groups. At the same time, Jews have been transferred to the camp from Poland. They came mainly from the Ghetto of Lodz. For me, that was the first encounter with Jews coming from another country. Many Hungarian Jews belonged to my group who did not understand Yiddish. These communication difficulties had their impact on the relationship between the Poles and the Hungarians. Fortunately, I spoke Yiddish and understood a little Polish as well that I had picked up from my mother. As I was once again hungry, I started to look for some crumbs in my pockets. A Polish Jew who spent some time in the camp already, noticed what I was doing and he remarked in Yiddish: “ Du Hirensi! Du hast noch Schmutz in die Oiren fun derheim und du kratzt schon in die Keschenes?” In English; „You son of a bitch, you still have dirt behind your ears from home, and you already scrape inside your pocket?” His anger was caused by the circumstances that these people already suffered many years in the concentration camp whereas we arrived from the land of plenty only yesterday.

We became members of the carrier team on the construction site and had to offload bags of concrete from the goods train, which came right up to the building site. The rules were that no walking was allowed on the site, only running. This meant that all jobs had to be performed at the double, thus the offloading of the concrete bags as well. We had to run with bent backs to the railway truck, two prisoners dropped a concrete bag of 50kg weight on my shoulders and I had to run with it to the concrete mixer, off-load the bag and carry on running, non-stop, always round and round, on the double.

54) Meleschwitz or Fünfteichen (Laskovitz or Markstaedt) District Breslau Viz. Martin Weinmann (Ed) The National-Socialist Concentration Camp System, Frankfurt 1990 in German language

The overseers drove us with their whips from the center of the circle and whenever someone dared to slow down, he was immediately attacked with the whip and sometimes even threatened with the Parable. This situation reminded me on the story in the Pessach Haggada that has shown how the Egyptian slave-drivers drove on the Hebrew slaves with their whips. This association of ideas must have occurred to someone else as well, because suddenly he started to sing “We were slaves”, the Pessach-song **55**).

After this job was completed, my father and I were transferred to another group, to drag along steel tubes. The Germans did not spare any effort to complete the building construction as soon as possible. They mobilized the work force and the machines. Dozens of concrete mixers were operational on the construction site. The concrete paste was pressed through interconnected steel tubes up to the height of the moulds. Occasionally we had to relocate the tubes to a new spot. For this purpose we had to dismantle the tubes, rinse them and to transfer them to the required place. My partner in this job was no other than my father and as he was smaller than me, he had to carry more load. If I discovered a wild plant while dragging along the tube, I stopped, laid down the tube and ate the plant. The famine forcing a man to humiliate himself for the sake of a piece of bread also induces one to forget the consequences of his actions.

Hunger and suffered left their marks. We quickly lost weight, only skin and bones remained. The dragging along of the steel tubes on my shoulder made my skin bleed.

My first encounter with the Angel of Death

I received a new task. I had to stand on a two story high building pillar over the casting form and to push the concrete paste oozing from a tube into the wooden form. Here too, SS-guards supervised us on the left hand and the right hand side, who never ceased watching us, not for one second. I was pushing the concrete with the stroke of a machine and for fatigue I almost collapsed.

When on one occasion I stopped for a second, the guard noticed it and did not hesitate to push me into the concrete paste already in the form. In the meantime the flow of the concrete continued unabated and I was sinking in it deeper and deeper until the concrete mass reached my breast. My father succeeded with the aid of another prisoner to pull me out of it in the last second. I was not the only one thrown into the concrete and not every one of the victims were lucky enough to escape.

55) Viz. Anna Ornstein: Slavery and Liberation – Jewish Destinies from Hungary. Modern Pessach Stories, Konstanz 2001 , in German language

I had communication problems with the Germans. I could not speak German and Yiddish did not always help. Whenever we spoke Yiddish, the Germans became suspicious, as they believed we are taking the Mickey.

But, in order that the Germans should not understand what we were talking about, a special language has been developed in the camp, a new language. The words to be substituted were based on Yiddish terms. I found out much later that this new language was universally known in almost every concentration camp. For example, to substitute the word “Goy” (non-Jew) , the Yiddish expression “Orel” (not circumcised) was used. If the guard approached, the sign for six was given for the Yiddish number “shesh” to indicate “Ssh” i.e. silence. The individual guards received nicknames, e.g. Amalek, **56)** Ashmedai, Haman **57)** Rasha (villain), I had to learn some special terms from the Jews originating in Poland as well, i.e. the Polish words in their Yiddish. For example, in marching in rows of three, the man behind me remarked: “*kuze nicht*” (Don’t swirl up any dust!). I have also heard hitherto entirely unknown curses as well, like “Oirenbeisser” (ear biter) or “Hirensi” (son of a bitch) and “Shiss a wint!” (Beat it!)

Most of us had reached the stage of absolute exhaustion. Any one who was not up to the hard conditions, died right at the beginning, like some of my ex schoolmates who had a sheltered life at home. Fortunately, I was fed at home like a peasant. Therefore, I proved to be more robust, I was able to bear the suffering, could eat grass and/or potato peeling which was a special treat to me.

Fortunately we have finished our duties at Fünfteichen and were transferred to another camp near Görlitz.

56) Amalekites, enemies of Israel (5 Moses 25, 17-19)

57) Evil character in the Esther legend, who tried to annihilate the Jews in ancient Persia

Görlitz-Biesnitzer Grund

The Görlitz-Biesnitzer Grund Concentration Camp was erected in the first half of 1943 on the grounds of shutdown brickworks in the town Görlitz, Lower Silesia. The Camp Görlitz was a subsidiary camp of the main concentration camp, Gross Rosen **58)** At the beginning approx. 900 prisoners were kept here but in a short period of time, the number of Jews rose to 1200, men and women. The prisoners had to work in a large armament factory (the Wagon and Machine Factory Ltd, Görlitz page 135)

In 1945 the town Görlitz had 100,000 inhabitants. After the occupation of Görlitz by the Red Army at the end of World War II, the town was divided. The one on the right hand banks of the River Neisse was transferred to Poland and was re-named Zgorzelec. The part on the left-hand bank of the river remained with East Germany.

The commander of the district, Dr. Bruno Malitz with his official title “District Commander Highest People’s Storm Leader of the Circuit Görlitz” and the “Bürgermeister” (Mayor) of Görlitz, Dr. Hans Meinshausen, ruled high-handed over Görlitz.

Malitz was officially responsible for WUMAG, the armament factory and the concentration camp as well. He was also the supreme commandant of the SS unit of the circuit. Both Nazis had been caught after the war, tried, condemned to death in 1948 and executed. (Page 138).

58) E.Jäckel et al Encyclopaedia of the Holocaust München 1995 (in German)

The concentration camp

As mentioned before, the camp was established in 1943 on the grounds of shutdown brickworks. The only building that still stood was the kiln with its high chimney. The concentration camp was surrounded by two high voltage barbed wire fences, with a trench between them. A guard stood at the entrance to the camp. The soldiers' barracks were located not very far from the entrance, on the right hand side of the camp. On the left hand side there was a road leading to the women's camp, completely isolated from the men's camp. On a hill, at the other end of the camp were the living quarters of the Head Camp Commander, Zunke. The barracks or baser aid, blocks of the prisoners were standing side by side. Every block had a "Blockältester" (block commandant). In filling these positions in most camps the Germans used the services of Jews who received privileges, better conditions, and more nourishing food, if they supported the horrible regime. These persons were the Capos and the block commandants.

The so-called "Appelplatz" (assembly place) was in the middle of the camp surrounded by the blocks, also the kitchen with a sink in front of it, the pigsty and the sick room also called the "mortuary" because not many prisoners had left the place alive. The blocks contained rows of bunk beds with one jute sack filled with straw to represent a mattress and a single blanket for two. The oven stood in the middle of the block.

We had been transported from Fünfeichen to Görlitz in Lorries. We were in luck because groups coming from other camps had to walk it and many prisoners never made it, they died on the way. Our arrival was celebrated by military pomp. We had to march in step in rows of five through the main gate direct to the assembly place. Our group comprised Hungarian and Polish Jews. The present inhabitants assembled not too far away from us in the hope to find some relatives or friends among the newly arrived prisoners. But every contact with the present inhabitants was prevented by the guard. All the important persons, the bosses were there: the camp commander Zunker, Sedlak the camp supervisor, Hermann Tschech, the "Lagerälteste and Jakob (Jankel) Tannenbaum, the camp Capo.

We received our orders in Yiddish from Jakob Tannenbaum, who acted as the main speaker. He issued a warning according to which any infringement of the camp regulations will be punished by death. At the beginning, I was glad that at long last we have a commander who speaks Yiddish. This could have been an advantage but unfortunately, I was mistaken. Much to my despair, my hopes were so wrong that quite often I wished we had a German boss instead of this Jankel Tannenbaum.

We were divided in two work-groups, one for engineering, and the other for wagon construction. This organization determined our living accommodation in the barracks as well. I found it very important not to get separated from my father. Fortunately we succeeded in remaining in the same group.

After the blah blah came to an end, we had to remain standing at the assembly place for a long time, without any food or even a drop of water. We had no idea what was their plan with us. We were not allowed to talk with each other. Consequently every one of us was kept busy with his own thoughts. I looked round and saw a well-organized, clean camp, very different from the one I was coming from. The self-assurance of the Germans and the perfect organization made me skeptical. I was getting used to the idea of their “1000 years Reich”. There might be something in it, I thought. I had no idea what went on in the world and on the battlefronts. I thought that the Germans already occupied the whole world and I pondered about my possible destiny here under these circumstances. Was this, after all, the end?

The Germans planned to turn us systematically into slaves **59**) to disorientate us spiritually, to break our body and to bring us so far that we obey any of their commands without any opposition. As a matter of fact, a number of us broke down and resisted no longer. Amidst my pessimistic thoughts, I woke up with a start like from a bad dream. I convinced myself that I wanted to live. *“Do not despair in the hour of danger”* (Israel Kohen). This quotation became my guiding maxim. Obviously, this decision had a physical effect on me as well as I was now less tired from standing about for such a long time than before. I became master of my own destiny. There were no wise men here, no well-educated people who could have guided the rest. Every one of us was himself responsible for his own fate. I managed to convince my father as well. We decided to delete the words “hunger” and “famished” from our vocabulary as they did not bring anything but made matters only worse. We became even hungrier by talking about it. I developed a self-hypnosis to overcome all kinds of weaknesses and at the end, believe it or not, it helped.

Before we were allowed to leave the assembly place, Jakob Tannenbaum, the Capo introduced to us the gang of Blockältesten (block bosses). Some names I still remember: Wolkowitz, Gerschon, Angel, Eichner and Dwaski, all of them from Poland. The only one from Karpathorussia was a guy called Rosenfeld, a religious man, who was comparatively fair.

In addition to the factory work, our routine encompassed cleaning the camp courtyard and the latrines as well as potato peeling...

The worst job I ever had to perform was the loading of corpses on carts; the corpses had been collected in the basement, treated with lime. When 40 or 50 were ready, a haulage contractor came from the outside and transported the bodies to a crematorium in Görlitz, Zittau or even to Gross-Rosen. Sometimes I discovered people among the dead I used to know and said to my work-mate: "Look, who is here? Such and such!" I was almost happy to find the corpse of a person I used to know. The macabre aspect of this phenomenon did not worry me at that time. Our free-time occupation or hobby was lice hunting. The small creatures lived especially in the seams of our clothing. We scraped the lice out and cracked them between our fingernails. We also organized lice races for fun. We draw a straight line on the floor as a finish and placed bets with some small bits of bread whole louse will win. On a certain occasion the winner was so delighted that he picked up his louse, the winner, and replaced it into his garment while he murmured: "You bring me luck, I'll keep you!"

Occasionally new prisoners arrived. When a new group approached, the Polish and the Hungarian Jews started to argue. Are the new ones Hungarians? Are they Polish? The tension grew while they moved in. Although the guard kept them away from us, we could see them through the barbed wire fence. We tried to figure out with shouts the district of their origin. On one occasion, a group of women turned up from Poland, the wife of one of the inmates among them. They had not heard from each other for years. This couple succeeded to survive together.

Our shoes from the olden days have gone long ago. Instead, we received wooden clogs, like bloody Dutchmen. A hammertoe on my left foot is my souvenir I still have, the result of a too small clog I had received.

One day, my father was taken to the sick room. I was shocked when I heard the news because the sick room of the camp was a one-way street. Very few inmates turned up from there well again. I ran hysterically to the area and met a dying attorney from our town, Nyirbátor. When I lifted off his blanket, I saw a human skeleton. He was decaying already and next day he died. I picked up my father as quick as possible.

The Nazis deceived us whenever they could. For example, they occasionally distributed pre-printed postcards between us in order to prove their goodwill towards us. We were allowed to address these postcards to the remaining members of our families. We believed they were still kept in another camp somewhere. Little did we know or guess what really happened to them. My father added a few lines to my postcard and I some to his.

The postcards then arrived with the mysterious franking of a non-existent place,

59) Waldsee in Germany. A collector's item in this sick world...

Pigs, objects of envy

In the camp, pigs were fattened for the camp commander and his assistants. Tons and tons of garbage arrived from the town, which was used as pigs fodder. We envied the pigs for they received better grub than we: “Look, the pigs stuff themselves and you die of hunger!” I thought I had no choice; I must go and try to steal some of their grub. The pigsty was surrounded with barbed wire. To arrive to the garbage container, I crept on my tummy to it, my metal plate stretched out in front of me. The danger was that I wake up the pigs and they start to grunt and alarm the guard on duty on the top of the watchtowers. However, I was sure the soldiers will think it over twice before they open fire, for fear that they might hit the pigs and get into trouble with the camp bosses.

When I arrived to my target, I dipped my plate into the bin, filled it, and retrieved it. I cleaned it out while lying there and then refilled it for my father. I collected my father in the block, I made him to come with me and took him to a place where his plateful of fodder was awaiting. I asked him to clean it out on the spot. I did not want to leave any traces. I never told him where the fodder came from.

Quite a few prisoners paid with their lives for stealing pig fodder, one of them was called Schwimmer, whom I knew. He was caught red-handed and executed at the command of camp commander Sedlak. By nature, I’m rather anxious and on looking back at these tricks, I can hardly believe myself the keenness with which I was risking my life for a plate of pigswill. As a matter of fact, I must have believed that it would be better to get shot than to die slowly of hunger. “Do not mock the thief if he steals to still his hunger.” (Sayings 6.30)

Occasionally a deckchair was displayed at the concentration camp’s gate with a dead prisoner in it, obviously executed by shooting. He had a shield attached to his breast saying: “This is what happens to a prisoner who tries to escape!”

Waggon und Maschinenbau AG Görlitz (WUMAG) (Railway Wagon and Machine Factory Ltd)

The WUMAG Works of Görlitz **60)** contributed a great deal to Hitler's war efforts. They manufactured aircraft engines, diesel engines for trucks, pumps, optical systems, grenades and tanks.

