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FOREWORD

In March 2001 the Boro Park Y was given the unique opportunity to create a new program for Holocaust Survivors—funded by UJA/Federation and the Conference on Jewish Material Claims against Germany—that would provide a social adult activity program for Nazi victims.

Since its inception, Club Nissim has developed into a mainstay of the lives of its members, celebrating life and ensuring their dignity. It provides an opportunity to participate in learning and growth that was denied them in their youth.

The stories of their lives before and during the war are their legacy to our community, giving our generation and generations to follow an understanding of their life experiences, and serving as a memorial to the Six Million *Neshamos*.

We thank the members of the writing group for sharing with us their memories, and we dedicate this volume in their honor—and in the honor of those we have lost.

Ellie Kastel

Acting Executive Director, The Boro Park Y

INTRODUCTION

Club Nissim at the Boro Park YM-YWHA, founded in 2001, today consists of approximately nine hundred women and men who are Survivors of the Holocaust. As the Program Director of Club Nissim, I am almost daily confronted with testimonials from the past; jokes and nightmares, stories and reminiscences, to which I listen with a sense of awe.

Like many others before me, who have found themselves in the company of Holocaust Survivors, I felt passionately that as many testimonials as possible had to be preserved. So when I asked a teacher of creative writing, Elki Rosenfeld, to lead a series of memoir writing workshops, it was with the goal of creating an anthology of such testimonials; memories of the world that was lost; witness of atrocities; remembrances of the dead; but also — perhaps to an even greater extent — a chronicle of the celebration of survival; faith and reliance in God; the choice of life and hope in the face of devastating forces. We are living through the end of days – and the end of the days of the Survivors. True, some of our members are still quite young, but the young also have fewer memories.

It was originally our hope that many more would respond to the call of this memoir writing project, but what we may lack in quantity is surely made up for in quality. In creating this volume, I wanted to preserve not only personal legacies by its respective contributors, but also a legacy of our program, Club Nissim — The Miracle Club.

Here—with *Siata DiSh'maya*—it is.

Simonne Hirschhorn

Program Director, Club Nissim

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BRONIA BRANDMAN



Bronia (Bracha) Brandman, née Rubin, was born in 1931 in Jaworzno, Poland.

She came to the U.S. in 1946, achieved a Master's Degree in education, and worked for many years in the Public School system. These days, she volunteers as a docent at the Jewish Heritage Museum.

Mrs. Brandman has one child and two grandchildren. She lives in Boro Park with her husband.

BRONIA BRANDMAN

Faces from Auschwitz

The toothless ghost standing before me – was this my uncle? I wasn't sure – he did not resemble him. This man looked like a bunch of matchsticks loosely joined; the bony structure about to topple. His only recognizable feature was his coal-black eyes, now deeply recessed in the hollow below his bony skull. His terrified eyes were wild as a hunted animal's. His cheeks were also sunken. He was dressed in rags, his bony rib cage protruding. His speech was incoherent. He grunted.

Somebody had alerted me that my uncle was in my concentration camp, Brzezinka, a part of Auschwitz. Brzezinka was on the other side of the high voltage barbed wire, where the gas chambers and crematoria were. I was strategically placed near the ovens for the quick transfer of the murdered victims' clothes and possessions to be sorted by us prisoners for shipment to Germany.

Uncle Volf used to be a handsome man, with a beautiful set of white gleaming teeth, olive skin and riveting black eyes. His black goatee gave him a distinguished look. He was a kind person and solicitous of his wife and baby son. He was my mother's next youngest brother, one of ten siblings.

Uncle Volf married a sophisticated lady from a big town, Jassy, in Rumania. I wondered why she was willing to settle in our provincial town of Jaworzno in Poland. Aunt Liba was not especially attractive. Perhaps she was attracted to my uncle because of his good looks. Aunt Liba became a mentor to her many young nieces. They flocked to her for advice on the latest fashion. She also initiated classes for them in literature and foreign languages, to supplement public and religious schools. I remember their three year-old son, Elias, named after my grandfather. He loved his sailor outfit. He had curly black hair and coal black eyes like my uncle.

Now I faced Uncle Volf in the barrack at Brzezinka. I stood there transfixed. I did not know what to say or do. Had I been able to communicate with Uncle Volf, would I have been able to tell him that his wife and child and all his ten brothers and sisters and their spouses went the way he was about to go, through the gas chamber and chimney? Did my Uncle recognize me? After being in Auschwitz for a year and a half I was told I looked like five instead of twelve. Did I look as unrecognizable and frightening to him as he looked to me?

According to the German agenda, I, a child, should have been exterminated. He, as a young, healthy adult in his prime, could have had a chance at survival. Did my uncle know what was in store for him? He came with a transport from another concentration camp. Because the gas chambers were filled to overflowing, he was placed in our camp to wait his turn, which was to come within an hour or two.

We stared wordlessly at each other. How should I have parted from my Uncle Volf?

* * *

The gas chambers, the six crematoria billowing smoke twenty-four hours a day, every day, were a constant reminder to me that the only way out from Auschwitz-Birkenau would be through the chimney in smoke. My grave the air. My remains turning into nothingness, as if I never existed.

I was sick with typhus. I was lying on a wooden plank, covered with straw in the "Revier." The "Revier" was a compound of barracks for the sick. The sick were not treated.

They either died or were removed to the gas chambers. I lay naked, with two other women on a 36-inch plank, one of three tiered planks filling the barrack from end to end. I had a high fever, diarrhea and was racked with pain.

Only two weeks ago – or was it three; at the end of 1943 or beginning of 1944, I don't remember – all the sick people of my barrack were dispatched to the gas chamber. Among them was my oldest sister, Mila. I was the only one to be saved in the barrack. Bozenka, a Jewish head of the barrack, told the German henchmen that I was her sister. Why did Bozenka single me out? Perhaps because I was the only child around. I was twelve and looked like five. My parents and my brother Tulek were taken from my hometown, Jaworzno, Poland, and were killed in Auschwitz in August 1942. My baby sisters, Rutka and Macia, were killed a year later. At the time I did not know the whereabouts of my brother Mendek. He had been sent to a concentration camp in 1941 at the age of 15.

Lying in the "Revier," listless, with death staring me in the face, I thought I saw a mirage – a group of Jewish men appearing in our barrack. Except for the Germans, I had not seen men since we came to Auschwitz in the summer of 1943. They did not look like "Muselmanen," cadavers, like the rest of us. They were electricians coming to do repairs. As skilled inmates they were privileged, better fed. Among them was a young boy, Yossie, who was fifteen. He appeared to be the darling of the men, who felt paternal towards him. I felt a tinge of jealousy. Things were working out for Yossie.

Something unexpected happened, Yossie began to sing. Song in the "Revier" – in Auschwitz? In his angelic voice, laden with emotion, he sang "Kol Nidre," the song sung in the synagogue on the eve of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the holiest day of the Jewish year. I felt something stir, something I had long suppressed. For one fleeting moment I allowed myself to hope. Hope that Yossie would survive; that he would be a witness to Auschwitz; that there would be Jewish continuity.

The men could not finish their work and were to return the next week. How I looked forward to that glimmer of life, to seeing and hearing that golden boy with the angelic voice! I counted the days, but when the men returned the next week, Yossie was not among them. He had been selected for the gas chamber while standing in the twice-daily "Zählen Appell," roll call.