The Görlitz-Biesnitzer Grund concentration camp was especially erected for the Jewish forced labor employed in this factory. The Works Manager (Obermeister) was responsible for the shops and for every department there was a foreman (Meister), wearing a swastika on his armband. The workers were continually supervised in the machine shops by armed soldiers.

60) Viz. Roland Otto, The Persecution of Jews in Görlitz under the Fascist Dictatorship 1933-1945 Görlitz 1990, Martin Weinmann page 644 in German language

My father and I were told to work in the Welding Department of the Wagon Factory. We were soldering steel plates and cut components to size with the oxyacetylene cutter. Fortunately, we learnt our job quickly. As a result, we could stay long at the same place.

In the hall, where we worked, some women were employed as well. Who was there among them? I discovered among them Pessil-Leah, the Rabbi's daughter from Nyirbátor, a good friend of my mother in the Majdan days. She had her cousin Fejge with her. I could not get near the two but we exchanged signs.

Italian and French forced labor men were also employed in the factory whose living conditions were obviously better than ours. Sometimes they brought us sandwiches, especially for the women, for whom they were sorry. The sandwiches were passed forward during artificially put up arguments and fights which diverted the guards' attention while others handed over the food.

If the Germans wanted to find out what the argument was all about, they received the short reply: "Nix verstehn!" although some of us spoke quite well German.

Our objective was to sabotage the production as far as possible. When we heard that the supply of the soldering metal was running low, we drilled a hole into the wall, poured the remainder into the hole and sang to the foremen as in a choir: "No more soldering metal, no more soldering metal!" Another group managed to cause a short circuit somewhere. A

number of these workmen were caught and summarily executed. One day, on coming to work, we saw a group of Czech forced labor men sitting in the entrance hall in front of the main gate of the shop, surrounded by Gestapo men. I found out that they were accused of espionage. The Germans had discovered a radio transmitter over which someone reported the number of vehicles produced. The entire group was executed.

The foreman responsible for me whose name I forgot, did something extraordinary. He was cursing and braying at us so that we trembled of fear. But then he demanded yelling like mad that I picked up a certain screw from the store and he explained it to me in which drawer that particular screw can be found. When I opened the drawer in question, I found a sandwich in it among the nuts and bolts, wrapped in a greaseproof paper. I quickly ate it and returned to my works bench. Unfortunately on that occasion I was not able to share the sandwich with my father as I did not want to endanger neither the foreman nor myself. Another time, we were alone in the store, the foreman and I. He asked me to show him my hands, he counted my fingers and said: “ You have five fingers on your hand like I do,. Why are you here?” **61)**

“That’s a good question,” I answered. “I would like to know the answer myself as well.” The foreman warned me and other prisoners to be very careful. As soon as we returned to our workplace, he continued cursing and yelling at us. Although he knew very well how dangerous this game was, occasionally he brought us food. We knew that he was risking his life.

After the liberation by the Red Army we found out the address of the kind foreman and told the Russian officers what a good man he was. They sent soldiers to his home and attached a command to his door in Russian language, forbidding the entry for Russian soldiers and prohibiting to cause any trouble to those living there. We wanted to repay his kindness and brought him radio sets and other household machines we picked up in other houses but the foreman begged us not to bring him any more of these things. Unfortunately I don’t remember his name and therefore we cannot report it to Yad Vashem **62)** to have it recorded under the Just.

61) Viz. Jacques Stroumsa, *The Violinist in Auschwitz*, Konstanz 1993, page 53, In German

62) Viz. Mordecai Paldiel, *There had been some just people as well – Saviours and saving of Jewish life in German-occupied Europe 1939.1945 – Konstanz 1999* in German

My second encounter with the Angel of Death

Occasionally, a Gestapo-committee came to inspect the factory to verify the prisoners' efficiency. Any one classified as "Muselman" **63**) i.e. he was close to death due to starvation and overwork was picked up and removed from the workplace. The Muselmen were weighed and any one weighing less than 30 kg (66lbs) was sent to the crematorium.

I was picked up during one of these selections together with 12 other prisoners. None of us reached the required 30 kg. I heard the members of the commission to discuss the situation. They decided that we can return to the camp without guards and the next day we shall be sent to Gross-Rosen to the central crematorium. Thus my destiny was settled, the second time. I am not able to reconstruct my thoughts and my feelings how I felt at that time. We did not talk on our way from the factory to the camp. I had some moments when I thought, it did not matter. At least, my sufferings shall come to an end.

I did not even remember that I never even said good bye to my father. The situation was a complete indifference to me. Somehow I only thought of mother and said to myself: "But before, I would like to see mother again!" In the morning, when we went to work, I had no trouble going there. But now, on the way back, I had to support myself by holding on to the wall. Yes, I became so apathetic that I did not even think of escaping or to beg for a hiding place in one of the houses. I staggered like a drunken man.

63) Concentration camp term for a run-down, skin and bones prisoner

On our arrival to the camp I immediately escaped from this group of people. I don't know, where did I get the strength to do so, I saw an old German sergeant-major to carry a table on his shoulders and I got hold instinctively the table's leg. I take it, this spontaneous action was so self-explanatory that not even the guard at the roadblock asked any questions. So we passed together the roadblock on the way to the Germans' kitchen that was isolated from the rest of the camp. At the kitchen we parted company. A Jewish cook called Salzer from the city of Košice in Slovakia addressed me in Hungarian and gave me a pot to clean. I had to sit down on the floor and slowly polish the pot and whenever the old German should ask me anything, I should answer that I am from Hungary and I am a cook. When the old German

returned, indeed, he asked me who I was and what I was doing. I answered exactly according to Salzer's advice.

I gained the confidence of the old German soldier who was responsible for the food supply to the Germans' kitchen. He took me along to the food store to fetch some foodstuff. Salzer warned me not to eat too much at the beginning but try to get used to it. I followed his advice.

I tried to make myself invisible in the kitchen, as I was afraid, Jankel Tannenbaum could figure it out where I got. I made myself useful in the kitchen work. Thanks to Salzer's aid the old German employed me, who from now on never went to the food stores without me. While he was climbing the ladder, I managed to organize some foodstuff. Sometimes he gave me some small items, too.

After one month's time I had to attend the assembly. I turned up wearing a white cap and an apron. My father recognized me from the distance and in his surprise he almost fell over. It never occurred to him, not in his dream, that I'm still alive. He was certain I shared the destiny of the other prisoners who were sent one day after the selection to the Gross Rosen Crematorium. When I succeeded to get closer to him, he said: "I already said Kaddish **64)** after you!"

One day Jankel Tannenbau discovered me and asked what I was doing. I was clever enough to answer that he was to ask the old German, who was the head of the kitchen, but Tannenbaum did not dare to confront the German.

That was the only occasion that I was not frightened of him. He even tried to ingratiate himself with me in order to get some special food rations. I made a deal with him. He was to get father out of the factory and occupy him in the camp's courtyard. I was afraid that father could fall victim of a similar selection like I almost did. Thus I was able to support father with some extra food. He received the task to clean the courtyard near the kitchen.

On one occasion I succeeded in getting for my father a pair of real leather shoes that I handed over to him with great joy. When he put them on, he said that he already forgot the feeling, to have real shoes on his feet. One day I saw my father returning from some digging work and he had his clogs on. I asked him where his leather shoes were I got for him.

64) The Jewish prayer for the dead

He admitted that he had flogged them for one dollar which he had hidden in his clothing. When I asked, what he can buy here for one dollar, he of course did not answer. That was the

first time that I slapped my father's face. I was steaming with anger. Money had no significance in the camp.

My tasks in the kitchen included the scrubbing of the large pots that were used for cooking the German soldiers' meals. The pots were standing in a row, they were 80 cm high and all had lids with a mechanical closing system. Especially their outer surfaces had to be polished sparkling clean. The old German himself put the margarine into the meals. I accompanied him with the margarine tablet and kept the wrapping paper. While he approached the next pot, I fished out some of the molten margarine with a spoon, wrapped it in the paper and threw it under the pot. On a certain occasion I was able to get two eggs from the camp commander's henhouse and fried an omelet with the margarine. I invited my father in the middle of the night to have a festive meal at a secluded place. I remember what he said: "You are a better cook than your mother was!"

Entertainment

One day, the camp management decided to organized an entertainment evening. They knew that there were some educated persons among the Jews, well acquainted with the German culture. To me it remains a secret to this very day, what was behind their idea to organized such a mixed party, i.e. a party for “Aryan” Germans and Jewish prisoners. Many of us were too frightened to take part as the Germans, when inebriated and aggressive, represented a danger. But then when they were really drunk, they take part in singing with us Yiddish songs containing curses and threats against them and their system. German Jews made up a song which became a camp hymn. I tried to reconstruct its text as follows:

When the day is breaking
The Sun laughs
The columns march
Towards the daily fatigue
In the morning gray...
O forced labor
I'll never forget you
Because you are my destiny

Inmates of Camp Görlitz worth mentioning

Dr. Kinros

Mr. Kinros, MD was the doctor at the sick bay. This friendly Jew from Poland was in fact a doctor of dental surgery but in secret he treated the patients like a practical doctor. When a prisoner's arm was hit by the bullet of a German guard and the danger of infection arose, the doctor amputated his arm under the most primitive condition and as a result, saved his life. This man is living today in Israel. Mr. Kinros, MD, Doctor of Dental Surgery is a dentist in Tel Aviv. Whenever survivors of Camp Görlitz get together, he is always very welcomed.

Gottlieb

Gottlieb came from Munkács (Mukacevo) in Carpathorussia and arrived to the camp together with his sons. He was an educated, observant Jew with great knowledge of the Talmud. He was the only one in the camp who always knew when the Jewish festivals were to be celebrated. In the evenings, he sat with his sons in front of the block and gave them verbal lessons from the Talmud. He was a man who always preserved his humanity and kept to his ethics even in a concentration camp. Gottlieb and his sons lost their lives during the infamous death march.

Mrs. Izsák

Mrs. Izsák was the "Blockälteste" (block boss) in the women's camp. She was a lawyer and came from the city of Kolozsvár (Cluj) in Rumania. She was a grand woman, noble in character, who went her own way without harming anyone. Her hair that grew again after it had been shorn off in Auschwitz, grew again and was shining silvery grey. She was here in the camp with her three daughters but she did not offer them any special treatment. One of her daughters worked in the kitchen. The auxiliary cook, Itze, an ugly chap, who knew no hunger, courted her. To us, this did not matter. The daughter did not want to have anything to do with him. He never gave up, not even after the liberation, but the family rejected him.

Uncle Fetmann

Uncle Fetmann was born in 1887 in Hungary. He was a watchmaker and goldsmith in Nyirbátor. Because of his honesty, the local non-Jews brought their watches rather to him than to anyone else. His brother Moses was a watchmaker too and for a while my father's business companion.

Fetmann kept the tradition but did not belong to the strictly orthodox circles. He made sure that his sons receive good general education; he even sent them for this purpose to Budapest and as a result, rescued their lives. All three sons left Hungary and moved to Israel. Fetmann shared in Camp Görlitz the bed with my father. I lived in another block but visited the two whenever I could.

In addition to his Thora knowledge, Fetmann had a broad general education. I learnt a great deal from him. He was able to preserve his humanity and his morals under the most difficult conditions when many others ceased to behave like human beings. Whenever I could obtain some food for my father, I always gave some to Fetman as well who remained humble despite the most terrible hunger he felt and hardly wanted to accept anything because as he said, I got the morsels for my father. One night I got two portions of horse-flesh for my father and Fetmann. Some time later my father came crying to me and said that someone stole his meat. Fetmann was prepared to forego his portion. As I disagreed, with shared is portion between the two. On bringing him some food on another occasion, he said to me: "Shlajme, you are really an angel. I have plenty of money buried at home, and I promise you, you receive everything if we ever get there..." Uncle Fetmann died shortly before the liberation.

Hermann Tschech, the Camp Boss (Lagerältester)

“If they need a thief, he’ll be freed from the gallows” Hermann Tschech had been a murderer, condemned to death. The story had it that he murdered a number of people, members of his own family, But the Nazis saved him from the gallows as they believed he’d be the suitable person for the position of the “Lagerältester” i.e. the Camp Boss to rule over Jewish prisoners.

Hermann Tschech was a small man. He was cross-eyed and had to wear a pair of thick glasses that had a thick black frame. Because of his poor eyesight he never walked about outside during the night. His head rested practically without a neck on his shoulders and he always wore a black peaked, crooked cap. He was really frightfully ugly. Only his hump was missing and then he could have played the part of the Hunchback of Notre Dame in Victor Hugo’s story. His voice was hoarse but he hardly ever talked but always hysterically yelled. His special long-barreled revolver was dangling from his belt, reaching almost to his knees and he never hesitated to use it quite often. Occasionally he organized search parties. They were looking for hidden food stores in the prisoners’ rooms and bunk beds. H was accompanied by his true mate, Jakob Tannenbaum, who translated his words into Yiddish.

Approximately one and a half month prior to the liberation, Hermann Tschech was caught red-handed in stealing food from the military supply and relieved of his position. As it turned out to be, he had made preparations to escape from the district and to reach the American Occupational Zone as he was afraid that the local legal authorities might pass a death sentence over him after the war. When the Red Army liberated the camp, Hermann Tschech was caught, and taken to court. My friend Israel Grünwald, an ex-prisoner of Camp Görlitz testified against him and after a short process, Tschech was hanged.

Jakob Tannenbaum, the Camp Kapo

Not much was known about his past, only that he was born in 1913, in the small Polish town of Seiniawe. I got to know him the first day I arrived to Camp Görlitz. As he approached us at the assembly place, he introduced himself in Yiddish language. He said: "I am the Camp Kapo and my name is Jankel Tannenbaum". I considered it a favorable sign that he spoke Yiddish, as I was used to the idea that Jews help each other in need and when they spoke Yiddish, the first barriers were already fallen. But this proved to be an illusion and a mistake. Tannenbaum, with his gruesome deeds, was a wolf in sheep's skin. The circumstance that he spoke Yiddish was rather a disadvantage because we could not say anything in this language that would have remained a secret.

Jankel Tannenbaum obviously agreed with the German national-socialist views. His cruelty had no limits. When one cold February morning we got together at the assembly place before work, he asked us: "Who is sick? Who wants to go to the sick bay?" A number of prisoners complained that their feet was hurting them. He ordered these to take off their shoes and to march barefooted to the factory. He ill-treated Jewish prisoners; he made them fall to the ground and kicked them with his jackboots.

One day he discovered that my father who suffered a great deal because of the terrible cold, had wrapped a woolen blanket around his body under his prisoner's garb. Tannenbaum lead him to a block, made him to drop his pants and gave him 25 strokes with his whip until he was covered in blood. My father became over 90 and he forgot many details of the camp life but Tannenbaum's whiplashes he never forgot.

On one occasion a prisoner was hanged because he stole something. Tannenbaum conducted the execution and he made sure that we were all present as he wanted to make an example.