Shabbes Remembered

It's Friday

Mother took a day off from work helping Father in the store

In our large kitchen in the middle of the floor

There is a wooden round tub

The girls take turns in the bath

Pungent aromas waft

Fluffy, thick cheesecake for Shabbes breakfast

Chicken soup rich in fat

Succulent roast, marbled and red

"grivenes," sizzling in schmaltz

The candles glow

Silverware glistens next to the finest china

Children in their Shabbes finery

My saintly Mother in white embroidered apron

The mundane transformed into the sublime

In my third tier narrow cot, lying naked in Auschwitz,

Racked by fever of typhoid
I, a twelve year-old, bereft of
My family, turned to ashes in the crematoria
I hallucinate. Shabbes.....

Some Vignettes of a Greenhorn

It was a momentous day in August 1946, when our cousin, Simon, sent my brother Mendek and me visas to America, from Germany. For the occasion I got a dream outfit, a heavily pleated skirt of navy-blue very stiff material and a sweater to match. I was going to wow my family with my elegance. Eventually I realized how grotesque I looked in that pleated skirt which made me look like a barrel, wider than taller.

We came on the Marine Perch, an obsolete naval boat. I thought I was in paradise when I saw the tables laden with exotic food. All I wanted - oranges, peanut butter (a novelty), chocolate. Nirvana lasted one day, until the seas became very choppy. Nausea set in and I retched the rest of the two-week voyage. I felt like Tantalus - all those tempting goodies dangling in front of me and I could not reach them.

The excitement of the passengers was palpable as we approached the harbor of New York. The Statue of Liberty, the looming tall buildings, the throngs of people awaiting the newcomers, the panorama was mesmerizing and overwhelming. Imagine my chagrin when all the passengers were called to disembark into the arms of loving family and I alone was detained on the boat. My lung X-rays showed lesions of an indeterminate nature. The authorities could not determine if I had active TB. They escorted me to the Ellis Island hospital ward where I was the only patient around over the Labor Day weekend. I couldn't communicate and was shocked to find myself imprisoned in America. I was released in a few days with the commitment to be monitored for tuberculosis for the next two years.

My brother and I moved into my cousin's three-room apartment together with his wife, his children and his elderly parents. (We stayed there until both my brother and I got married, which was seven years later.)

How did I function in America? I had finally arrived to the free country, to the country of milk and honey. I expected to be able to instantly revert to the real me of yore. At home I was raised feeling elitist. We had such illustrious forbears on my father's side. My mother's father was known far and wide as the well-to-do charitable, highly respectful personage. My heritage must somehow reveal itself and I should be valued; I was that rare child survivor, deserving of deference, I thought.

In reality I was a dour, short, fat, inappropriately dressed, strange kid. I was enrolled in New Utrecht High School, even though I had only one year of elementary school behind me. Bais Yaakov was non-existent in Boro Park then. I sat in class feeling deaf and dumb. My classmates were giggly, bantering, carefree youngsters, who returned home to parents at the end of the day. I was fifteen, going on seventy-five, incapable of laughter or crying. I yearned to be understood on my terms. The only subject I comprehended was math and geometry, where I excelled. $A = \pi$, r squared, the hypotenuse and the isosceles triangle were Greek to all of us; so I had the same chance to learn it as the rest of the class. The teacher taught us that it was OK if we did not do well in math. If you had a Ph.G, "Papa hat gelt," you would succeed in life. He called me Sonia, as he could not deal with Bronia. The "frum" girls were very nice to me. They'd invite me for Shabbos afternoon. They came from different degrees of "frum."

After a year I had some command of English and decided I wanted to accelerate high school. Mrs. Bridge, my counselor, introduced me to the principal who was to give me permission to take six major subjects per semester, instead of the customary four, and to allow me to

study two foreign languages on my own during the summer and then take the Regents exam. I had to prove myself capable and I did not want to embarrass Mrs. Bridge who had a lot of confidence in me. As the interview progressed, I was bragging about my brother Mendek, who was extremely talented and very good with his hands. I figured handy was too simple a word. Why not impress with my more advanced vocabulary! So I proudly explained that my brother was very handicapped. I could not understand why the principal was baffled when I assured him that there was nothing physically wrong with Mendek. Permission to accelerate was granted. I finished four years of high school in less than three years.

I wasn't able to establish any friendships in America for quite a while. I had an identity crisis. Who was I? I did not belong. I had no peers. My status of survivor, as a child in a concentration camp in Poland, was practically non-existent. The older survivors wrote me off. I was greeted with "What do you know, you were too young," or, because I learned English sooner than they did, "You are already Americanized." The implication was that I was no longer in their category of Greenhorn. The American youngsters considered me a Greenhorn who did not fit in. It took many years for me to find myself and restore my self-worth.

In time I found myself taking advantage of the many opportunities America offered. I frequented the theater and opera, albeit standing room only. I got a college degree, Magna Cum Laude, attending school at night, and eventually a Master's degree at the age of sixty. Even so, I still feel more at home with the "grieners" than with Americans. After all these years, I still have not metamorphosed into an American.

ESTHER BRODY



Esther Brody, née Basch, was born in 1926 in Bardiov, Czechoslovakia.

She came to the U.S. in 1946, and is a trained nutritionist.

Mrs. Brody has seven children and—*keynahora*—“many” grandchildren and great-grandchildren. She lives in Boro Park.

ESTHER BRODY

My Grandfather the Hero

“Dear Talmidim, it says in the Torah that every Yid can save himself until the last minute. We should all try to do it in any way we can. We all know what is happening to the Yiden in other cities.” These were the words of Rabbi Weismandel, the Rav of Nitra’s son-in-law, spoken right before the take-over of Nitra. The Germans had already taken over most of Eastern Europe, when they started to round up the older Jews in Nitra to send them to Auschwitz. This was in the summer of 1942.

My grandfather had heard what was going on, and heard what Rabbi Weismandel had said, so he got himself peasant clothing, false papers, a beggar’s bag to put his false papers and tefillin in. He also got big boots with space for a saw, screw driver, and other tools he thought he would need.

When the Germans rounded up the younger people, he got dressed and walked with everyone to the train which was for cattle.

Thousands of people were put into one car. On the way he stopped, went into a corner and davened for two hours. People thought my grandfather was crazy but he did not care.

After he finished davening, the Germans grabbed him and threw him into the train. It was stuffy and hot. There was no window.

When the train started to move, my grandfather made a tiny hole with the saw and screwdriver that he had brought, to see where they were. Then he started to cut out the wood and put it back so the Germans should not realize that something was wrong. Then he started to cut piece by piece and kept putting it back until the whole board was off. Then he waited a few minutes. He looked through the small hole he had made, and then announced “whoever wants to save himself should jump now!” In a split second, he took off the board and jumped out in a corn field with ten other people. They waited there until the train went away.

Finally, when the train disappeared, my grandfather and the other people who jumped checked if anything was broken. Miraculously, none of them hurt themselves. They got up and walked to another city for food and a place to stay.

After a year of wandering and hiding, they walked back to Nitra and hid in a bunker until the war ended in 1945.

After the war, Rabbi Weismandel came back to Nitra from Switzerland, where he had fled to when they rounded up the older people, to help rebuild the broken neshamos.

In the year 1945, in the city of Nitra, my grandfather got married. All the other people that jumped from the train with my grandfather came to my grandparents’ house to eat. They thanked my grandfather for what he had done. My grandfather said, “I did nothing. Hashem just made me a shaliach. I listened to what Rabbi Weismandel said.”

Every year we make a “seudas hoda’a” on Sukkos, the time of year when my grandfather escaped from the train.

My Life

I am the oldest in my family. My mother always taught me how to be a balebostah. My father did not let me go to school, but I had a private teacher who taught me lots of things.

When I was seven years old I lost my mother. I raised my two brothers and sister. I cooked and baked for them.