In the seventies I received an invitation to appear at the department for Nazi crimes in the Jaffa police station in Israel. I did not know in what case. The female officer presented me a collection of photos. On looking through the album, I discovered Jankel Tannenbaum's photo and cried out: "This here is Jankel Tannenbaum, his name be extinguished!" On the photo he looked like the last time I saw him in the camp. She interrogated me in detail on what I knew about Tannenbaum's deeds and asked me whether I'd be prepared to go to the States and to appear in a criminal court as a witness against him. Of course, I agreed. A few days later the police also questioned my father and other former Görlitz prisoners as well. On this occasion I heard that Tannenbaum turned into ultra

orthodox and went into hiding in the Chassidic district of the Bronx and did not dare to travel to Israel. The police disclosed that Tannenbaum did not know anything about the current investigations into his past. The American press got hold of the matter. A journalist of the "Washington Post" interviewed me by phone. He told me he is conducting a research into the case Tannenbaum and had the chance to interview some of the ex-prisoners of Camp Görlitz in the States. The Israeli press also took up the matter later.

This was the first occasion that a Jew was accused according to the law against the Nazis and their helpers. The New York Jews were concerned that this could lead to anti-Semitic excesses in the event of a criminal process and they tried to avert it. At the end, the case ended with a deal. Tannenbaum was prepared to admit the rough treatment he sometimes meted out to the prisoners. However in consideration of his old age and his poor health, no trial took place, but he lost his American citizenship.

Gustav, the chief cook of the camp

About his previous history I only know his given name and the fact that he came from Poland, nothing else. He spoke Yiddish and Polish and did not look like a Jew. With his shining bald head and his furrowed brow he looked rather like a Mongol. His behavior and his manners were coarse and common. He gave every sentence he uttered special weight with a curse. He rushed about wearing his white apron, but not only in the kitchen, but elsewhere as well, to demonstrate his position. When the grub was distributed, he stood in the front with his ladle and gave every one a helping of cloudy sludge concocted from weeds, sand and small pebbles designated as soup. Woe betides to any one who dared to ask for a second helping or to push to the front. He got one over his head with the ladle and was called a "*Chajess*" (biest).

One evening, when I finished my duties in the German's kitchen, I succeeded in getting a piece of horseflesh and to smuggle it out. I wanted to bring it to my father. On the way out I bumped into "slaughterer" Gustav (that was his name among us). He discovered the meat and started to hit me cruelly while cursing like mad. He confiscated the meat but otherwise I had been lucky, nothing else happened.

At the end of the fifties a friend, David Nechustan (previously called Meginski) visited me, who was together with my father in Camp Görlitz. He was very excited and he told me

that he has heard that Gustav is now in Ramat Hasharon near Tel Aviv. Before we went to the police, we traveled to Ramat Hasharon. We found out that Gustav made his living as a carter, with a horse and cart. We went immediately to the Herzlia police station and tried to institute police proceedings against him. However, much to our disappointment, the policeman acted rather indifferently. In those days the interest in the Holocaust had not fully developed. Two weeks later a short report came from the Herzlia police that they see no ground for an action against Gustav as someone else had put in a good word for him. Thus we decided to take the matter into our own hands.

Ramat Hasharon was at that time only a small place. One day we decided to wait for him at the main road crossing. We knew that his wife worked at the Consum on that crossing and that he'll come by in the evening with his horse and cart. When Gustav turned up, both of us were awaiting him in Israeli military uniform. We stopped his cart, boarded it and directed the horse and cart in such way that it blocked the crossing. A large crowd came together in no time, our audience. We told the people who this monster on the cart really was. We described his evil doings in the camp and remarkably, Gustav never said a word. His wife, who had no idea of his past, left him shortly after. We said to him: "Gustav! You'll die like a dog, we'll be after you till your grave."

From that very day the locals boycotted him. A few months later he suffered an infarct of the heart and died. No one came to accompany him to his grave.

The death march

The expression “death march” became part of the camp language spoken by the prisoners. “Death marches” came about especially when the concentration camps had to be vacated at the last stage of World War II. Many thousands of prisoners had to march for weeks and weeks whereby the Nazis not only intended to physically destroy the Jewish prisoners but also to torment them before. For me it was the most horrible time of my entire camp residence.

As a reaction to the renewed advance of the Red Army mid January 1945, the Germans started to vacate the concentration camps. When the Red Army arrived to Görlitz and the siege of the town began on 18. February 1945, Group Commander Malitz ordered the enforced evacuation of the Görlitz Concentration Camp. He said:” If our town must suffer under the siege, I shall not tolerate the presence of any Jew here!” The evacuation concerned several camps. Many prisoners came to us from the Bunzlau Camp ⁶⁵⁾ who were in a better condition than ourselves. Unfortunately, their camp was liberated just a little too late, a few hours after their enforced departure.

There was a rumor going round that our ultimate target is Tirol. The Bunzlau prisoners told similar stories. The Germans brought carts from the town and loaded their food and their belongings on them. The prisoners were ordered to get ready at the assembly place equipped with one woolen blanket and with a thin bread bag called in Yiddish “Broit tarbele” and their metal feeding plate.

Herr Tschch, the Camp Boss said that any one who is unable to march should come forward and step to the side. 300 presented themselves. Tschch asked them whether they could walk if they got better clogs. 100 said yes. Tschch commanded them to go to Block 2. When everything was ready for the start, Tschch entered Block 2, took all shoes, woolen blankets and jackets away from these people, and drove them out in the freezing February cold. He ordered them to pull the loaded carts, instead of horses.

All camp inmates, men and women (with the exception of the 200 sick) waited for the command to start. An SS-unit with Ukrainians, especially dreaded because of their anti-Semitism and cruelty, turned up to accompany the evacuation of the camp.

⁶⁵⁾ Viz. Martin Weinmann, ed. The Nazi camp system. Frankfurt 1990. In German

My third encounter with the Angel of Death

On that day I had to work throughout the whole night and dozed off fully clothed on my bunk bed. I slept so deeply that I never noticed what went on around me. Suddenly I was hit by a rifle butt over my head. Three SS-men stood in front of me, their weapons directed at me and I heard them yelling: “Hands up!”

They injured me with the rifle butt; my face was covered with blood. I had to march out with my hands kept above my head, accompanied by the SS-men. That time I was sure this was my end, especially as many shots sounded all around me, like on a battle field. Soon it is your turn, I believed. When the evacuation of the camp was announced, about 80 prisoners went into hiding into the barracks in the hope that the approaching Red Army will rescue them. I heard Jankel Tannenbaum calling them in Yiddish to come out and then they were shot in cold blood. Accompanied by the SS-guard, I saw myself with each step getting closer and closer to the grave. I did not know what anyone would do in such a situation. My father was outside and I was sorry not having been able to say good bye to him. They commanded me to go out from the camp to join those who were ready to go. Thus I was rescued from my third encounter with the Angel of Death. I shall never know why they spared my life.

When I walked up to my father he was completely taken aback as he was certain I was among the 80 prisoners shot in the camp. “Incredible” he said. “Once again, you are back from the hereafter!” We had no proper surgical dressing material, but with some rags we managed to stop the bleeding of the gash on my head.

The march started the guard was extremely nervous. They were afraid to encounter the Russians on the way and to be taken prisoners themselves. Among the SS-men who were guarding us, there were, as I mentioned before, some Ukrainians, who had indeed something to worry about. If the Russians caught them, they summarily executed them. Nevertheless they still had shown no mercy towards us, but continued with torturing and murdering the Jews.

After a march of six kilometers – for us an almost endless distance – we arrived to a large farm in Kunnerwitz. We were put up in the horses’ stable. We found sugar beet in the frozen ground. We made us some provisional digging sticks to get them out. That was the only food we had after two days. The juice of the sugar beet caused severe burning in the throat. The bread brought along from the camp was distributed among the block commanders and the Capos.

Tschech, the Camp Boss suddenly remembered the 200 sick people he had left behind in Görlitz. He went back, collected 100 of them and made them march under severe pains until they arrived to join us. We left a number of dead bodies behind in Kunnerwitz. Some of them were murdered, others died of dysentery.

Our march continued via the village Friedensdorf to Sohland. In that village too the horses' stables of a farm served as our accommodation. It provided little protection against the bitter cold. We settled down on the straw, the women camped on the hayloft above us. Here too, we tried to nourish ourselves by digging out sugar beet with some broken bits of glass and a soup we made ourselves boiling weed. In Sohland, too, several more prisoners died of dysentery. After a few days Tschech, the Camp Boss announced that we'll continue the march but when we arrive to our destination, we'll get something to eat. About 15 prisoners stayed behind to clean up the farm after us. They joined us a few hours later. We had to assemble. The commander asked: who is unable to go any further? Nine prisoners took the risk. They were allowed to board a cart that had a number of corpses loaded on it already. The guard threw a number of digging spades and hoes on the cart as well.

At the beginning, the nine prisoners were happy that they were allowed to have a ride but then the cart was diverted from the road to a piece of open country at the edge of the forest. The nine had to disembark. The Ukrainians gave them digging spades and ordered them to dig a hole. The prisoners realized that this was now their end. Among them, a young Jew, not older than 17. from Hungary. He ran from one Ukrainian to the other, he dropped to the feet of one of them, he clasped the feet of the Ukrainian in his arms and cried for his life. he shouted: "I can walk, I do everything you say, just let me live!" But before he could finish his plea, a bullet finished him off.

"When he begged us for mercy we did not listen to him" (1 Moses, 42,21)

The prisoners were by now so weak that one after the other dropped dead during the march. A couple of sisters marched with us. One of them broke down and the guard shot her. The other sisters, one after the other, lowered themselves on the corpse and were also shot. I don't remember how many sisters were involved but this massacre made a permanent impression on my memory. I remember that an elderly "Scharführer" went up to the dying girls and gave them the coup de grace by shooting. On that day alone 170 victims were left behind on the roadside.

I suddenly noticed a certain indifference in my father. He almost dropped and that would have been his end. I managed to keep him straight up and yelled at him: "Now we march the first kilometer!" Obviously, it helped, as he carried on marching.

We arrived to a place called Rennersdorf and once again we were allowed to stay in the stables of a farm. The place made the impression of a ghost town, not a living soul was to be seen in the entire district. All Germans took to the flight for fear of the Russians who were very close indeed. We had to stay for a while here, longer than originally intended, because the German Army was fleeing for their lives for fear of the Russians, and all the roads were blocked.

The farmers took their horses with them but left the sheep behind. The Germans slaughtered some sheep for themselves but warned us that the sheep were not for the prisoners. Here we received a slice of bread each guarded as a treasure in every one's bread bag, to eat it bit by bit. On waking up one morning – I was resting between my father and another Jew – I felt that my neighbor no longer moved. The first thing I did, was to look for his bread. When I found it, I was overjoyed.

On that morning the elderly soldier turned up, the one who was leading the kitchen for the Germans and called me: “Farzer, come quickly!” He ordered me to skin the slaughtered sheep. He said that any sheep that went sick was to be cooked for the prisoners. I found a method to make the sheep sick. I went into their pen, kicked the sheep in the belly so that it fell over and then said: this one here is sick. As a result, after a long time we got something to eat.

After three weeks stay in Rennersdorf, we received on 23. March 1945 the order to return to Görlitz. The Germans had to admit that it was impossible to get through to Tirol. I found out later that Malitz, the district commander wanted us to return immediately to Görlitz, to dig trenches for the German Army to help to defend the city against the Red Army.

Before our start, we had to assemble. Such assemblies were nothing special. The Germans wanted to know, how many prisoners were still alive. We were approx. 30 kilometer away from Görlitz. They asked us, who was unable to walk. Around 100 people reported who were transported to the camp by truck. Upon our arrival, we found them well. The sick people who remained in the camp were still alive, too.

We marched the whole day until we arrived to the camp. The good weather made the march easier. Fortunately, Tschsch, the camp boss was caught red-handed in stealing, he was relieved of his duties and replaced by a more humane person. During the death march we lost approx. 1000 from the originally 1500 inmates.

The liberation

On 2.May 1945 I got the lieutenant his breakfast on a tray. Suddenly, a German soldier turned up, wearing a steel helmet. He placed a sheet of a newspaper on the lieutenant's table, showing Hitler's image, in a black frame with the title: "The Führer is dead!" In addition, he brought the command, to free the prisoners.

I dropped the breakfast tray in my excitement, I ran in the direction of the women's camp, the entrance of which faced the camp's office and shouted all the way: "We are free! We are free!" The women believed I have taken leave of my senses. I changed my direction and ran towards the men's camp. I rushed to my father and kept shouting all the time: " We are free!" There too, the message was received with some doubts.

One hour later, the lieutenant turned up in the camp. He addressed the prisoners he met on his way with "Sir" which meant that we became people again. He said: "You can now remove your number. You are free." The lieutenant asked the men and the women to assemble in order to officially announce our liberation. The officer announced at the assembly that the camp personnel will try to get over to the American side and asked the former prisoners to join them. Much to his regret, no one joined them, except the Kapos and the block bosses.

The wind of freedom disturbed the minds of some prisoners. Some entered the officers' quarters and stole the shoes of the men. The officers ran after them in their underwear and begged for their shoes. The elderly Oberscharführer (my boss) from the kitchen asked me to help him to load a car with foodstuffs. I called my father who organized some more help. The old man stood in the store room and handed me boxes loaded with all kinds of canned food which should have been loaded on the car. In the meantime, a chain of people was generation outside. I passed the box to my father, who passed it forward to someone else. Nothing found its way on the car. The old German came out, realized the situation but never said a word.

All Germans have gone. We remained in the camp on our own. But we did not dare to leave because of the fights still raging in the city. Oddly enough Jankel Tannenbaum joined first the celebrations, he danced "Hora", an Israeli dance, and told us that earlier on, he belonged to Hashomer Hazair", the Zionist youth movement. But, soon enough, he made tracks for fear of revenge.

Those were hot days. We got the ovens from the barracks and cooked meals on them from the foodstuffs we took away from the Germans, While we were outside the barracks, a

Russian plane turned up and dropped some bombs on us. I stood next to my father and said naively: "Look, they are dropping little fish on us" But then an incredible air blast hit me. I flew through the air and found myself far away from my original place. Fortunately, only two persons had been slightly injured.

Later on I found out that some captured Germans told the Russians a tale, that our camp was an important military base. They might have hoped that the possible bombing will destroy important proofs against them.

Next day I left the camp in the company of my father. We have heard shots and looked for cover. Suddenly, we found ourselves among German Wehrmacht soldiers who fired their cannon. The Germans could not care less about us. We settled down behind them and watched what was going on. Then, we returned to the camp. The bombing raids continued. We looked for cover and went into hiding in the brickworks.

On 8,May 1945 we were still in that building without knowing what was going on in the outside. One of us declared himself ready to climb the chimney and to see which way the wind was blowing. On arriving to the top of the chimney, he just shouted: "The Russians are here!" We rushed out and saw the Russians cutting the barbed wire fence. We covered them with kisses. That was the first occasion after a long-long time that tears were coming from my eyes.