When the war started in the year 1939, the Nazis took me out of my bed and brought me to a concentration camp in Poprat, Slovakia. I was there for six weeks. All I ate was potato skins and black coal. My father got papers from the mayor that said that I was younger than all the other girls and I had permission to leave the concentration camp. I was already on the train that would be taking me to Auschwitz. They called my name with two other girls. The Germans told us that we must leave and walk towards the gate and should not turn around. When I got to the gate, I saw people standing there with their suitcases. I asked them, "Where are you going?" They answered, "We are going towards Moshiah." I was thinking that if they were going where I just came from, then it was bitter. I asked one of the gathered people for the Gemach that gives money, and where I could get food and drink. They said that all the stores are closed but the Gemach is still open. I went with the other girls to the Gemach. The Gemach gave me money so I could get it to my father. They told me where I could get a train to my house. They also gave me some cookies and a drink.

When I got home, no one was there. The non-Jewish maid opened the door and saw how I looked and didn't allow me to come in. Meanwhile, the Jewish maid came in and said that I should go to the barn and there she would wash me up from the lice that I got from the concentration camp.

The maid washed me, gave me clean clothes and cut my long braids. When I was all clean, I asked the maid where my father is. She said that he was in a place that had hot springs and baths, and that my father was on the way home.

When my father came home, a short while later, he didn't recognize me, but he was happy to see me home alive and well.

All the Jews had to move from the West side of the town to the East. We went from our town in Bardiev, Czechoslovakia to Nitra. We didn't have to hide until the year 1943, when it was getting really bad, because we had connections with the mayor.

In 1943, we found a gentile that was willing to take us in. The gentile put all our valuables under the barn and said that after the war someone could come and pick it up. I answered that my whole family should come back, because without my family, why is it worth living?

This gentile was the head of the Gestapo but he hid us in his bunker anyway. The radio said that if they found a Jew they would kill the Yid together with the gentile. The gentile said, "we will both live through this war." We only ate milk, bread and butter the whole time.

In the beginning when we were in the bunker, I had a dream where my mother said that my father and brothers should put on tefillin and say the whole tehillim every day, and then the gentiles wouldn't harm us in any way. We davened to Hashem that the Moshiah should come. Once a Nazi officer wanted to come into the bunker but didn't enter. It was terrible time. We sat in a small room and were not allowed to leave. Bombs flew all around us. Once a bomb fell on the gentile's bed when he was sleeping, but nothing happened.

After a long and hard year, in 1944, we were finally freed. We came out of the bunker and went to live in Nitra. In Nitra, our redeemers, the Russians, took away watches from the boys and kidnapped girls. I and ten other girls hid in a small, dark and dreary room. The room was in a cellar without windows and without air. We got food from the room above that had a small hole in the floor underneath a bed. We sat cluttered together like this for a few long weeks until the Russians left Nitra. Then my father, brothers and sister and I went back to our house in Bardiev. There I got married, in 1945, and then I went to live in Nitra with my husband.

In 1946, we went to Paris for four weeks. Then we finally made the journey to America with the Nitra transport. The journey took six weeks. During the journey people got sick and so my husband and I were the doctors and helped the sick ones. We arrived in Ellis Island. There we stayed for four weeks until we were able to get the correct papers. Then we went to live in

Columbia Street on the East Side. In later years we moved many times; to Bedford Stuyvesant, then to Williamsburg, Monroe, and now I live in Boro Park.

Baruch Hashem, we were able to build up a *dor* with many children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, who are all observing Hashem's Torah and mitzvos.

MAGDA FRANKL



Magda (Malka Zippora) Frankl, née Klein, was born in 1926 in Hszoboszla, Hungary.

After the war she and her husband lived in Israel for several years, during which time she, tragically, lost one child. In 1956 she moved to Australia, and finally came to the U.S. in 1972.

Sadly, Mrs. Frankl passed away in 2004, during the initial editing stages of this book, but even on her death bed she continued to write her memoirs! She is surely a *meilitza yosheres* for her five living children, thirty grandchildren and numerous great-grandchildren.

MAGDA FRANKL

My Life

(Translated to English by daughters Chava Minzer & Chana Lebowitz)

I try to remember the happy years, though they were unfortunately shattered by the advent of World War II. I recall my dear father, may he rest in peace, saying, "My children, you have no idea of what 'hard life' means."

My own carefree happy childhood began at my birth, and lasted until 1939-40. We belonged to the Hajduszoboszlo Orthodox Jewish Congregation, and I heard my father relate that the house we lived in had the brocho of the Ratsfeldeh Rov, Reb Shalom Leizer from Uyfeketo. He told my father, when we went to consult him about the purchase of the house, that 'the mezuzos will bring in the brocho.'

We lived at the edge of the town. In the summer, the herds of cattle, sheep, ducks and geese passed our house daily to their place of pasture. The children particularly enjoyed watching the livestock return in the evenings. Here and there a cow would stop by a particular gate waiting to be let inside. The gaggles of geese and chickens returned on their own to their owners; sometimes with the accompaniment of the shepherd, and sometimes not.

My first bed was the cradle in which all of my siblings were rocked. We had a live-in maid who, between my siblings and her work, spent time rocking me. When I reached three years, I also rocked the younger children. The cradle was never empty, with always somebody to rock or to play with. We had a big yard which accommodated two houses – a big one and a small one. Both had shingle roofs. We lived in the big house; the little house served as our store, which eventually became a feather factory.

Our house was big enough for a family of seven children and a live-in maid and we lived in total innocence. When Juliska, the midwife arrived, we instinctively ran outside to watch for the stork as it dropped a new baby down the chimney. But if was late at night, all of us were shuffled into the adjacent large room which we rarely used and put to sleep because if the stork arrived during the night, we 'wouldn't see anything anyway' and in the morning we'd be free to resume our sightings at the chimney. Our house consisted of two large rooms and a large enough entrance room at the end of long, open foyer. In the summer we used it for dining purposes. One of the large rooms was our winter kitchen, dining room, and bedroom. In the corner was a mud oven, which our dear mother always heated on Friday. She baked the weekly bread, challah, bukto (a kind of milchig cake mixture) and cookies. A table stood in the center of the room with a bench on one side and chairs on the other. On the side of the oven was a window overlooking the road, which led to the city's main thoroughfare, where only horses and wagons passed.

Under the window stood a basin with a pail and jug, beneath them on a lower shelf stood two cans of water, which was brought from the street corner stream. This water was expressly used for drinking and cooking. For washing and bathing, we drew water from our well in the yard. Near the basin was a crate in which we kept the dirty laundry, after which stood Apuka's bed which reached the wall. Next to the bed was kitchen cabinet with dishes and cutlery. Directly across it stood Anjuka's bed, which she always shared with the youngest child. In front of Anyuka's bed was a smaller bed and in front of it a folding metal bed which we pulled out and opened every night. In this bed four or five children fit, depending on whether the boys

were at home or already in Yeshiva. The boys did not mingle with the girls.

In the meantime we were growing up and Anjuka decided that it wasn't so terrible if we'd also work a little harder. Bella, my oldest sister who was only twelve years old, stood in the store after school and did the figuring together with Apuka. They discussed the business together, everything from feathers, down, delivery and finances. She took over a quarter of Anyuka's problems, and later Anyuka was completely released from her involvement.

Yitty, the next sister, was placed in the kitchen. The poor soul always remained hungry, because by the time she finished cooking she constantly realized that she underestimated, and there was never enough food to go around. Each time, she announced that she wasn't hungry because she had already eaten. I, being the third child, was still was not allotted any serious work. I just filled in here and there, leaving me plenty time to play. Yitty had even more time on her hands, as Zsuzsa Neni, the washerwoman, would say, "Yitty, kish asany (*title of respect given to an employer's child*) would love to attend work's burial. Yitty, kish asany, can never be found when something needs to be done." I attest that this was true.