The Russians suggested we go into the town and move into the houses of some Germans who escaped to the West and to live there. But first, we had to change our clothing. The prisoners' dresses were burnt in the camp. We took along Pessil-Leah, the Nyirbátor Rabbi's daughter and her cousin, Fejge with us and described ourselves as a family. Pessil-Leah was allegedly my father's wife and Fejge my sister. This time we take care with the Russian soldiers, especially if they were inebriated.

We occupied a splendid house and had several floors at our disposal. A number of former camp inmates joined us and we lived the life of a commune. We collected foodstuffs from the houses of the Germans and had slap-up meals with our friends. If the rooms on one of the floor became untidy, we moved to the next one. One day a German turned up who very humbly introduced himself as being the owner of the property. We received him with joy because now he could serve us. We found Week's patent jars filled with home-made preserves and jam, properly lined up on shelves and marked with the contents and the year of preparation. It was a real treasure to us. But we took care not to consume too much at the time to give our body time to get used to the nourishment. The Russians did not know how to open these Week's patent jars and used brute force. One day we found a goat in the basement.

We slaughtered the goat on the expensive carpets and when we finished our festive meal to which all former camp inmates were invited, whom we met in the street, we moved to another floor and left the cleaning up work to our servant.

The street looked like a Purim scene. People wore pieces of clothing they got away with which were too large for them, s most ex-prisoners were only skin and bones. They wore funny hats and sunglasses on the tip of their nose. We hardly knew each other again. I entered a photographic studio and picked up two professional cameras. As I was too weak to carry them on my shoulder, I just dragged them along across the street without knowing why did I pinch them. Some friends who saw me, warned me, not to walk about with cameras. The Russians could easily mistake me for a spy. I tossed the cameras into the bin.

The first Jewish member of the Red Army I got to know was Gershon. He had no idea what was to be a Jew, but he spoke well Yiddish. He served at the Commendatory, their headquarters. Gershon encouraged me to tell him if we have any problems. The Russian soldiers often visited us in our house. One of them asked me to accompany him to go to the houses of the Germans and to look for valuables. He was looking for especially for watches and jeweler. Prior to our departure, we made an agreement: the gold is for you, the watches are for me. Upon entering the first apartment, he saw a brass door handle. He shouted: "Look, this is gold!" He thought, I had now received my portion. As luck would have it, I found some watches in the house. I don't know what the outcome would have been otherwise. In the best room they had a display cabinet made of cherry wood, filled with lead crystal and fine porcelain pieces. The Russian got his submachine gun and sprayed the cabinet with bullets.

My father turned into a materialist and started to hoard things if he thought they had some value. In one of the flats he discovered a well-filled jeweler box in a hiding place under the floorboard that he brought home. After that he went through other houses and pinched everything starting with bedding, and ending with bikes. He even applied force to get what he wanted. On one occasion, he saw a woman pulling a handcart with water buckets on it. At the time the drinking water service to the flats was not yet reinstated. My father ran to the woman, tossed out the buckets, poured out her water and confiscated the cart which came in very handy for him to transport his loot.

We received the first news about the destiny of our family from Jewish officers of the Red Army, They told us the gas chambers and the crematoriums in Auschwitz. I did not want to believe that my mother and the kiddies had been annihilated in such manner. But, on receiving confirmation that these horrors really existed, I found no peace in Görlitz any

longer. I wanted to get home as soon as possible and to convince myself that the family had not returned. The joy over the liberation had turned into mourning.

One evening a couple of inebriated Russian soldiers turned up in our place and started to get fresh with the women. I felt danger and ran to the Commendatory to call my Russian friend Gershon. When he received my report, he cocked his weapon, ran to our flat and yelled to the soldiers: "Beat it or I shoot!" He also repeated in Russian: "These are my sisters!" The frightened soldiers took to flight.

One day, on going for a stroll in town center with my father, I suddenly noticed a familiar character. I said to my father: "Look, this is the works manager!" The man pushed a bicycle along and carried a blue armband, with the text: "PEOPLE'S POLICE". We went up to him. He had some difficulties in recognizing us. I asked father to watch out for him and ran away to find some Russian soldiers. At long last, I found three, I told them the story and when we returned to the works manager, one of the Russian soldiers addressed him in fluent German: "Works manager, sir, do you remember me?" The soldier was a Jew who had served two years before our arrival to Görlitz as a prisoner at WUMAG and worked under this works manager but took to flight and first joined the freedom fighters and then the Russian Army. He was serving at a special unit of the NKVD, where his knowledge of the German language and the local conditions became very useful. The soldier told us in Yiddish: "Das ist meaner Schajre" (my goods!) and he took the German away with him.

Our way home

Our return home was connected with many events and adventures. We did not want to stay much longer in Görlitz while it was still possible that a survivor of our family was already at home. Therefore we wanted to return home to Nyirbátor as soon as possible. Only we found it difficult to say “home”.

The Red Army Commandatory issued group passports to us. Father packed his loot in several suitcases and carrier bags and mounted the lot on two bicycles. We lifted the bags on the top of the train and the four of us traveled together: father, Pessil-Leah, Fejge and I. The wagons were occupied by Russian soldiers. Thus, we climbed on the roof and settled down quite closely with some other former camp inmates. In the course of the journey the Russians took away father’s bicycles which was for the better as we had to drag along less junk.

Towards the evening we arrived to the railway station of Reichenberg, called today Liberec. Our train was diverted to a side track where we had to wait for several hours. The majority of the Russian soldiers were drunk and we were afraid they could cause us some harm. In order to get rid of the fear, I climbed down from the roof and started to look for Jews among the soldiers. Suddenly some shots were fired. They came from the darkness of the night, from a small wood opposite the railway station. Despite their condition, the Russians quickly took up battle formation and responded to the firing. They also used flame throwers to set fire to the edge of the woods. As the matter turned out to be, some German soldiers were hiding in the woods, who still did not had enough of the war. I had heard the Germans shouting that they wanted to surrender but the Russians had shown no mercy. After the action was completed, they went on drinking like before.

Throughout our travels across German territory I saw destroyed cities, bombed houses, defeated people. In all quietness, I wished, justice shall prevail and Germany shall remained destroyed and vanquished for ever. I denied the Germans’ right to call themselves human beings.

From Reichenberg we arrived to the capital of Slovakia, Bratislava. Many trains had already arrived to the main railway station, one train with former concentration camp inmates, women, still in their prisoners’ garb, and with their clogs on the feet. Suddenly a high ranked Russian officer, a lieutenant general turned up who turned out to be a Jew. He was horrified on seeing the survivors, ordered that some food is to be brought to us and talked in Yiddish language with us. On seeing a train with German POWs he ordered his solders to open the

Germans' wagons and issued the command that the Germans should swap shoes with the women. One soldier remarked: "The clogs are too small for the Germans' feet!" The officer yelled: "Get a hammer and make his foot to go into the clog!"

A little later a train arrived with German refugees. The officer issued a command to get every one from the train and to separate the men from women. He then sent away the individual groups in different directions. As soon as he quickly down a little, he said in Yiddish: "A kleine Nekume: Sollen si spirn was's geshen in Auschwitz!" (A small revenge: they should now feel how it was like in Auschwitz).

In Bratislava we have been transferred into the care of the JOINT 66) and put up in the Hotel Doxa, to have a rest.

66) American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, amerikanisch-jüdische Hilforganisation
In the meantime I have heard more and more details about the extermination camps and these details upset me very much. Many survivors of various camps came through Bratislava and on meeting; they were all telling each other their own special story. I was unable to stay in the hotel, I walked the streets in the hope that a miracle may occur and I'll meet my family. Every character I saw from the distance looked like this or the other relative of mine. But these were only delusions, like the Fata Morgana...

On strolling on the streets, deeply lost in my thoughts, I encountered Lipa Teitelbaum, the Rabbi's son, Pessil-Leah's brother. In the first moment, he did not know me. I asked him in Yiddish, whether he wanted to see his sister to which he answered yes, but rather apathetically. I took him along to the hotel, where he could meet his sister and he joined our group. This encounter gave me new hopes.

I saw a high-ranked Jewish officer on the street. He immediately realized that I'm coming from one of the concentration camps and he was overjoyed to be able to talk with me in Yiddish. He pulled photos showing the members of his family from his pocket and "This is my wife, and he is my son..." Thus he introduced them proudly to me. The officer accompanied me to the hotel and would not go away until we told him about the camps. After he has gone away, a military truck came full of goodies and soldiers off-loaded the foodstuffs destined for us. Before we left in the direction of Hungary, we received new documents, to be used as passports.

We arrived on 6.June 1945 to Budapest. We had to report at the Refugee Center of Bethlen tér where all returnees were registered. We received papers, money and first aid. The

boards of the Center were littered with notices people displayed in search of their relatives and also with lists reporting the names of the liberated. I read through the notices ones and then the second time, but unfortunately no one from my family appeared in these lists.

A few days later we arrived to Nyirbátor.

Our return to Nyirbátor

I returned to Nyirbátor full of expectations and mixed feelings. Perhaps I shall find some survivors of my family there? Unfortunately this proved to be pure illusion. On my return to the small town from which I had been deported one year ago, I considered, depressed and anxious. Was this really the town I used to know? I looked at the market place full of melancholy that used to be the center of business activities. The shops around the place belonged mainly to Jews. It seemed to me the clock stopped here. I found myself in a ghost-town. I glanced at the shop signs still bearing the old owners' name – I knew practically all of them – and believed to see gravestones in a cemetery. The institutions of the Jewish congregation, previously the center of busy life, were practically empty. Some institutions like the Talmud-Thora School and the Stiebel were destroyed and disappeared without a trace. The characters of the past appeared to me like images of a Fata Morgana. I saw the destruction with my own eyes.

As soon as I recovered from the first shock, I was able to assess to measure of the catastrophe that overtook us. “You should not cry about the past, thus, I shall not cry” (Samuel J. Agnon 67)

The non-Jewish inhabitants of the town have heard of the horrible catastrophe from the returned survivors and could hardly believe it what happened. Mrs. Baracsi, my mother's good friend visited us immediately after our arrival and returned our bedding left with her by my mother. Mrs. Baracsi had pangs of conscience, not having demanded more energetically that my mother should leave my sister in her custody.

A number of survivors had returned before daily and ourselves came a few more. The Jews of the surrounding villages preferred Nyirbátor as they were concerned about possible anti-Semitic excesses. The encounter with the returned Jews upset me very much. On the other hand, I was very sorry that none of my relatives returned. Sometimes I caught myself about pondering: why was I spared? Was it fortune? Coincidence? Destiny?

When father and I visited Grandfather's house, we found it occupied by a Roma family. We introduced ourselves and explained that the house is ours. The Romans begged not to kick them out. We were sorry for them and were prepared to let them stay until they could find another place for themselves to live. In the course of time a friendship developed between us that remained in craft after their removal. The family Lakatos made their living by playing traditional Hungarian Gypsy Music on parties. The old father was completely deaf, nevertheless, he could still play well the cimbalom and the oldest son, Kálmán Lakatos

became later as a violinist famous well outside Hungary's borders. When I visited Budapest, many years later, I went in the company to the well-known Emke Kàvéház . Upon entry, I had the surprise of my life. The orchestra played the Israeli National Anthem, "Hatikva" . I heard it later that the Family Lakatos played this anthem to my honor, when they saw me.

I had a number of family photos hidden on the loft and in the basement I buried my mother's diamond ring before our deportation. I was looking for these things after my return , but much to my regret I was unable to find anything.

I found out later that the anti-Semites came and thoroughly searched the Jews' property for valuables, on the day of our deportation.

The returned Jews began slowly to settle down again and they attempted to resume their normal lives. Reb Lipa, the son of Rabbi Aaron Teitelbaum who was murdered in the Holocaust, reorganized the community. The room of prayers was still filled with junk and broken furniture of deported Jews. Therefore the divine service took place in the "Palish", the passage way to the Synagogue and that was where people studied the scripture. My father joined the

67) 1888-1970 Hebrew writer, who lived in Palestine since 1908. 1966 Nobel Prize winner in literature
Learning circle and found consolation in the company of the newly established community.

He still suffered from the occasional attack of hunger. He prepared for himself a tray with food prior to going to sleep, and placed it on a stool next to his bed. In the middle of the night he woke up and polished it off. With time, differences of opinions arose between us. I became an adherent to Zionism while my father returned to orthodoxy and materialism. In order to avoid the unnecessary clashes, I moved in with a friend, called Bagyi Szrolovics, who too was glazier and worked together with me at David Österreicher's place before the Shoah. We reopened Österreicher's workshop (he and his family were murdered) we undertook glazier work and framed pictures. In those days the inflation was so rampant that it was no use to accept money. The money lost its value after each hour. Therefore we preferred to accept eggs or other foodstuff instead of payment. The shelves were filled with eggs and vegetables. Day after day we made egg omelets in the workshop. (In those days we were able to polish off 20 eggs each day!)

Bagyi reported to the Secret Police and took part in the search and arrest of Hungarian Nazi criminals, the Arrow-Cross men, that part which had a share in the deportation of the Jews. His efforts were not in vain. He succeeded in tracing some of these people. Bagyi emigrated later to the United States and since then we have not seen each other.

My father opened a watch repair shop and needed tools and spare parts. He told me the story of my Uncle Alter's both daughters-in-law, Magda and Aranka, who both returned from the concentration camps. What is more, Aranka was able to rescue her little son Motti as well. These two daughters-in-law and the grandchild the entire family had perished in the Holocaust.

Before the Shoah my Uncle Alter was owner of a company called "Josef A. Silber" in the Hungarian town of Sátoraljaújhely, at the beginning in partnership with his brother Shlomo. When the partners were separated, Shlomo opened a similar business in the Hungarian town of Debrecen. Alter's company dealt with the distribution of watches, spare parts and watchmakers' tools and the import of watches and spare parts of well-known Swiss companies. One of these Swiss suppliers provided him with pocket watches under the trade name of "Reblis" a pun on his own name "Silber".

The Germans inspected and completely emptied every house and shop of the deported Jews. Later on the Russian soldiers continued the job who took away the property of non-Jews as well. But, a miracle happened. For one reason or another, my Uncle Alter's business property was not entered and robbed, neither by the Germans, nor by the Russians!

My father asked me to travel to Sátoraljaújhely, to collect for him watches, watchmakers' tools and spare parts. He believed that because of the close family relationship (Alter was my mother's brother) I am legally entitled to some of the inheritance. I did not want to refuse my father's request although in those days material things did not interest me the least. Therefore I traveled rather unwillingly to Sátoraljaújhely.

The two daughters-in-law, Magda and Aranka made me very welcome. They were happy to meet another survivor from the circle of our family. They looked after me very well and after high tea, we all told our camp adventures. The stories lasted throughout the half night. In addition, I told them the reason of my visit, and they replied that next morning we are going to visit the shop and I can take with me whatever I fancy.