I think this was the reason Yitty and I could never agree on anything. When I felt I was right, I challenged Yitty. Instead of arguing and defending her rights, Yitty conveniently fainted. This was more effective than continuing to argue, because arguments came to quick conclusions (not always to her satisfaction). Yitty was a master of fainting. She fell to the floor, but not even once did she hurt herself. The first few times she did this I was frightened and poured water over her, but I soon realized she could get up without my help. I did not feel sorry for her, only for Anjuka because she suffered the most from our squabbles.

I was about five or six years old, when electric wires were pulled on our block and we switched from petrol lamps in our house to electric lighting. Around that time, I was registered to the first grade. Our school had six grades, boys and girls together – approximately fifty children to one teacher. We were good students, and when we reached the fourth grade to attend public school, we knew as much, or more, than the students who had been taught separately – one teacher per grade. My class in public school had five other Jewish girls up until 1939. In 1940, all of them had dropped out. The cause of this was the newly enacted Jewish laws.

Only I completed the fourth grade. Though I was among other children, I was literally alone in my class. My classmates regarded me as air; nobody spoke to me or acknowledged my presence – not even those girls whom I had counted as my friends only six months before. My teachers threw sarcastic glances in my direction. The children openly displayed Hitler's pictures in front of me. Suddenly, all the things that I found comforting and beautiful disappeared. What exactly was so comforting and beautiful? I used to feel surrounded by friends with whom I shared a level of understanding, we could play, and could discuss our problems after which I had a peaceful home to return to. All of this shut down completely. Our home was peaceful no longer. The newspapers printed new orders every day. Our store functioned, but barely; it was too dangerous for Apuka to travel to Debrecen to sell merchandise. Jews were beaten up daily on the trains. Bella took over this job.

Yitty completed a sewing course. My parents paid for her course. After two years, she passed with good credentials. However, upon her completion she announced that she never wanted to sew again. The humming of the sewing machine made her nervous. She kept her word. Anyuka promised Yitty that she would get as many new clothes as she wished to sew. It was in vain. Under no circumstances would she sew.

Wishing to prove to my parents that I was different than Yitty, I asked Anyuka for the opportunity to learn to sew. My parents paid my tuition for nine months after which I apprenticed myself to an old seamstress who taught me to cut patterns. At that point, I was already accepting work under her responsibility. This arrangement paid my tuition.

My two little siblings arrived unexpectedly. The stork, which was far from our minds, unexpectedly flew in again. Inei, my younger sister after Yitzchok, was nine years old in 1938 when Juliska Neni arrived again, and the stork threw in a sweet little boy. When in 1939 the stork introduced a little girl, nobody was surprised. I remember once Rosh Hashana, Anjuka came home from Shul to nurse the baby and sobbed, "What will be with these children? What will happen with these little ones?"

In 1944 we were also sent into the ghetto. On Shavuot, the ghetto was locked; there was no entrance or exit. Until the last minute we did not believe this would happen. We had been strong patriots, and did not believe that our homeland would discard us. We kicked ourselves. We had heard about the Polish Jews, the Slovaks, and here and there about the Hungarian Jews who were turned out of their homes and collected in camps, such as the Shima Puszta brick factory, and similar camps where millions of people were herded into wagons and transported to their deaths. We did not believe it.

We only stayed home to be able to send packages to our brothers. We received letters from Valze, "We are okay, we're working," and similar distracting falsehoods. How dumb were we? Hashem took our brains. We received secret letters from laborers telling us to purchase false identification, and look for places to hide. 'The wagons are rolling towards death, the way-side is full of Jewish *helomrim* (things which people have left because they cannot carry it any further)'. We could not grasp this. Why did we believe that we would be an exception? Jewish people are not dumb, and we belonged to them.

In the spring of 1944 we also landed in the Debreceni brickyard. There was an announcement that workers should come and report. Yitty and I reported as seamstresses. We took our backpacks and bid our family farewell. Anjuka sobbed and asked me to take care of Yitty. Not I, but Hashem watched over both of us, because we were sent back to our families. A day later they locked us up, eighty people per wagon. Frida Neni, Anjuka's sister, a single woman at the time, begged the overseer to be the eighty-first to join our wagon, but he did not dare to defy the orders. Apuka told her, "Why do you want to join us? We have little children with us." She only replied, "Whatever will happen to you, will also happen to me." Unfortunately, this was not the case, because we were fortunate, and returned home, while she gave her life Al Kiddush Hashem in Auschwitz.

Our transport consisted of large families with children and elderly. We were squeezed into a wagon without air or water and were rolling towards death. The atmosphere was somber. One night the train stopped; we had no idea where. It soon started again and we noticed it was going in the opposite direction. We all heaved a sigh of relief. We spent a week in the wagon. At last they opened the wagon in Strasshauf, a transit camp. Those who died en route were laid near the wagons. Here we passed selection, inspection, and our family landed in Johannestadt.

That Anyuka was with us was an extra gift from G-d. There were many sick and the overseers asked for nurses to attend to patients. Anyuka also volunteered, but was scared back to the family when a patient grabbed onto her coat insisting it was hers. Those who had volunteered were further deported together with the sick. Our transport, which had turned back, had a considerable amount of surviving families. Most families were missing someone, such as a father, or a brother who died in labor camps, or somebody in hiding, or somebody who had succumbed to typhus in Theresienstadt after liberation. In Szoboszlo four families came back intact, ours among them. Another three families had somebody missing. This is all that remained from the 150 families of our community. The rest were only singles. Some families had no sur-

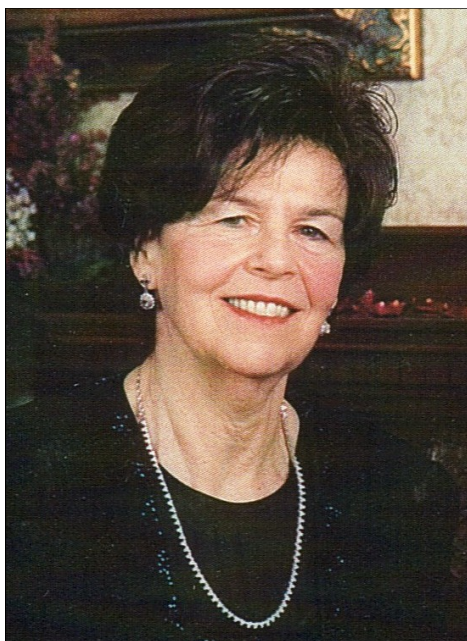
vivors. .

In spite of this, the goyim still said, "More came back than were deported." Those girls with whom I had completed High School did not even recognize me, and those who did recognize me told me how much they had also suffered under Russian occupation. At our fifth reunion, two girls were responsible for inviting the class, but nobody called me. Not that I would have gone. We had entrusted our belongings to people whom we knew as upstanding, but they returned nothing, or almost nothing. There was the occasional gentile family who watched and returned the goods, but those were few and far between.

Because of the anti-Jewish laws, feathers, down, corn – everything my father had counted on to marry off Bella, Yitty, and me, had disappeared. We started anew and progressed, however we could. All three of us got married with no material possessions. Unfortunately, Apuka did not make Yitty's and my wedding. We were both engaged at the time. I was engaged Motzoei Shabbos and Apuka passed away the following Tuesday. Our weddings were celebrated without him. We tried to settle down, but if we were to remain observant, we needed to escape. First, we purchased false travel documents. I was in my seventh month of pregnancy at the time, and my young siblings Oczi and Katy were written in as our children. At the Hodjes Halom border we were caught together with ten orthodox families. We arrived at Avo, the Avos were once Nyilos, (Nazi sympathizers) and so it was a relief when we landed in the Szombothelyi detention center. Together we hired a lawyer, costing us a pretty penny. The women were sentenced to thirty days in prison and the men two months. The children were taken to Lelensz, an orphanage, where Anyuka picked them up. My husband was sentenced to three months, because he stubbornly did not dispose of the jewelry at the border as commanded. This is why he was detained an extra month.