On entering the store, everything went black. I saw crates upon crates standing about, some of them still filled with watches, even gold ones. I saw in other boxes incredible quantities of rubies, spare parts and watchmakers' tools. I collected a number of tools, brushes, pliers, hammer and other items useful in the repair of clocks and watches and packed them in a carrier bag I brought along. When I wanted to leave, Magda and Aranka begged me to take with me some more things. I told them, I am morally not entitled to take with me any of their belongings. They wanted to present me with a wristwatch (I did not possess a watch at that time) but I refused it. Magda and Aranka gave me the address of my Uncle Zvi in Tel

Aviv and told me that Cousin Jóska (Joe) and Cousin Lili had returned from the camp and lived in their parents' house in Debrecen. I took my leave from them deeply moved. I met them again much later in Israel and we remained in touch for a long time.

Upon my return to nyirbátor, I handed over the handbag containing the tools to my father. "What, is that everything?" he asked. I said, yes and told him everything what I saw. Of course, he was upset, but I could not care less.

How my life had changed after the Shoah

One day, a deputy came from Israel to Nyirbátor. He was called Efraim Gottlieb. He was the first real “Sabre” **68**) I ever met. Efraim came in the name of the religious Zionist youth movement Bne Akiva. By the evening, the members of the congregation got together in the temporary synagogue and Efraim addressed them enthusiastically in Yiddish. He tried to convince with all his power all survivors of the Holocaust to move to Israel. I needed no arguments in the favor of this plan as I had already decided on the “Alija” **69**). After my return to Nyirbátor it became clear to me that I am not going to stay very long.

I decided to fulfill my long dream and to move to the Land of Israel. I never forgot the words of Rabbi Lemberger, who predicted eight years ago that one day there'd be a Jewish state and Jewish soldiers. Neither did I forget my mother, who had dreamt all the years from the immigration to the Land of Israel, a dream that much to my sorrow could not be realised.

I asked Efraim to help me with the emigration and he promised to get in touch with the Budapest Center on my behalf. In addition, he presented me with a Hebrew language book. I saw him again in Budapest later. Much later, on a leave of absence from the Israeli Army, I went to see him and his family in the Agricultural School Mikve Israel near Tel Aviv where he worked as a teacher. Unfortunately, Efraim Gottlieb had to die young.

Before my departure to Budapest, I said good bye to all my acquaintances with my wish: “See you again in Erets Israel!” (“...in the Land of Israel”) First I traveled to Debrecen to see my cousins Joska and Lili. This encounter was partially joyful, but also very sad, because the rest of the family never returned from the concentration camps. Before the Shoah we had especially close contact with each other. I had spent some of the summer vacations at their home and Lili came often to us on a visit.

Railway travel was not very pleasant in those days. If you had no seat, you had to stand there for hours and hours. Fortunately I found a seat on that long stretch of the journey, 250 km, from Debrecen to Budapest.

I knew the City of Budapest only superficially. I visited the capital the first time after my return from the concentration camps but stayed there only for a short while. When I left Budapest Keleti Pályaudvar, the Eastern Railway Station in the center of the city, the turmoil frightened me. I stood there helpless on the street corner and did not know which way to turn. I asked the passers-by how to get to No. 10, Eva Street. They suggested I take tram no. so and so and then to change over to another tram. This was far too involved for me. In fact I was

too frightened to board a tram and preferred walking. Occasionally I stopped other passers-by and repeated my question about the way. After all the explanations I believed I know now how to get there. But, how wrong can you get! I walked round and round for hours and hours to discover only later that most of the time I was walking around the house I was looking for. I could see the war damage during my wandering, houses destroyed by bombs and the cannon. The pretty figures they once decorated the facades of the houses on the main streets looked like abstract statues.

At long last, I found the address I was looking for. The office was in a high floor of the respective high-rise building and therefore I had to use the lift. I must admit that I never used a lift before. The strange carriage made me concerned I studied the control panel and then I managed to press the correct button. The door slammed shut behind me, the lift shook and I was afraid remaining locked up inside it. My acquaintance with the tramways was somewhat similar. I had no idea, how to buy your ticket, which line do I have to take and where to change. To leave or enter the vehicle while it was still in motion was far too acrobatic for me. My friends explained to me later: “Until you cannot board or exit the moving tram, you are not a true city man.” What shall I say, in time, somehow I had to learn it.

68) Designation of the fruit of cactii, outside thorny, inside sweet

69) Hebrew: “Ascent”, immigration to Israel

I arrived safe and sound into the office. The *haverim* soon realised that I was a countryman. The leader of the organization, Ossi, Shraga and Usi greeted me. It was the first occasion that I took part in a conversation in Hebrew, a little haltingly, but still, in Hebrew! They suggested that I take part in a course of preparation at Bajcsi Zsilinszky Street 46 in Budapest.

The rooms of this preparation course, the so-called “Hachshará” **70)** were located in the city centre and occupied a complete story. I’m still sorry for the neighbors who lived below us. They suffered from the noise, the singing and especially when we were dancing our “Hora”. We lived there, like in an Israeli Kibbutz. The objective was to make us into a close knit community, to be able to either organize a new settlement or to strengthen an existing Kibbutz in Israel. Most of the *haverim* had a job outside while the girls were looking after the household with the aid of a few young lads. The wages went into a common kitty.

At first I was not very happy with our life in the community. It took a while until I got used to this type of life form. The management was trying to find a workplace for every one of us. They found me a job at a confectionery factory, called “Stollwerk” that belonged to Jewish people. The stores were located at the bank of the River Danube and that is where we had to prepare the sweets for dispatch. I worked together with a local Jew who instructed me how to wrap up the shipments and how to tie them up with some strings. At the beginning I thought what a simple job, anyone could do it. Only later did I discover that the job was not as simple as it looked. I stuffed myself with so much chocolate in those days that I lost my craving for sweets forever.

I quickly got used to the life in the big city and soon I found my way in Budapest. As I said, I even learnt how to board or exit the tram while it was still in motion. I got on well with my new friends. We spent our free time together and played many tricks. For example, there were no seats free in the tram. What could be done? One of our *haverim* started to scratch himself somewhat frightfully, while the other one asked him on the top of his voice: “Well, what did the doctor say? Is the ointment he prescribed, any good?” The passengers who occupied the next seats took to flight, horrified and kept well away from us.

You will recall that my father was called up to do forced labor during the persecution of the Jews and my mother had to look after us on her own. I was forced to leave school early, to help to support the family. Upon my return from the concentration camp, I found that I ought to continue my education. I went to the Public Library and was busy reading the books of writers that were popular in those days; Zweig, Sinclair, Victor Hugo, Tolstoi and others. At first, I read them in Hungarian, but later I got slowly acquainted with Hebrew literature, not forgetting Yiddish. Fortunately, my mother taught me to read and write Yiddish. She even got me Yiddish stories (*Meisse Buchelech*) very popular in orthodox circles as they dealt with Rabbis and Zaddikim (wise guys) who performed all kinds of miracles. I still remember the very impressive life story of Rabbi Gershom “the Light of the Diaspora” (approx. 960 to 1028), whose name is connected with the ban on polygamy. But now I read the great Yiddish writers Shalom Alejchem, Mendele Mocher Sforim **71**) and Isaak Leib Perez **72**)

I wanted to take the culture in storm and frequented the cultural amenities of Budapest. Art and music were a new area for me. Occasionally I visited the Franz Liszt Academy of Music and attended the classical concerts there. I also went to the Light Opera to listen to the works of Imre Kálmán, Lehár and others. I also went occasionally to the Royal Opera.

In addition, I was busily studying Hebrew, the history of Zionism and joined the “Hebrew Club” where papers were read, usually on a Sabbath. The lecturers were mainly delegates of Zionist organizations from Israel or local intellectuals, lecturers of the well-known Budapest Seminary for Rabbis, among them Dr. Scheiber, Dr. Szepesdi, and Elieser Grosz. I witnessed the first time a stormy discussion between adherents of extreme political views. A Communist from Israel quarreled with a member of the local revisionist youth organization “Betar” **73**). In those days there were no serious conflicts between religious and freethinking circles. The religious people were more moderate although the extreme orthodox persons still rejected Zionism and the liberals made every effort not to clash with the religious ones.

In 1946, the first time after the war, elections took place in the Budapest Jewish Congregation. The electioneering campaign was fought mainly between two parties, the Zionists and the anti-Zionists – the latter comprising mainly assimilated Jews and Communists. The Zionist Center called on the *haverim* of the “Hachshará” to turn up at the meetings of the anti-Zionists, to cause trouble and generate as much disturbance as possible. The leader was a Josef Golan (Fetmann) from my own town. Occasionally, some fights also occurred.

70) Hebrew “Training”

71) Shalom Jakob Abramovitz (1835 to 1917) significant Yiddish and Hebrew writer in Russia

72) 1851 to 1915 Yiddish and Hebrew writer

73) “Beitar” short for “Brit Trumpeldor”, founded in 1923 in Riga, youth organization of the revisionist party, named after the Zionist pioneer Josef Trumpeldor, killed in 1920

The process

The *haverim* of the “Hachshará” mentioned to me that every Saturday Hungarian Nazi war criminals were tried at the People’s Court.

Would I like to attend? I said: “Yes!” We had to appear as early as possible in the court room to get a place. The venue was in the Markó utca, in the same building where the well-known prison was. Hungarian war criminals, members of the Arrow-Cross movement had to stand trial at the People’s Court in February and March 1946.

The trials took place mainly on Saturdays and the public comprised mainly of Jewish Holocaust survivors. In addition, relatives of the accused persons were also present in the court room, but they stuck together in the back rows and kept well away from us. To see that Nazi war criminals were facing the gallows gave me little consolation. At that time I wanted revenge and was able to watch how Nazi murderers were put to death. I believed in those days that the daily psalm for Wednesday, Psalm 94 corresponds to this reality the best: “God of Revenge, Eternal, God of Revenge, appear! Arise, Judge of the World, repay the wages of the Highhanded!”

The trials were mainly of relatively short duration. Sometimes individuals were charged, another time entire groups. The judges followed the investigation reports and passed mostly death sentences. After the announcement of the sentence, the condemned prisoners were taken downstairs in the courtyard of the prison to get executed. We ran downstairs too, to get as close to the gallows as possible.

The cobblestones of the courtyard of the prison had been worn smooth during the years so we found it difficult to walk on them. The red brick walls around the courtyard turned with the passing of the time black. The other prisoners could follow the events through the barred prison windows. Four gallows had been erected in the middle of the courtyard. The sentenced prisoners were lead down the stairs to the gallows by a group of soldiers led by an officer. On one occasion, I saw that the commanding officer was no other than a Jew from my own home

town. "Weinberger!" I shouted to him. He immediately recognized me and we waved to each other. The officer presented the prisoners to a judge, who took place at a desk in the courtyard; he read out the judgment of the People's Court and gave the order to carry it out. The sentenced prisoner was then handed over to the hangman, called Bogár, whose father had also been a well-known hangman. Bogár the hangman was a man of considerable height and strength. In a certain case the prisoner tried to attack him. Bogár hit the man over the head with his giant fist, picked him up from the floor by his hairs and promised the crowd that he'll hang him slowly.

The execution was normally performed as follows: The hangman tied together the prisoner's hands in front of his body and asked him whether he wanted to say anything. Most of them cursed the Jews. After their last performance, the hangman sometimes but not always pulled a black bag over their head; he placed the noose around their neck and tied their legs together. Then he pulled both ropes over the hook of the gallows until the prisoner's neck broke. After the prison's physician established the prisoner's death, the corpse was removed.

On one occasion, five murderers were to be executed, the so-called "murderers of District St.István" They were accused, to have shot countless Jews in cold blood and to have disposed their bodies by throwing them into the Danube. They were members of the gang operating in Szt. István körút No. 2 at the local headquarters of the Arrowcross party, under the leadership of Brother Gróf. The tempers rose high during the process, the crowd wanted to lynch the murderers. When they were led to their execution, I asked me how are they going to be hanged as there were only four gallows. Bogár hanged the first four and then pushed the corpse of the first aside and hanged the fifth next to him. The onlookers encouraged him during the execution and shouted: "Slowly, Bogár!" and they tossed to him coins and cigarettes.

The flight

During my times as an escape helper I had plenty of interesting experience. Most of the activities took place on the border between Hungary and Rumania. For this reason, I continued the Hachshara in Debrecen, not far from the border.

We received money and instructions via a harmless-looking post office box at the entrance of a building on the Budapest Banking Street. We were able to smuggle dozens of Israel-emigrants each week from Rumania across the border to Hungary. Once they were inside Hungary, they were loaded on trucks and driven towards the next railway station in the direction of Debrecen. Their journey continued via Budapest to Austria, to the Rothschild House in Vienna. On some occasions the Rumanian border guard discovered the would-be emigrants in the Rumanian forests and fired their guns at them. Some were wounded. When the Hungarians started to increase their attention, we guided the emigrants to Nyirbátor and told them to hide in the Mikve. They continued their trip in a few days by train towards Debrecen.

During one of my stays at the Rumanian border crossing-point I had the surprise of my life. After entering the border guards' office I could hardly believe my eyes: I saw Uncle Ezra (one of my late mother's brothers) with his wife and three little kiddies in front of me. I knew him from photos we received before the Holocaust. Ezra was sitting at the table and repaired the watches of the Rumanian soldiers. They captured the family the day before and arrangements were made to have them returned to Rumania. Ezra told them he was a watchmaker and declared himself prepared to look after their watches. They gladly took their chance and handed him a number of watches and this is why they were still there until our coincidental encounter. I accompanied them direct to Debrecen, to my uncles where they stayed over for a few days before they continued their trip to Austria. I met them again in the Pardes-Chana Immigrants' Home in Israel.

The Hungarian border guards caused us occasionally difficulties. We had to figure out all kinds of tricks. When we succeeded in loading a group of emigrants on a truck, we took away from them their documents and everything else indication their Rumanian origin. In addition, we requested they only speak Yiddish. Especially, not one single word in Rumanian, please! As expected, the Hungarian soldiers stopped the truck but were unable to talk with the people. We passed them on bicycles as if by accident and asked the border guard how we could help. They were pleased to accept our kind offer. We acted as interpreters and explained to them that these people came from Austria and wanted to get to

Rumania to continue their trip from Constanza, a seaport, towards Israel. The Hungarians took a firm decision. They will not help them to go to Rumania but they will return them to Austria. They even accompanied the truck to the Austrian border. We were very grateful to the Hungarians for their kindness.

My friend Pinchas Rosenbaum phoned me one day and asked me to accompany a group of children (picked up in convents) from Debrecen to Budapest. In those days the trains were all overfilled. One could find no free seats, especially not for a whole group of children. After I paid a good bribe to the stationmaster, he reserved a railway compartment for us and he even organised that the ominous red notice "Attention! Infectious Disease!" should be displayed on the outside of the wagon.

Having settled down in the wagon for the journey, Russian soldiers turned up and demanded that we clear the compartment. I knew they were not joking. We left the wagon. I discovered that the wagon was requisitioned for seven high-ranking Russian officers. Looking at the officers, I was sure that one of them was Jewish. I asked him directly: "Officer, Sir, you are a Jew, aren't you?" He answered without hesitation. "Yes, I am!" "Have you ever heard from Auschwitz?" I asked. He said yes in Yiddish. I explained that these children and I myself were survivors and they were thrown out from the wagon to make room for you." He immediately issued the command to the soldiers to let us board the train again. He himself stood of the wagon steps and asked me every time: "Is he Jewish? Is that one a Jew as well?" Every time I confirmed the answer, he let them board. As it turned out to be, most of the officers were Jewish. A Christian doctor who was there, told us that he had a friend in Moscow, a Jewish Lady Doctor, and asked me to make a draft of a letter in Yiddish, to be addressed to the Lady. During our long journey I told them about my experience in the concentration camps which upset them very much.

On a certain occasion we lost touch with one of our female escape helpers. We were worried about her and therefore I was sent to a certain address in Budapest, in order to find out more what happened to her. Upon ringing the doorbell, the door burst open, a hand appeared and I was dragged inside. Two secret policemen were inside the flat who started to hit me. They interrogated my about the girl. They took me to the headquarters of the Secret Police and presented me to the officer in charge. I recognized his Jewish origins. He was a member of the Communist Party and not especially in favor of Zionist movement. His first question was:

“Which Zionist party do you belong to?” I answered: “To the same as you yourself.” After a long discussion during which the fight almost escalated, a telephone call rescued the situation. I realized it was about my person. After the telephone conversation, the officer handed me my papers that was partially counterfeit anyway and ordered me to buzz off!”

Pinchas (Tibor) Rosenbaum

Pinchas Rosenbaum came from a family of Rabbis originating in the small Hungarian town of Kisvárda. He was a gifted orator, widely educated in the matter of the Thora and spoke Hebrew, English, Yiddish, Hungarian and later French as well. At the time when we worked together as escape helpers, we lived together in a room and so I got to know him quite well. I liked to listen to his stories about his actions during World War II. He turned up after the war in the uniform of an UNRRA **74)** officers and thus he gained admittance to the convents, to discover and to pick up Jewish children who had been hiding there during the war.

On a certain occasion, he simply disappeared for two weeks. After his return he told me that he was in London and got engaged to marry the daughter of a wealthy family, the family Stern. With his typical smile, he got out a Parker fountain pen with a gold nib and remarked in Yiddish: “Dus hab ich bekummen als Drushe-Geshenk!” (Look, I had this received as an engagement present)

After that I have not heard from him for a long time. I found out later that after the wedding he moved to Geneva. One day I read it in the paper that Pinchas (Tibor) Rosenbaum flew together with the President of Liberia Tubman in the same plane. When the President saw Pinchas to put on his Tefillim, Rosenbaum had to explain their significance. The discussion continued on questions of the economy. The president was so impressed that he made Rosenbaum the economic advisor of Liberia. Pinchas became internationally well-known. He became wealthy and was elected president of his banking corporation in Geneva. He also handled investments in Israel and became a good friend of Israel’s finance minister of the day, Pinchas Sapir. Occasionally we still met each other in Israel and he asked me every time if he could help me in any way.

One of my acquaintances had asked me one day to get in touch with Pinchas Rosenbaum as his youngest son needed help. The son was suffering from a cancer of the throat. The doctors suggested to transfer him to Geneva, for radiation treatment. I gave the boy’s mother, who accompanied her son to Geneva, a letter addressed to Pinchas Rosenbaum in which I asked him to help both of them. The mother told me after her return how Pinchas looked after both of them and paid all hospital and hotel bills. On my next trip to Switzerland I visited Pinchas in Geneva. He accompanied me to a synagogue he had erected exactly according to the model of the synagogue of his fathers in Hungary. Pinchas died as a young man, in his early years.

74) UN-organization for looking after the refugees, founded in 1943

My father's visits

My father visited me frequently during the Hachshara in Debrecen which is only 50 kilometers away from Nyírbátor. I found out soon enough that my father did not come to Debrecen for only my sake. He was introduced by a Shadchen (a marriage broker) to a widow called Böske (Rachel) Horowitz from Debrecen, whose husband was murdered during the Shoah. Böske had a workshop for ladies' fashion and she was pretty, slim and educated woman. Her father, Zvi Horowitz came in the Fifties to Israel. Her brother Gabriel (Gabi) and his wife Judith took part in the Hachshara of the Zionist youth movement in Debrecen. Gabi was later for years and year's teacher and cultural officer of the agricultural college Mikve Israel near Tel Aviv. The other brother, Chaim Horowitz who moved in the Thirties to Israel, belonged first to the Kibbutz Kfar -Sold and lived later in the Kibutz Givat- Chaim Ichud.

After a short time, my father married his Böske who presented him with four children. In the first year after their wedding, we celebrated Seder evening once again at my father's table, together with Gabi and his wife Judith and sang Hebrew songs this time without horrors.

A new young girl came to Debrecen, to the Hachshara whom we all called Zusu. She was very pretty and a blessed singer. I fell in love with her at first sight. I cannot explain why was I frightened to show her my feelings. Possibly, I suffered from inferiority complexes. Shortly after her arrival, I prepared the annual Chanukka celebrations and I asked Zusu to sing us a song. She agreed, but needed piano accompaniment. For this reason I accompanied her to town to a pianist with whom she could practice. On our way I was even frightened walk next to her and tried to keep a certain distance as between strangers. When father saw Zusu during one of his frequent visits to Debrecen, he saw her and said to me: "Do you know, this girl is pretty! She is very-very pretty, why don't you take her out one day?" I asked him: "Please do not pour any oil on the fire, will you!" One day a new guy turned up, called Gershon (Gecú) to us. He was small, took a pair of inclined glasses on the tip of his nose and he started to court Zusu almost immediately. One day he announced that they'll get married. After the wedding I went to see Zusu to offer her all my best wishes and the best of luck. She took me aside and told me one single sentence: "You are a great big rabbit's foot!" As it turned out to be, Zusu had some deep feelings for me. She went to Israel, as a matter of fact to Safed (Zfat).

When I once, in October 1998 I stayed in Safed, I met a friend called Shlomo Haupt from the Hachshara in Debrecen who lived there and I asked him whether he knew where Zusu now lived, as I remembered that thy lived for a long time in Zfat. Shlomo told me that she moved a few years ago to Rehovot. After a short search I found her telephone number and gave her a call. It was a conversation after 51 years. When I said who was calling, she answered deeply moved: “Do you know, today is my birthday and this was the best present I could have received!”

Makó

Later on, I was transferred from Debrecen to Makó, a South Hungarian town near the Yugoslavian and Rumanian border, a town famous for the onions cultivated there. After the war, the Hachshara was established in Makó in a building that was earlier on the home of the Talmud-Thora School. When the *haverim* left for Israel, the leaders decided to hang on to the building, in order to keep up the receipt of the financial support for the Hachshara. Therefore I had to go there and to make sure that it looked like the course was still being continued. At a check-up, I explained the inspectors the *haverim* were all at work.

In Makó I found entire families that survived the Shoah i.e. old people and kiddies as well. In fact, in 1944, 21,000 Jews, coming mainly from South Hungary, among them the Jews from Makó, had been concentrated in the Ghetto of Szeged. Later on, they had been deported from Szeged to the Strasshof Concentration Camp near Vienna. Thanks to the rescue activities of Rudolf Kasztner **75**) some of them had not been forwarded to Auschwitz.

I soon formed a friendship with a wireless technician who gave me information and tuition willingly on electrical technology and electronics. I was very enthusiastic about my new profession. Having learnt welding and got to know the various components such as resistors, cables and various tubes, I built a simple wireless receiver, a crystal detector set, with only one crystal. With this set it was possible to receive one single radio-station. Upon advancing further with my professional training, I managed to construct a true radio receiver with quite powerful tubes. This set, without a housing, I placed on my bedside cabinet and I suspended the speaker from the wall.

In the meantime other, new young people came to the Hachshara, among them young women. These asked me to install a loudspeaker in their bedroom as well, because they too

wanted to listen to music. I configured this loudspeaker later in such manner that it could be transformed into a microphone when some of its connections were disconnected and reconnected.

75) Rezső (Rudolf) Kasztner (1906 to 1957) journalist, Zionist, lawyer, politician from Cluj/Rumania. He conducted negotiations with the SS and Eichmann concerning the freeing of a number of Jews for large sums of money and military trucks. This resulted in bringing 1684 persons to Bergen Belsen at the end of June 1944 and from there 318 people to Switzerland. Kasztner took legal action in the fifties in Israel against a Malkiel Grünwald, was accused himself with collaboration, but acquitted. A survivor gunned him down in the street in 1957... (viz. E. Jäckel et al Encyclopedia of the Holocaust A.Barzel in E.R. Wiehn & M. H. Wiehn 1986/87 in German language.)

In this manner my friends and I myself were able to listen in to the confidential conversations of the young women. This gave me the idea to connect a microphone to the wireless and to hide the mike in the room next door.

The radio transmission

The local Jewish youth leader, Shaul Friedlender (Zusu's brother-in-law) spoke perfect Hebrew and he agreed to act as the speaker of an imaginary radio station. He settled down in the room next door in which the mike was hidden and read out in the tone of a real professional radio speaker notices from a Hebrew newspaper. Everybody believed we were receiving a radio transmission from Israel.

We also "transmitted" news in Yiddish as well and we sent messages and greetings "from Israel" for the Diaspora at a pre-arranged time in the evening. Many people turned up in our room who wanted to listen to the "radio transmissions from Israel" especially on the days when greetings to the relatives in the Diaspora were broadcast. We made a list of Makó-people who had immigrated to Israel and sent greetings to their relatives who stayed behind in Makó. One day, we mentioned the name of Tibi Jakobowits, which caused Tibi's brother, who was present, to jump out of the (ground-floor) window in a state of excitement, to spread the good news.

At the end even Makó's official news bulletin that appeared every Friday, mentioned that it was now possible to receive the Israeli radio transmitter "Kol Israel". A few persons brought along their wireless sets and asked me to help to tune them in. I found it quite difficult to

invent all kinds of complicated explanations as an explanation why that was no possible with their sets. When Purim came, Shaul decided to tell the truth. “You are stupid,” he said. “ the so-called transmissions did not come from Israel!” But the people did not want to believe what he said. They knew it better. They believed this was the “craziest Purim gag ever invented in Israel!”

Return to Budapest

I moved once again to Budapest, this time without orientation problems. I joined the Hachshara in the Kinizsy Street, in the city center. In the older houses of Budapest the individual flats are located around an inner courtyard and every house has an entrance with a gate that is locked at 10.00 pm. Each house had a gatekeeper who lived in a ground floor flat next to the entrance. Our gatekeeper was a pretty woman, whose 16-year-old daughter was even prettier. When we returned after 10.00 pm, we had to ring the bell at the gate and then she came to open the gate and received the so-called “gate-money”, a tip. We often didn’t return until late hours to enjoy the view provided by their transparent night ties.

The celebration on 29. November 1947

This date, the 29. November 1947 I shall never forget. Tensions grew for hours and hours in the excitement as we were awaiting the results of the UN-voting on the partition of Palestine. Almost all members of the various Zionist organizations got together, to listen to the wireless transmission. When the results became clear, we all jumped to our feet and sang “Hatikva”, the Israeli national anthem. After that we marched to the city center with our national banners and danced “Hora”. On marching Budapest’s main streets, the police kept the way free for us. The Budapest Jews joined us and were showing their joy as well. Jewish pride had never been demonstrated in such manner before. Only three years ago, the very same streets witnessed the persecution and the murder of countless Jews. Who could have dreamt of this day before? The Jews compared the situation with the arrival of the Messiah. On the top of the columns marched the banner carriers (like myself). We arrived to the Liszt Ferenc Music Academy where a special event was planned in the great hall, together with the Budapest Jewish Congregation. Important people addressed the meeting in Hungarian and some of them in Hebrew as well.

Chaim Gouri

Under the leadership of Chaim Gouri, an envoy of Israel, military training exercises took place in the woods of Csillebérc, in the Budaer Mountains. Pioneers of all Zionist groups took part. Gouri's deputy was called Cigány Eisenberg. We started with man-to-man battle training. Gouri handed out sticks to every one. We had to stand in a circle. As soon as his command: "Double-quick, in circle!" sounded, we ran around in a circle while Gouri whirled his stick and attacked the first. Woe betides to anyone who did not take up defensive position. I was always afraid of an unexpected stroke that could smash my fingers. This is how the man-to-man battle went: A stroke to the head. A stroke to the chin. A stroke to the right hand side. A stroke to the left hand side and a stroke to the leg. (It is possible that I did not recall correctly the sequence of the strokes or blows, after all, the training took place more than 50 years ago.) As I had not completely recovered from my stay in the concentration camp, I was unable to take part in all phases of the training. I was unable to roll over a line of barrels and had some difficulties in balancing over a high slat with a heavy bag on my back and catching a medicine ball from the right and then from the left while going, without falling over. The *haverim* spoke only Hungarian on the training grounds and mostly I had to serve Gouri as an interpreter. Gouri was vegetarian. For a meal, he prepared himself a bowl of salads. He chopped up the vegetables; applied some condiments to it, some olive oil, and he mixed the lot through with his fingers. I almost fainted with pleasure when I tasted his salads. After the end of our training I was told to report at the commanders of our movement. They asked me whether I understood the Czech language and I answered in the affirmative. The next question was whether I was prepared to take part in military training in Czechoslovakia to which I again answered yes. As a result, they promised me to transfer me to Israel on the completion of my training. I needed some documents to enable me to apply for a passport. I had to travel to Nyirbátor for this purpose, especially as I wanted to say good bye to my father as well. Nyirbátor was in the middle of the throws of the national elections. When I arrived, I saw that a large tribune was being erected for the various party bosses. (Those were the last free elections before the Communists took over) I came a little closer and I noticed a character I seemed to remember. The man considered the tribune where he was to be the main speaker. Because of his bald head I immediately recognized the notorious Mátyás Rákosi, I walked up to him and asked: "What is your opinion of the Zionist movement?" He turned red and answered in an angry voice: "The Zionists are Fascists!" I remarked: "You are a Jew, aren't you? I mean, your name was originally Roth! Am I right?" He did not want to answer and ignored me. Who knows what would have happened to me had I met him a few months later!

My service in the Czechoslovakian Army

Czechoslovakia was friendly towards the young Israeli State during the War of Independence; she delivered weapons and provided the Israeli Army with a number of training camps belonging to the Czech Army where pilots, paratroopers and radio operators received their military training. I, too, belonged to these volunteers. I arrived from Budapest to Prague one day in July 1948. The Israeli Ambassador, Ehud Überall (later Avriel) organized a reception at the Embassy. All volunteers attended. His wife Chana, who also worked at the Embassy, looked after all necessities. The liaison officer between us and the Czech Army was a guy called Michael. I was sent to the military camp of the city of Chrudim, the camp where Jaroslav Hašek (1867-1922) wrote his satirical book: "The Adventures of the brave Soldier Schwejk during the World War" (1923/24)

We have been received in the Barracks of Chrudim like regular recruits. Every one of us received a uniform, mess tin and woolen blanket. Afterwards, we had to report at the place of assembly, dressed in Czech military uniform, to ceremoniously receive one's own rifle with bayonet. Our commanders did not waste any time and began with the instructions, drill and march training with rifles, as prescribed in the Czech Army.