Naomi, my child was born, but her father first saw her only when she was one month old. I had originally wanted to go to Anyuka in Szoboszlo for the birth, but my plans didn't work out, because when I went back home it was necessary to set up the house and reestablish the business and begin selling the remaining merchandise. Naomi spent her time in a carriage in front of the store and was only in my arms when I nursed her or when I changed her diapers. She was beautiful and good. Our house did not have beds any more. We just slept on straw sacks. My husband joined us when he completed his prison time. We tried to collect ourselves and build a new life.

NELLY GRUSSGOTT



Nelly (Necha) Grussgott, née Friedman, was born in 1930 in Berlin, Germany.

She came to the U.S. in 1940, where she earned a Bachelor's Degree and taught in Public School until her retirement.

Mrs. Grussgott has four children, fifteen grandchildren and four great-grandchildren, going on five! She lives in Flatbush.

NELLY GRUSSGOTT

I Remember Bardiov

I was not born in Bardiov nor did I ever live there. Yet, I am taking the liberty of writing about my memories of Bardiov since I visited there several times. My maternal grandparents had their roots in Bardiov and most of my family lived there until their lives were cut short when they were deported in 1942.

As a little girl from Berlin, I was always excited by the prospect of my mother taking me along for visits to our family in Bardiov. I remember the great charm of the place and I was overwhelmed with the warmth of the people; especially my loving aunts, uncles and cousins, who showered us with so much affection. I can never forget them. None of them were especially prosperous, but they were happy people, leading satisfying lives. They had what is most important; they were rich in their hearts, and their homes, though small, were great in “Chesed and Mitzvot.”

I remember my grandfather, Binyumin Feuerlicht, a very astute elderly statesman, a “talmid chacham”, much respected for his integrity. And I remember my grandmother, Mariam Reizel, selling fish in the market place. She was a hard-working business woman, renowned for her wit and wisdom. Like many grandmothers, she bought me all the goodies I wanted. A major event for me was our excursions to the Kupele (the Bardiov spa) which I looked forward to with some trepidation as well as great pleasure.

I have many more memories from Bardiov. Most of them are important only to me. However, what I wish to share, are the feelings I had for the family I lost in the Holocaust; a family that gave me a sense of belonging – the feeling that this is truly my own family. I belonged to them and they belonged to me. All this was taken away from me while I was still very young. Overnight they seemed to have vanished.

When I think about my family in Bardiov, I am left with one comforting thought. I had the privilege of having known them, and I have the memories of the wonderful times we shared.

Experiences from the Holocaust

The individual’s experience of the Holocaust is of vital importance. It relates to my own experience; it is an account of my family’s struggle for survival. As with so many other families, our survival was only partial.

Born at the inception of the Nazi era in Berlin, Germany, I was nurtured on fear. Already by the age of three, when in a park or on a street, wherever the signs “Juden Verboten” were posted, I understood their significance. With each passing day, the persecution of Jews became more acute and unbearable. Jewish businesses were being eliminated, Jewish properties were confiscated and their licenses revoked.

In 1937, deprived of a livelihood and basic human rights, my father, seeing he had no alternative, left for the United States, where he had a sister and brother. He was seeking a way to secure affidavits so that my mother and I would be able to join him. However, he found that the immigration laws in the U.S. were not as liberal as he expected. Subsequently, after a year’s stay, after trying to hasten the immigration procedures, he decided to return to Belgium, which at that time was still a free country.

Subsequently, my mother and I left Berlin and joined my father. In Belgium, with ap-

appropriate affidavits in hand, my father thought that as a family together we would await the immigration visas, and leave for America. It did not happen this way. The Czechoslovakian Consulate informed us that the granting of the visas would be expedited if my mother and I would return to Berlin, since my mother was of Czechoslovakian birth. Once again we were divided as a family; my mother and I returned to Berlin without my father.

Upon our return to Germany, the following sequences of events took place: On the morning of November 9, 1938, the infamous "Kristall Nacht", on my way to school, I passed all the ruined shops which the Nazis had destroyed. At school bands of young Nazi hooligans were throwing stones at us. All along the streets the Nazis were throwing linens and other valuables out the windows of Jewish homes. Mainly Polish Jews were harassed at that time, and my mother who was not Polish was, to an extent still safe from Nazi terror. Therefore, by the time I arrived home, many of our neighbors found refuge in our apartment. After a few days, when the terror subsided somewhat, our neighbors returned to their homes. A short time later they were deported to Poland. I can vividly remember the frightened faces of children at school, whose fathers were among the deported. At least my father, I remember thinking, was safe in Belgium.

On September 1, 1939, when Germany attacked England, we were forced to evacuate our home. Taking with us only a few personal belongings we moved in together with five other families into a small dingy apartment. I was no longer permitted to attend school. Curfew was imposed upon us, and although all Germans had to limit their food consumption, Jews were the most severely rationed. My mother still tried to conduct business with her former "trusted" customers but these same people began threatening to expose her as a Jew. Almost overnight, the heretofore gentle Germans took pride in proclaiming themselves as Nazis.

We had only been living a few weeks in our new apartment, when one morning, two Nazis burst into our home. At gunpoint they forced an elderly man from his sickbed, and with his hands raised he was marched out through our room. No more than a few days passed before his ashes were sent to his wife. I remember her and my mother crying bitterly at that time. Incidents, like this repeated themselves daily, and although I was very young (8 years old) these details did not escape my attention.

In 1940, just about when it seemed that the situation in Berlin could get no worse, my mother and I were granted our visas, and she and I miraculously left on one of the very last boats bound for America. When we arrived at long last in New York, penniless, the Hebrew Immigration Aid Society refused to provide for us. But this did not deter my mother. While struggling to support us, my mother still managed to travel to Washington DC many times, trying to obtain a visa for my father. She did not succeed. The red tape was too much to bear, what with the restrictive laws and archaic quota systems.

Although my father's birthplace, Hungary, had already instituted Anti-Jewish laws, the American government still considered him to be a Hungarian subject. My father was therefore regarded as an enemy of the United States, because America was at war with Hungary at the time. Numerous appeals, trips back and forth to Washington went unheeded. Requests to grant a visa was consistently denied, even though the state department was fully aware of the atrocities being committed against the Jewish People. I have in my possession original correspondence signed by H. K. Travers, Chief of Visa Division, as proof of the State Department's indifference to the Holocaust.

The bitter irony of this tragic experience was that my father had succeeded in obtaining immigration visas for my mother and myself just in time to save us, but not for himself. He was apprehended; when Hitler overran Belgium, my father was jailed and deported to France and subsequently to Sobibor from where he never returned.

Even though others have suffered traumatic experiences far more horrible than mine, nonetheless this does not diminish the effect of our suffering. Those scars as well as the scars of all the people who suffered in the Holocaust will never be erased.

STELLA HERMAN



Stella Herman, née Rubinstein, was born in 1930 in Vienna, Austria.

She came to the U.S. in 1939, just one week before the outbreak of the war.

Mrs. Herman, who enjoys traveling, is the mother of four children, who in turn have given her sixteen grandchildren and twenty great-grandchildren. She lives in Boro Park with her husband.