At the end of the session we had to enter our room where the subaltern demonstrated the art of bed making – something which is not as simple as one would believe. The straw mattress had first to be knocked into the shape of a box (the job for a sculptor). A sheet had to be spread over the mattress. Another sheet came and then the blanket, the edges of the top sheet were folded around the blanket to form a white frame. Next to the bed there was a bedside cabinet that looked like a two-tier-crate without doors, for our clothing, eating utensils and shoes, strictly according to the rules. The shoe soles were reinforced with rows of studs that had to be polished each evening. Then the shoes had to be placed into the locker, with the studs pointing forward. As a result, the serge could see it from the distance whether they had been polished well enough or not. The duty officer quite often performed surprise inspections to check whether the blanket and the locker were ship-shape or not. Very often, he rubbed the floor with his hand protected by his white gloves and if his gloves became dirty, we had to scrub the floor.

We received a thorough training and plenty of drill in the barracks. The worst part of it was when there was a fire alarm during the night. We had to throw out everything, beds, lockers at the window, we had to tie a number of sheets together to make up a rope, to fasten it to the mullion and transom and glide down from the third floor. Down there, my bed

neighbor and myself erected our beds, placed all our belongings on the top of them and marched off with the lot a few kilometers. In the course of the walk we had to pass a brook or a small river. The water reached up to our breast. We had to change into dry clothes. A short time later we received the report that the fire in the barracks had been extinguished.

Everybody back! Once again we had to pass the river and change over. Upon arriving into the barracks, we had to hang out our moist gear to dry. But the nightly adventures did not alter our wacky time. We had to get up as early as always. After breakfast, the barracks emptied themselves to the last man. We marched singing – together with the Czech soldiers – to the training grounds. The heavy iron gates of the barracks were closed and a big board was displayed that said: “THE BORDELLO IS CLOSED” The training usually went on until the evening. The field kitchen that was set up outside provided us with a hot meal.

The sergeant gave me a machine gun instead of my submachine gun, as I had broad shoulders. My “number two”, the ammunition carrier, dragged along the ammunition belt in a crate. When the command to open fire sounded, I dropped flat on my tummy, opened the triangular belt lever of the machine gun and my comrade inserted the belt. I fired volleys, until I received the command to stop. As I had no practical experience in the use of weapons, it happened to me in the intervals that I grabbed hold of the red-hot housing of the machine gun instead of the purposely-designed belts and badly burnt my hand. On one occasion, I was laying down on my belly, with my heels pointing upward and suddenly I felt a kick in one of my heels. The training officer remarked: “If this is how you’ll lay on the front in Palestine, Yasser Arafat will come and shoot you in the legs!” (We received such remarks quite often.) At the end of our training session we marched back to barracks, singing, where the girls were already awaiting the arrival of their friends.

We were not allowed to go to town in our uniforms, as the Czechs tried to keep our presence a secret. During a weekend absence of leave, I visited with some comrades the city of Pardubice. We visited a certain restaurant with dancing. Music was provided by a pure ladies’ band. On every table they had a list with the titles of the most popular hits of that time. The guests were allowed to mark their choice and the waiters transmitted their wishes to the band together with a tip in an envelope. We decided to poker high. We wrote in ten languages we knew: “I love you.” When the note was passed on to the lady musicians, they passed it forward from hand to hand and tried to figure out what it said. On that evening, we went out in the company of the ladies’ band.

The price for this pleasure was the gonorrhoea I caught.

I reported sick. The doctor sent me to a special hospital for venereal diseases. As penicillin was at that time not yet available, the treatment was extremely painful. Fortunately, penicillin arrived a few days before my planned discharge from the hospital. In the meantime I wrote to a girlfriend, called Esther, who was in Bratislava on a Hachshara. She realized that my letter came from a hospital and therefore she decided to come and to pay me a visit. When the male nurse called me and told me that I had a lady visitor, I did not know what to say to her about the reason of my presence. I asked the male nurse what to say. He put my mind to rest by saying that I am not the first aid; thus, they had a number of tricks. He got me a plaster bandage and crutches. He dressed my leg so that it looked I had it broken. Esther was so impressed that she even signed her name on the plaster bandage. When I returned to the barracks, I had a surprise. The comrades of my unit were waiting for me with a shower of water and accepted me as a full member of the men's club. As it turned out to be, I was not the only one with the clap.

One day we received news that an Israeli General shall soon be coming to see us. I was very excited at the prospect to be able to see an Israeli General in person for the first time. I also wanted to know what kind of uniform he is going to wear. We got together at the assembly place to give the distinguished visitor full military honors: the salute with rifles. When the visitor appeared in short sleeved white shirt but not in uniform, I was a little disappointed. First, I thought it was Ben Gurion because he had similar hair. But he was Israel Galili. He received the roll call and asked: "Who among you understands Hebrew?" Not mentioning the Israeli delegation, I was the only one. Galili was asking us whether we have any complaints. We answered in a choir: "We are drilled the whole day, from morning till nightfall and sometimes during the night as well!" He answered that's not too bad; the State Israel needs disciplined soldiers. At the end of his visit, he handed out Palmah ⁷⁷⁾ insignias.

⁷⁷⁾ Abbreviation for "raiding parties", leftist elite unit of the Jewish self-defense forces in Palestine since 1941

Bratislava

After termination of the Czech military service in June 1948, I traveled to Slovakia, to Bratislava and stayed at the Hachshara, Zochova ulica 3. The haverim were mainly of Czech origin and awaited the Alija **78**) like myself. I met again my friend Miss Esther Kramer from the Hungarian town of Paks, the same who had visited me during my military service. We were pleased to see each other again and I must admit that I liked her very much. With her blue eyes and blond hair she was really pretty. I met there new friends as well, the small Shuli and the big Shuli and this friendship was to destined to last for a long time in Israel too. I went for walks in the city and on the banks of the River Danube and visited the largest Mandela-Store in Slovakia. It was the highest building in Bratislava and high up, in giant letters, there was the name of the Jewish owner: *Mandela*. I was told that when the Nazis wanted to arrest Mandela, he went up to the roof and jumped to his death between the letters of his name. Near to the Zochova-street we have the Židovska ulica (Jewish Street) One day, after the war, they picked up an old Jewish woman in this street. The Slovakian anti-Semites were on the move again. But the Zionist youth took action. The fight went on until the police came and restored the peace. I was present during this incident through the window of the Hachshara building. Next to me an Israeli journalist typed his report on his portable typewriter to the Israeli press.

Prague

From Bratislava I went back to Prague again. I have heard there that a cousin called Joseph had returned from the concentration camps and lived in Liberec in the Sudeten. This area was taken away from the Germans after the end of World War II and restored to Czechoslovakia. The Jews made a pun: “Lieb Erec” (dear Erec) instead of Lieberec. Well, I went there to see Joseph after I heard the news of his survival, which had also heard of mine. Joseph was the son of my late mother’s brother. He and his brother Shlomo survived but the rest of the family perished. Joseph lost one arm in the factory during the forced labor; His wife Shoshana was expecting a child. She was at that time in the ninth month. Shoshana’s family, her parents, brothers and sisters were able to escape the Nazis and lived in the district. Some months later they all immigrated to Israel. Joseph’s invalidity was recognized in Israel and he received state aid for establishing a small food store in Ramat Gan.

From Lieberec I returned to Prague to wait the time of my emigration. I stayed at the Hotel Regina Soon after my arrival; my friends invited me to take part in the Friday evening’s divine service at the old Synagogue called the “Altneuschul”. This visit to the synagogue was a unique experience, not only for myself but for many other Jews as well, who came from all over the world, religious or not. Concerning the synagogue’s name there are two ways to read it. One says that the designation “altneu” refers to the two construction phases the first in the 13th and the second in the 14th century. The other interpretation introduces the Hebrew language into the discussion. In Hebrew, “al-tnai” means “provisionally” i.e. until the arrival of the Messiah. Next door, on the tower of the Jewish Community Hall, there is an ancient clock whose face has Hebrew letters instead of numbers and whose hands go anti-clockwise.

During my short stay in Prague I had lots of experience. I have heard that Golda Meir **80**) (at that time still called Meyerson shall be visiting Prague on the way to Moscow where she’ll be the first Israeli Ambassador in the Soviet- Union. I hurried to Vencel’s Place in the heart of Prague and saw Golda Meir to arrive in a state limousine with the Israeli flag. The Communist party secretary, Klement Gottwald **81**) prepared for her a grand reception. I must say it was a very moving moment.

Around the same time (1952) the legendary long distance runner, Emil Zatopek **82**) also called “the Locomotive” returned with his gold medal from the London Olympic Games. The excited supporters awaited him at the Wilson-Railway Station. The railway engine was decorated with flags and flowers. Zatopek got out and made a honorary run to Vencel’s Place to celebrate his triumphal reception.

There were many extraordinary nightclubs in Prague. One of them was called “Pět-P” the other “Luzerna”. In both nightclubs there were telephones on the tables next to a desk lamp, with a number. If you wanted to toast a lady for a dance you had to dial her number. If she liked the caller, you were on. If not, you tried your luck with another one.

A few days later the Czechoslovakian Wireless reported dramatically: “The President of the State, Eduard Beneš **83)** died. The people of Prague reacted spontaneously. There were everywhere flower-decorated Benes-portraits and lighted candles in the shop-windows. The Communist leaders disliked this and they took immediate countermeasures. State security forces took up positions on the street corners, their weapons hidden under their coats. The radio broadcast every five minutes warnings: “President Beneš died. Caution, caution! Keep your calm!”

The Communists started to make short job of their opponents in Czechoslovakia. Their next victim was the Foreign Secretary of the day, Jan Masaryk, who was thrown out at the open window of his office. Officially, they said, the Foreign Secretary committed suicide.

80) 1898 Kiev – 1978 Jerusalem, living since 1921 in Palestine 1948/49 Ambassador to Moscow, various ministerial posts, 1969-1974 Prime Minister

81) 1896-1953 Communist party boss, 1946 Prime Minister, conducted the Communist take over in 1948

82) 1948 London 10,000 m, Helsinki 1952 Marathon champion

83) 1884-1948, President of the State 1935-1938, 1945-1948

Having witnessed all these things and others still to follow, I was very pleased to be able to leave Czechoslovakia while the going was good. Before I left Prague, I purchased on the street market a dismantled gramophone and some tools. I knew it very well that after my arrival to Israel I shall have to look after these goods and myself could help me to earn a little money.

During my first visit to Tel Aviv, I mounted the gramophone on a wooden base in the joiner’s shop of my relatives the Prisants in the Volovelski Centre and I was able to sell it for two pounds, which in those days was a lot of money.

The Alija

My maiden flight took place on 15. September 1948, from Prague to Venice.

When the plane started, I was afraid to look out at the window. Not until we reached the traveling height did I dare to cast a glance at the heavenly wide landscape. It was a clear summer day with especially good sight and I enjoyed to splendid bird's eye view. The snow-covered Alps appeared to me as clouds hanging in the air and our flight over the sea was simply breathtaking. That was the first time in my life that I saw the sea. The term "sea" I knew from the Cheder, from the creation of the world and the crossing of the reeds. When we passed Venice, the city appeared to me like a small island in the great sea and I asked myself, how the pilot will find the landing place in this small point. I felt a hard impact at the landing and so, to my surprise; my first flight was over, without any trouble.

I had to cross Venice on my way from the airport to the seaport. On my way, I admired the picturesque houses and churches. Up till then I regarded Prague the most beautiful city in the world but now, seeing Venice, I realized that other cities also exist that can take up with Prague and Budapest. I found the buildings especially fascinating, as they appeared to be growing out of the sea.

"M/S Campidolia" the Italian ship with which I was to travel to Israel, already anchored in the port. A group of immigrants pressed towards the ship on the waterfront. They all wanted to board the same ship. Most of them talked Yiddish which made communications with them easier. After a long time, the representative of the shipping company turned up and explained that the ship will not leave Venice until two days time and until then no one may board. Suddenly I felt like being cast ashore in a desert. I did not know Venice, I spoke no Italian and I had no idea where shall I rest. But, help came from unexpected quarters. I discovered a very pretty young lady among the immigrants, called Miriam, a Jewess coming from Italy, a trained nurse who decided to immigrate to Israel and to serve in the new State of Israel as a medical nurse. She spoke German, I spoke Yiddish and we could communicate. When she heard that I had nowhere to stay, she took me along to the city office of the "Joint" where they found a place for us until the ship was to leave port.

On board, we never had one single boring day. There was always something going on. As Miriam spoke Italian, the Captain asked her to act as a liaison person between him and the passengers. Therefore she was able to keep me posted on everything that happened. The immigrants were practically all survivors of the Holocaust, who came direct from the

concentration camps. In addition, a few delegates from Israel and a number of important persons, at any rate, persons who described themselves as being important.

One day, Miriam told me in confidence that the safety officers of the ship had discovered an Arab spy who managed to sneak his way on board but is now detained in a cabin. This case was never made public. Not until we arrived in Tel Aviv, was he arrested by the security. The news that people of the Jewish underground organization „Lechi“ **84)** murdered the UN representative Count Folke Bernadotte) in Jerusalem have reached us on our way.**85)**

I found the Italian cuisine strange. My taste was conditioned by the East European Jewish tradition. When the Italian Steward served us creamed potatoes with black olives for lunch, I thought first that the black things were prunes. I had never seen olives before. I knew the term “olive” only from my studies of the Thora as a religious-legal definition of a small quantity, “ the size of an olive” as the smallest quantity over which the corresponding blessing had to be said. When the Steward served the olives with his ladle, I asked for some more , but upon trying them, I found olives bitter. I was expecting something sweet. I buried my olives in the creamed potatoes and let it stand. A few days later I became seasick but fortunately I got well again.

The ship entered the Cyprus port of Famagusta, to pick up fruit and vegetables. This was necessary as in those days the agricultural yields were very low in Israel. In addition, daily new immigrants streamed to the country. Fruit and vegetables had to be imported with special view of the approaching season of high festivals. **86)**

In Cyprus British soldiers came on board and took up position on the gangway. They wanted to stop would be immigrants detained in British internment camps in Cyprus to board. The presence of British soldiers was not accepted peacefully. Passengers picked a fight with them and it almost came to fisticuffs.

84) Abbreviation for “Fighters for the Freedom of Israel” Zionist-military underground organization, led by Shamir since 1942

85) 1895-1948 Nephew of King Gustav V. UN-negotiator since My 1948, shot to death on 17.9.1948

86) Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year

On 23. September 1948 the ship entered Port Tel Aviv but had to drop anchors at a certain distance from the waterfront as the harbor was not deep enough to accommodate ships of that size. We were transported to land by boots and directed to a large warehouse where all formalities were to take place. A recruitment office of the Army was also there. All kinds of representatives of the various Kibbutzim were running about who wanted to persuade the newly arrived people to join this or the other Kibbutz. When my turn came with the registration, I was told to wait, as first the new ones had to be registered. Because of my knowledge of Hebrew, they mistook me for a returning Israeli functionary.

From the Tel Aviv Port we traveled by bus along the Ben-Jehuda Street. To be able to travel across the streets of Tel Aviv and to see everywhere Hebrew letters was indeed a fulfillment of an old dream.

From Tel Aviv we traveled further to Hadera, where we were provided accommodation in a former British military camp at the town entrance. Families came to a home for immigrants in Raanana.

Next day I went again to Tel Aviv to see my Uncle Zvi, my mothers' brother with whom I already exchanged some letters. I can see my late mother with my mind's eye how she wrote Uncle Zvi's address in Hebrew letters on the envelope and added only the name "Palestine" in Latin writing. On my way to Tel Aviv, I anxiously awaited my first encounter with Zvi and his family, I walked from the bus terminal across the Moshawot Place in the direction of the Ha'Alija Street to the Emek Jisrael Street where the Zvi's had their restaurant. The meeting with Zvi and his wife Chana moved me to tears. Chana cooked like at home, the meal taste as if prepared by my late mother. We talked about the great misfortune of our family and Chana told me a great deal about my late mother she loved very much. They wanted to know how I was able to overcome the horrible wartime in the concentration camps. Towards the evening we went to their home at the Ha'Alija Street 51. Their daughter Sarah was seven years old. I spoke to her in Hebrew that I learnt in the Diaspora. "What is your wish?" etc. Suddenly I heard the little one asking her father: "Daddy, who is this bloke who talks so funny?" Next morning, I helped out in the restaurant, made pop, and got to know all the other, hitherto unknown Israeli beverages. Zvi paid me half an Israeli pound for my help in the bar and I was astonished to get so much money.

Soon after I got to know the rest of the family, first at the families Prisant, Zvi's stepbrothers. Jakob Shmil Prisant's daughter Ariela fought in the ranks of the "Lechi" and lost her life in an action against the British. In her memory, the Tel Aviv City Library is named Ariela-House. The Prisants, four brothers and one sister immigrated to Israel in the

thirties from Majdan and settled down in the Florentin district in the south of Tel Aviv, where many people from Karpathorussia had lived.

In addition, immigrants from Saloniki **87)** lived there, people well-known of their diligence, who made their living as carriers and haulage contractors. The two Prisant boys opened a small joiners shop in Tel Aviv's Wolowelski Centre that later on expanded into a factory for furniture for juveniles, called Prima, a company well-known in Israel.

§I also met there another member of our family, Joseph's brother Shlomo, the one I had already visited in Liberec. He arrived one year before myself and found a small flat in the Florentin-district next to Zwi's restaurant and not far from the synagogue where Rabbi Fraenkel officiated, the rabbi of the district. Because of the TB Shlomo picked up in the camps he was freed from military service. When we met each other, he was already cured and was busy working in a diamond cutting shop. He invited me to move in with him. Later Zwi Weinberger joined us too, Shlomo's cousin on the side of his mother. Zvi Weinberer had arrived on board of the "Altalena" **88)** and served in the Marines.

Unfortunately, on my return to Hadera, Miriam was no longer in the immigrants' camp. She washed my underwear and spread it on my bed. It was accompanied by a small hand-written note in which she told me that she was called up and must do service in a military hospital. I have never seen her since.

I moved to Tel Aviv and earned my money with the repair of electrical goods in my neighborhood. One day, on passing the Place of Moshawot, I was arrested by the Military Police and brought to a recruiting centering Tel Litwinski (today Tel Hashomér). I explained that I did not want to dodge military service but never received any call-up, although I was registered upon my arrival in the port. They believed me and I became an Israeli soldier on the spot.

87) Viz. Erhard Roy Wiehn, *Jews in Thessaloniki*, Konstanz 2001 (in German)

88) Pseudonym for Vladimir Jabotinsky (1880-1949) writer, and Zionist leader from Russia. 1925 founder of the Zionist-revisionist party and youth organization "Brit Trumpeldor" "Betar" for short. Name of a boat that should have brought weapons to Israel, which was prohibited by the government so as to not endanger their monopoly of power. This led to the sinking of "Altalena" in June 1948.

In the Tel Litvinsky recruiting center they gave me a pair of khaki shorts and gave me 90 cents to go and to buy in the "Ata" textile store in Tel Aviv's Ha'Alija Street a khaki shirt to go with it. This was my uniform. Every one of us received for the drill an overall and a wooden rifle. Real guns were reserved for the fighting troops the wooden rifles were good enough for drill and exercises. I strolled about in the evenings in the center of the base and met all kinds of old acquaintances from Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and the concentration camps as well as female soldiers, Jewish girls from Hungary who still had some problems with their Hebrew and therefore they were pleased to meet someone who spoke Hungarian.

I found it difficult to get used to the predominant heat, as I had to put on my overall made of heavy coarse drill stuff, regardless to the weather. I marched kilometers and kilometers without any water. One was allowed to take along one single flask, as the commanders insisted upon our "water discipline", with the explanation that in the desert there is no water anyway. I almost fainted for thirst. During our march across the citrus plantations around Tel Litvinsky I discovered a tap belonging to the irrigation system. Without considering a possible punishment, I fell over the tap, turned it on so that the water came really gushing out, and drank my fill. The whole troop followed my example. We got a drench by the strong stream of water, but it was real pleasant. We used our visit to the plantation to pick a few ripe oranges and we hid the fruit in the overalls. The troop leader discovered that the entire troop was "suddenly expecting babies" but he proved to be tolerant and asked us not to peel the oranges within the boundaries of the plantation. That was not the thing to do. I learnt something again.

One day, upon returning from the exercise grounds, we were given real rifles and we were loaded on trucks, ready for action. We did not know why did we have to travel to Jaffa, armed with rifles. We stopped at the clock tower in front of the prison (today's police station) in which the "Lechi" members were kept, accused with the killing of Count Folke Bernadette. We were told, some of the "Lechi" people had escaped and we were to capture them. We deposited our rifles in the trucks and declared we were not prepared to fire on Jews. They had no other choice but to take us back to the base. A few days later we were taken to Hadera, to help the military police in the capture of some elements hidden in the woods, who wanted to escape their military service.

The last traces of the concentration camps were still present. Among others, I still suffered from an open, malignant sore on my calf, caused by lack of vitamins. It looked like a gap in the flesh going right through to the bone and it stank horribly. There was no real cure for it. The doctors believed, it'll come right in time and the only treatment needed was a daily

change of bandages. It kept me busy for years. I mention this bad sore because the Israeli army took over the British military custom to stick the trousers' legs into the boots and to add wrap-round puttees. Of course, I could not wrap anything around my poor leg, as that would have made my pains even worse. Thus, I reported to the doctor to be exempted from this duty and I received it as well. On my return to the tent, I found the place empty; all my comrades have been transferred to the front.

From Tel Litvinsky I was sent to a radio operators' unit on Base Sarona (today's government district in Tel Aviv). Once again, I had to get used to a new camp, new life and new comrades.

The rouse was accompanied each morning by noisy music coming from the loudspeakers spread all over the camp that always played Ravel's "Bolero." Obviously that was the only record the base possessed. After the morning p.t. (some would say work-out) Salutation of the Flag and breakfast, we boarded a bus that was called up for military service together with the driver and belonged to the bus co-operative society "Eged". I forgot his name, but he was a friendly Yemenite, with the Egged cap who spoke better Yiddish than the Galizians and knew every one of us by name. He drove us every day to the bases "Net" and "Diamond" and back. After the bus was returned to the co-operative society, we traveled by truck.

The radio operator troop had two workshops. The one, located in Pardes -Katz, was called "Reshet" (Net) because once upon a time there used to be a wire net factory at the place. The second, "yahalom" (diamond) was located in a former diamond cutting shop opposite Hospital "Geha". Today the motorway Geha passes the place by. Jeshajahu Lavy, called „Ishi“, managed the shop „Net“and the boss of the "Diamond" shop was Naftali Ras called "Nafta". Upon reporting at "Nafta" and he asked my professional experience, I mentioned to him that I brought along some tools. He laughed and said, they tools I can take back with me. I was assigned to the shop "Net" in which there were several departments. Shlomo Bornstein, together with Moshe Perlmann, called „Partisan“ and Chaimke Zimmermann, managed the electrical and generator department. The department for the repair of the radio transmitters models 19 and 20 and that of the walkie-talkies 536 was managed by Zeew Ben Jaakov and the carpentry shop by Joske.

I became a member of transmitter repair team in which the transmitter's models 348 and BC 610 were repaired. The technician Joe from South Africa, Gideon Sareana, Ehud Rubinstein and an ex-"Etsel" **89**) man called Zvi as well as Berkovitz, a graduate engineer worked also there. Every one of these characters would deserve a volume to be written about

him. Joe, the volunteer from South Africa was commonly called “Crazy Joe”. He only listened to English radio music, which was strange for us, while we wanted to listen to Israeli music. Joe stuck to his taste and was not ready to compromise. We climbed the roof to sever the antenna, he reconnected it again – an eternal game.

89) Abbreviation of a Jewish military underground organization (Hagana Bet) since 1936

Ehud Rubinstein was a tall fellow, at least 6 feet high. He had a bushy moustache, like a Drus. If we wanted to board the truck, mind you, I was at the time much thinner and lighter; Ehud just picked me up by my shirt, lifted me up like a chicken and loaded me in the truck.

Whenever he went to Tel Aviv to visit his father, I gladly accompanied him. His father, director of the main branch of the Bank Leumi in the Allenby, had a pair of glasses with a thick black rim. He sat at the desk with a round chrome-plated clock on it. I liked the best that whenever Mr. Rubinstein hit the bell, a messenger immediately appeared to whom the director handed over a document for urgent transmission to another person in the bank. So when Ehud said it was time to go, I always begged to stay just a little longer until perhaps Mr. Rubinstein will hit the bell once again.

Mr. Berkovitz, the graduate engineer came from Bulgaria. Despite of his introverted nature I liked to work with him because one could learn a great deal from him. One day Mr. Berkovitz told me that his wife shall be returning from Cyprus in a few days where she'd been imprisoned in a British internment camp. He was afraid from asking a leave of absence from his superiors to be able to pick up his wife at the Port of Haifa. I suggested he should approach Ishi, who would certainly grant him a few days what he did. Shortly afterwards Berkovitz asked me whether I could lend him an interesting book to read. “Why do you need a book”, I asked, “if your wife has just returned to you after such a long time?” “I'm afraid I might find it boring”, was the surprising answer.

The motor vehicle sergeant, a “jecke” (German Jews called thus in Israel because of the jackets they preferred to wear) was called Baschitz. We called him “Baschwitz”. He was responsible for all types of motor vehicles, including booties. They delivered to us armored vehicles the Israelis captured on the Egyptian front, hit by anti-tank grenades. Charred remains of human bodies still stuck to their side walls that had to be scraped off before we updated the armored vehicle with our radio equipment.

Ishi's car was Baschwitz's true love. It was a British "Humber" discovered in a hidden storage place in Jaffa, whose owners left. The car was re-sprayed in khaki color, and equipped with very impressive transmission antennas. Baschwitz was, as I said, responsible for the vehicles of the base. In addition he involved himself in everything and got very excited any minor detail. People found his jecke accent hilariously funny. They were looking out for an opportunity to punish him. The time came on 1. April 1949. "April Fool's Day" was widely celebrated in those days. Even the "Voice of Jerusalem" broadcast that morning all kinds of funny reports. Thus, Baschwitz was told that Ishi got stuck with his "Humber" at headquarters 8 in Tel Aviv. The location of today's Hilton Hotel. To make matters worse, there was a sweltering heat on that day, 30°C or more. When Baschwitz got the message, he took an armored vehicle (no other car was available) and took off. But the comrades at HQ were already alerted so when Baschwitz arrived with the armored car, he was told that the "Humber" had been towed away to the military police station in Jaffa. Baschwitz drove to Jaffa where he was told that he was made an April's Fool. Ishi had heard of it and was awaiting in good spirits until Baschwitz turned up after his two hours torturous trip and exited his armored vehicle.

From this time on I received varied tasks. Prior to the armistice meeting between the representatives of Israel and Egypt in Rhodes on 24. February 1949 I had to prepare a transmission unit Model BC 610 and to make it ready for shipment. On the crate I attached a piece of cloth with the address Israel Delegation Hotel Rose Rhodes in graphic writing. When the unit came back later, the piece of cloth was covered by stamps in English and Greek, and had even a wax seal. I carefully removed it and looked after it but not well enough because someone pinched it. This transmitter made history because now I had to make it ready for the planned military transmitter. The installation was Ishi's responsibility but I belonged to his team. The place selected for the transmitting station was the Ha'Manchil School in Ramat Gan. One team received the task to organize a transmission studio. A wooden crate was delivered there with a hole in its middle for the gramophone. The second team – to which I myself belonged – installed the antenna. The tubes for the antenna came from the place opposite the Geha Hospital where bits and pieces left behind by the British were still to be found. In order to install the tubing's, flanges and connection pieces had to be welded on them. I told Ishi that I had been trained in the concentration camp as a welder and that I can do the job without any doubt. The required hand tools were sent to Joske's metalworking shop in Ha Rakevet Street in Tel Aviv. This was a small-sized armament factory where all types of bombs were manufactured. The designers decided that the location

of the antenna should be exactly at the corner of kindergarten nursery. I started to job by trying to make a hole for the socket of the antenna. However, when the owner of the kindergarten nursery an old-old woman discovered that her territory had been invaded, she prevented any further activities. Ishi stood there and gave me the order to keep on digging while the woman cursed and yelled I should stop and so on. At the end, Ishi managed to convince the woman and the base got ready. We fastened ropes to the antenna in order to vertically erect it. But it was not to be. The sudden cry of the women caused all of us to jump and run for our lives. The antenna collapsed. But at the end we managed to erect it. We organized a recorder model "Webcor" that used steel wire on which the programs were recorded. Tape recorders were not yet available. Ishi recorded the following message: "Listen, listen everybody! Here speaks the trial transmitter 4 x 4 waw-alef!" Following that message, part of the national anthem "Hatikva" was transmitted. This message was broadcast several times that day. In the meantime the military transmitter had been moved to Jaffa and developed into a respectable radio station.

My next task was to equip a semi trailer (an artic) with an amplifier for 12 mikes. We found the vehicle at the above mentioned place opposite the Geha-Hospital. The British left it behind with plenty of sugar I the tank to sabotage it. But we cleaned the tank and got the semi trailer to the base "Reshet". On the top of the vehicle there was a structure I had to remove before the amplifier was mounted.

I spent some more years in military service, until 1955. I got married in 1953, I have three children and today six grandchildren.

After my demobilization I tried to find my way without any previous experience in civilian life. Until 1973 I was chief buyer of an electrical company. Following that I made myself independent and represented electrical companies located in Switzerland, Germany and France.

In 1998 I moved to Switzerland, to join my partner in life, Myrtha in Basel. This is where I wrote my book "**Schlajme**". It will be continued. Especially, I could fulfill my old dream, to sit down and paint. I became an artist, a painter. Between the exhibitions I read papers on the Shoah, especially in schools in Switzerland and in Germany.