STELLA HERMAN

Childhood Memories

I was born in Vienna, Austria, about nine years before the war started. At the age of six or seven, my younger brother caught diphtheria. After a stay in the hospital he was sent home. He apparently was still contagious, so it was decided that I would visit my aunt who lived in Baden-Baden until my brother was well. There were three cousins, two of which were close to my age, who made my stay very pleasant.

My cousin Fritz was a few years older and I loved and admired him a lot. Rita was my age and I always enjoyed spending time with her whenever I sporadically saw her and the family. They made my visit in Baden a time to remember.

Baden was beautiful and I learned later in life that it was a world-famous health resort.

In 1939, Fritz was sent to France to escape the horrors that were taking place, but he unfortunately succumbed to typhus a few years later, when he was shipped back to Germany from the Vichy Government in France.

My brother and I came to America in August 1939 with – to me – unknown members of my mother's family. My parents were fortunately able to join us seven months later, when their quota (for non-citizens) was opened.

My aunt and cousin Rita were killed, and I never saw anyone in that family again.

MIRIAM LONNER



Mrs. Miriam Lonner, neé Behrend, was born in 1925 in Hamburg, Germany. She came to the United States after the war, and married Rabbi Moshe Lonner, who for many years was the English principal of Yeshiva Torah-Voda'ath.

Mrs. Lonner is the mother of five children and has — *keynahora* — “many” grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

She lives in Borough Park.

MIRIAM LONNER

A Real Malach

Many years ago my husband, of blessed memory, became very sick. One night he started bleeding. We called the doctor who told us to get a certain medication. At that late hour all the pharmacies in Williamsburg were closed. We called the police, who told us of one drug store, which was open all night, in Park Slope.

There were no car services at the time. My young son and I went to the corner of Marcy Avenue and waited for a taxi to pass. Lo and behold, a taxi stopped with a young, female passenger inside. The driver who, believe it or not, was Jewish, asked us where we wanted to go and told us to get into the cab. After dropping off his passenger, he drove us to the drug store, but the pharmacist couldn't give us the medicine, as we didn't have a prescription. The driver took us to the doctor's house. We got the prescription and drove back to the pharmacy where we finally got what we needed. On the way, the driver handed me a dime, stopped at a pay phone and told me to call my husband. Then he drove us back to Williamsburg. The driver, after all this, refused to take a penny for the fare and wished us a "refuah sheleimah".

Do you know who this Malach was? Our own [Club Nissim member] Mrs. Braunstein's brother-in-law! Can you imagine this?! The Ribbono Shel Olam has his "sheluchim".

ILI MARKOVITZ



Mrs. Ili Markovitz, née Spitzer, was born in 1930 in Budapest, Hungary. She moved to the United States in 1965.

Mrs. Markowitz is the mother of three children, who, in turn, have given her ten grandchildren. She lives with her husband in Boro Park.

ILI MARKOVITS

Glimpses of my Childhood

I was about four or five years old. The playgroup finished, and summer had come. My mother took me by train to my grandmother. What was a four-five hours train ride? My grandmother and my aunt waited for me and we traveled to another city which was in the mountains. My aunt had rented an apartment for the summer.

Here was a private park that was open from time to time to the public, so we could see some historic ruins, and peacocks with beautiful feathers which would fall off sometimes, so if somebody found a feather, one could take it home. I happily found one that I took with me. My mother saved it, and years later I brought it for “show and tell” in school.

* * *

Short winter days, long evenings – no good! But every Friday, it was the other way around. I was waiting for my Father to come home from shul. My mother would invite my friend over for supper, because I didn’t like to eat, but if she was with us, I ate too. If she could not hear Kiddush with us it was not like Shabbos.

After supper we sat around the oven, and my father told weekly Parsha like a real storyteller. He would comment and explain every so often, so we could understand the reasons of what happened and why.

* * *

I was the first grandchild in my mother’s family. After me, my three cousins – three years-younger twins, and a six years-younger cousin – were also girls. So I was the oldest. I spent vacation time with my grandmother. I was the Big girl, really with a capital B.

So one day – I don’t remember what we did under my instruction, but my aunt who lived with my grandmother, said we must be punished well, so we got our punishment: the three of us were locked into the bathroom (boring idea). For a time we sat quiet, but after a time we got bored and started playing “Hindus.” We took the towels for turbans and bowed our heads (my idea). Because the house was only one floor, I opened the window and helped my cousins out and last I jumped out. Two small blocks away was the Highway to the city, so exactly by our house stood a police man. Just as I stepped out of the window, he was there and caught us. He rang the doorbell, and when the door opened he proudly showed my grandmother that he had caught us. My grandmother thanked him. Never again was the bathroom door locked.

Danger Begins

It was the end of the summer vacation of 1938, but I was happy to go back to school,

and happy to meet the old friends whom I used to see in class, and play with after school.

Especially, I was waiting to meet my friend Tobi. She was my special friend; we used to talk secrets and we made secret codes, so if we didn't know something in class, we could let each other know we needed help.

The day came when we got to school and I was very disappointed when my friend Tobi was not there. It was the same the next day and the next day. So went a couple of weeks. I asked my father what happened to my friend, because we went to the same shul as Tobi's father. My father said he didn't know what happened to the family.

One evening I was in bed and I heard my father saying something about "police, the Polish, the Germans." I didn't know what he was talking about. The next day I asked my mother what they were talking about. She slowly tried to explain the story to me. Tobi's father came from Poland, and because he was not a citizen, the Hungarian Nazis were looking for him. Somebody told him, so he went into hiding. When these people went to look for him they couldn't find him. One day they left a message for him, that if he didn't come out, they would take his family. The next time they came to look for him he was home. He was taken. So was the whole family.

ALICE ROSENBERG



Alice (Esther Fradel) Rosenberg, née Lieberman, was born in 1933 in Debrad, Czechoslovakia. After spending several post-war years in Israel and England, she came to the U.S. in 1955. Mrs. Rosenberg, who was interviewed for Stephen Spielberg's Shoah project, has four children and—*keynahora*—"many" grandchildren and great-grandchildren. She lives with her husband in Boro Park.

ALICE ROSENBERG

A Wound that Never Heals

I was about ten going on eleven when I became aware of how quickly human ignorance can breed hate and violence. I've witnessed this terrible phenomenon firsthand. For years, I couldn't bear to recount my own personal experience with the terrors of Nazism, at my young age.

My story begins in 1941, when we had to pack up, just a few things we were able to carry, and they gathered the Jews who didn't have papers as Hungarian Citizens. My father was from Slovakia, so we were among them. We were put on trains and sent to Kosice, the nearest big city, where we stopped for a while, until they sent us home. We were afraid to unpack for weeks. Then we lived our life – I guess another three years, but it wasn't the same.

My father had a business so we had our *parnasa*; a "Kol Bo" they called this all-in-one grocery, where one person was also sewing dresses, so we had a nice selection of material. My mother had very good taste, and she gave the women in the village ideas what to get for every occasion. They appreciated it, I think, and we were quite close with the *goyim* around us. We were one Jewish family among about 3,000 *goyim*; they were mostly farmers and not too wealthy, and I remember that my father gave them merchandise without their paying right away. Later he went to collect, and we used to go along for safety reasons – you never know a *goy*, we couldn't trust them. We had a permit to sell liquor too, certain hours of the week. The customers brought it home to drink, but it happened that they had a few on the spot and got drunk. We used to be scared sometimes, when they were loud.

This came to an end in 1941, no questions asked; our sin was to be Jewish. Our parents were struggling. They saved the little we had and lived sparingly. My father was looking for a job. He wasn't used to hard work, but he found some in the next village, in a furniture factory. (It had a Jewish owner, but somehow they let him be for a while. In the end, his fate was the same as many others'.) This went on till 1944. It was the last day of Pesach when there was a knock on the door. We had to pack up a few things and get ready to go again. We barely put away our Pesach dishes; we used to put in a note – "*Leshono habo b'Yerushalayim.*" *Leider*, it didn't happen.

We were four siblings: Rifkeh Blanka was the oldest; before her there was a brother, but he was only two-and-a-half when he passed away, so I didn't know him. I came after Rifkeh Blanka. Then came Liby Katha – a beautiful girl with dark hair and blue eyes. My little brother Fredi or Mayer Avramele was the youngest. My parents were quite young – my mother about thirty-eight, and my father in his early forties.

They packed a food package for everybody to carry. We figured we would use it on the long way ahead; we had no idea what our sad future would be. They took us to the ghetto of Kosice, a half hour's train ride from the closest big city. We were put up by a great-uncle, and thought we were so lucky. It lasted about two weeks; three families in a five-room apartment. Then they took us to a brick factory in the outskirt of Kosice. They gathered whole villages in this horrible place, which already looked inhuman, judging from the way they treated us. We lived in barracks and tents with a lot of people pushed in a large room where we slept on the floor. Men and children over sixteen had to work; by us only my father was taken to work.

After three weeks came the worst we thought – we had to leave everything behind and go to a freight train, pushed in like animals in a small wagon with only a small window, and no bathroom. Police women checked all our body parts for jewelry we might be hiding, so we had to leave behind all valuables; "you won't need these luxury items!" I don't think I realized the

seriousness of the situation. We were playing with the other Jewish children that we hadn't had all the years when we lived surrounded with goyim all the time.

My little brother Mayer Avrumele had to study with my father because there was no cheder nearby. That problem was sadly solved when the war started and we were deported to the camps. They took us away in 1944; we arrived in Auschwitz after three days' traveling in cattle wagons. It was May 22, 1944 – one day before Rosh Chodesh Sivan.

It took a few seconds while we were selected to go to the right or left. It was a large crowd; we had to line up and our future was decided – to live or otherwise! I remember that Polish Jews were working there and they whispered to my mother, "tell them that the girls are older". I didn't understand Yiddish very well, but this much I heard. So my older sister Rifkeh Blanka and I were holding hands and we were selected to the right. My mother, my younger sister Liby Katha, and my brother Mayer Avrumele were sent to the left. Sadly, my father had to go with the men. I never saw them again.

We went with a group of young girls to a place where they cut our hair completely. I didn't recognize my sister, because we looked like boys. They took our clothing and we got grey dresses, mine went to the ankles, but at least covered me from the rain and cold.

We were counted twice daily; it was called Appell. This took two hours or more. If someone was missing, we had to stand there until the person was found, dead or alive. The punishment was severe. I remember the first Shavuot was horrible away from the home and family. I treasured my sister; at least there was someone close to me. But after about six weeks, she unfortunately got sick with Paratyphus. Many girls got it; they blamed the rusty water pipes. She got a high temperature and she had low resistance; she was always skinny. I was the strong one. The food was not kosher of course, and she wouldn't eat it. She was taken to the Revier, a kind of hospital or medical center. They kept a few patients there for a while, only for show. I was able to visit her once a week. She shrank from the illness and looked like a ten-year-old though she was fifteen. This place was a liquidation camp – they always took girls to other places, like factories in Germany.

I was waiting for my sister to get well. I never happened. I had to hide all the time, so as not to go with a transport, but stay and work. I was with some girls from my grandparents' neighborhood, and some cousins, who begged me to go with them, but I refused – I was waiting for my sister to get well. Then came a time when I didn't hide any longer....

First I was put in the twin block. That was my cousin's idea; she was the friend of a girl with a high position there, and had protection. I had an easy time there. Once we were taken to give blood tests – that was the worst part. We were counted inside the barrack instead of standing in the cold and rain or snow outside. We got more food than before, to compensate for the torture. The selection took place once a week. We had to undress and they selected the skinniest and oldest women that they had no use for, and put them in a separate room to be taken away to the place no return. They told us the Slovakian girls had been there two to three years already. I mostly kept to them, but somehow managed to sneak to the other room when needed, as if an angel pushed me or I had a strong will power. I was never caught; otherwise I wouldn't be able to tell this horrifying story. Hashem wanted me to continue the family tree what we lost – that is the only answer I have to why I alone survived from a family of six.

Before I got to the twin block, I met a cousin, Monci Lieberman, whom I had never met before in my life; this was one of the miracles. She came to look for girls, what neighborhood they were from, and she pointed to me; somehow she had a feeling that we were related, and asked my name. I said Lieberman, and she started to hug me and said, "you must be my cousin!" She was twelve years older than me, and from then on she took care of me. She had a job as Stuben Dienst (house servant), which meant she got more food and a little power. Her friend was a Lager Elteste (camp supervisor), so I went to stay with her while I recuperated and got stronger.

I didn't have to take part in the terrible selection that always carried the risk of being thrown to the wrong side. She made me work with Stuben Dienst too, and as long as I had a job I was "*potur*." One of my relatives, Chava Gross, visited me a few times, and I used to help her with food. That was the biggest problem; the hunger in one's young years. It is a pity she can't tell her story, because she never returned.

They started to empty the Lager. I guess the enemy, meaning the Russians and Americans, were coming closer to Auschwitz, so they wanted to destroy the place, and began liquidating it. I begged my cousin to stay with her, but nothing helped; we had to move further to a different camp. I missed my cousin and the surroundings. We were brought back to a Gypsy Lager in the middle of January. They became very serious about emptying the Lager; there were rumors that all of Auschwitz would be blown up, so there would be no proof of what went on in there. So we begged the leaders to let us go with the group that was planning to walk through the snow and cold to escape. They tried to scare us that it was big undertaking for us young girls, we wouldn't last for long. We replied that we would take the chance; whatever is *bashert*! So we started to walk in a large group – five per row. Everyone got a loaf of bread with half a salami.

I wore short socks with a skirt and a jacket suited for a spring day, and here we were in bitter cold and snow. The Germans went behind us with a few German Shepherds. We were petrified. In the beginning we were running, but later we had no energy. About twenty of us decided to never leave each other. We shlepped each other. Later, we were so exhausted that we lost a few girls; they just fell from the cold. We spent the nights in barns along the road. We suffered more from thirst than hunger, so we ate the fresh snow. After five days and nights we arrived in a train station. They put us in open freight trains, thirty to a wagon; no seats, just the floor. We sat close to each other to keep warmer, as the snow kept falling on us. There were two soldiers with two big dogs who occupied half of the place – nobody wanted to sit close to them.

We traveled for about three days and nights. I took off my shoes because they were uncomfortable, but when we finally arrived in Germany and had to get out, my shoes were frozen of course. I held them in my hand and walked barefoot on the white snow. We had to wait in line, not knowing where we are going – to a shower or to the gas. Finally we did get in a shower, and they gave us new clothing.

There were a lot of people merged from all over, and there was no space for us, so they put us in tents. It was a nightmare. It was bitter cold January, and we lived in an unheated tent, where we had to take a bath for sanitary reasons, so we shouldn't get lice. This Gehinnom lasted about four to five weeks, and then they liquidated the place, and made us walk deeper into Germany, while the front moved closer, I guess. We came to Molhow, which was an Arbeits Lager (work camp), but again we youngsters were saved from work. They didn't have too much work anyway; there was some kind of factory, but not enough for everybody to be occupied. Here we had Wehrmacht guards, who were somewhat better than the SS. They were older men and they were polite – probably because they felt that the end was close. They kept us busy for their own benefit, and we had to perform, like a talent show.

This lasted about three months, until they ran out of food. There was a shortage because they merged people from other Lagers, and the place became very crowded. I saw people there that resembled human skeletons. At the end of April 1945, the Wehrmacht told us openly that the end was near. We didn't hear too much news otherwise.

One day some prisoners decided to organize a group, and I joined them. The American Red Cross had sent us more food supplies, so we were saved from starving. When we left the lager we were on our own on the busy highway. It was very scary and crowded because the army was going with tanks and ammunition on the road, and civilians were fleeing. Mostly, we were hiding in the ditches by the road side; we moved only when it was dark, so we shouldn't

be visible. Our looks and clothing showed where we were coming from. The hunger and thirst were incredible. In the fields we dug the ground, looking for food; sometimes we found a few potatoes. We were so desperate that went up to houses begging for food. The Germans were scared of us and gave us anything, just to get rid of us as fast as possible. We wandered from one place to another, with no idea where we were located, deep in Germany.

When we arrived to the first city, we found that it was half Russian and half American. Any hope we had, was to get food from the Americans. As for the Russians, we were very scared of them. I was a pretty girl by then, but I didn't understand why we had to be scared of them. In a short while I found out everything, being that I was surrounded by more mature girls.....

We were happy and sad at the same time, now that we were free to come and go as we liked. It was like waking up from a dream, and hoping to find relatives and family members. The American Red Cross gave us food; clothing we found, because the Germans left everything behind when they fled from the city. But we had one goal, one dream: to go to our hometown and meet our family again. We had a hard time traveling, since the tracks were bombed in many places. We were able to hitchhike, but we were afraid of the soldiers. After three or four weeks we finally got home.

We arrived in Kosice, a bigger city, close to my hometown, where a lot of relatives lived after the war. They gave me the address to a cousin of my mother's, a dentist who lived by goyim, as a first stop. I was hungry and tired. I ate a good supper for the first time in a long while; then slept about twenty-four hours because I was so exhausted. I was told that my maternal uncle and aunt were back home in Sepsi. They were notified, and my uncle came to pick me up. Finally, I was close to the closest relatives I had that were still alive. I was in a daze, like a dream, and couldn't understand how I had survived, alone, of my entire family of six.

I was crying my heart out for a week, and there was no stopping me. In the end it seemed that I ran out of tears. My aunt tried to convince me that I was not alone, and that she would take care of me like a mother; even if she got married, she promised she would take care of me. We lived in my maternal grandparents' home in Sepsi. We created a small family; my aunt Ellu (or Pesu, according to her Jewish name), was a very responsible person, and took good care of me, and felt obligated to be very religious and strict with me.

Then my uncle Lebu, who had been married before the war, but had lost his wife and two little daughters, was a father figure; he wanted to correct me, and criticize everything I did. But I was a teenager, and didn't listen too much, or behave the way he wanted. He moved after a while, to the big city Kosice and made a business for himself. The other uncle, Feter Smil, was a different person – very soft and understanding. After a while he got engaged and married, *mit Mazel*, and moved to Kosice too, and my aunt and I were left living together in Sepsi, struggling with everyday living, no income, and nowhere to turn for help.

There was a public kitchen in Sepsi, where they gave out food to the survivors, but it was all mixed, with boys and girls together and my aunt stopped going there; it wasn't to her taste. Instead we struggled on. She found some hidden valuables, and tried to sell them to be able to buy food. She wanted to build me up and cooked me special nourishing foods. Some time later, my aunt received a letter from a longtime friend in Satmar by the name of Pesy Eckstein. Mrs. Eckstein had a brother, who had survived the war, but lost his wife and five children. He was now ready to marry again. He was hiding as a go in Budapest with a younger sister. Pesy wanted my aunt for a sister-in-law, and her brother was a very *gelungene* person, but a few years older than my aunt. She had a hard time making a decision, and nobody but me to discuss this serious matter with. Since I had no experience in such issues, she decided on her own to marry him.

The wedding was in Romania, in a little town near Satmar, and we all traveled to the choson. To travel you needed passports but we had no such things, and went anyway, illegally.

It was difficult to travel across the borders. We had to go by night. Once we got caught and put in jail for a few hours, but we had a cousin who somehow got us out. It took us a week until we finally arrived at our destination. After the wedding I stayed with my aunt and her husband for a while, but after a year they decided to go to Israel. I couldn't go with them, so I had to go back to Kosice where my uncle Smil lived.

EDITH RUBIN



Edith (Sarah) Rubin, née Spitzer, was born in 1931 in Szamosulvar, Romania, but grew up in Budapest, Hungary.

She came to the U.S. in 1947, achieved a Bachelor's Degree in English and a Master's Degree in counseling. She taught for eight years in the Public School system. Writing is her passion, and aside from articles in The Jewish Press, she has published a volume of memoirs.

Mrs. Rubin has four children, forty grandchildren and twenty-eight great-grandchildren. She lives in Boro Park with her husband.

EDITH RUBIN

A Happy Memory from the Past

One Sunday morning, in the summer of '38, my sister and I were woken up at seven. My favorite uncle stood there with his wife, beaming. "Get dressed quickly; we are taking you to the Island of Margit!" So, he had remembered his promise to take us to the "Palatinus" Beach there.

Although my family did not go there, because it was a mixed beach, my mother allowed her childless, flamboyant brother to take a seven year old and a five year old to this magical place.

We were flushed with excitement, as the wonders of this beautiful resort unfolded in all its splendor. There were several swimming pools to choose from with comfortable sunning areas, and a special pool where a chime reminded the bathers hourly, that huge waves would come for then minutes, simulating ocean waves.

We were thrilled to be in this palace of forbidden pleasures with our sophisticated, worldly uncle and his glamorous wife. They also doted on us and spoiled us shamelessly. They showered us with toys, which our practical parents did not much believe in. It was our excursion into fantasyland, and our entry into "society". They lived a sophisticated life of café houses, and indulged in luxuries, while my parents toiled endlessly to provide our mundane needs in our mundane lives. In this carefree atmosphere the war loomed far away. We spent an unforgettable day in the sunshine, in the happy abandon of our waning childhood. Beaches and swimming pools have remained my favorite places of recreation, ever since that long-ago day of frivolous fun in the sun.

Events that followed almost erased this idyllic memory of a carefree summer. A few months later, my uncle received a coveted visitor's visa to the Worlds Fair in New York and freedom. His wife chose not to go for her own reasons. He thus avoided the events of the entire war and the tragic Holocaust that tried to extinguish us all.

After the war when we came to America, my childhood hero greeted us. He became a wonderful great-uncle for my children; he appreciated their uniqueness and spoiled them shamelessly and recreated some of the magic he had provided for me.

Now he is only a beloved memory for all of us.

Survival and Escape from Hungary

Though many things have been written about the Holocaust, certain aspects are still shrouded in

mystery. Why did certain seemingly weak people survive against overwhelming odds, while physically stronger people succumbed easily. While we see the hand of Hashem, who in his infinite wisdom chooses one over the other, the intricacies of such selections boggles our comprehension.

We lived in Budapest, Hungary, during the time of the German occupation, where every day brought new directives for our annihilation. My father had long since been taken away to a Forced Labor Battalion, and my mother and fifteen year-old brother tried to hold our household together.

The newest ruling directed all women, between the ages of 14 and 40 to report for "Labor Camp", a euphemism for deportation. The Swiss Embassy issued some false "Shutz Passes" to help avoid this fate. My mother risked everything, by removing her yellow star, and standing in line at the Vada Utca Embassy. The first and second days were spent patiently waiting, but on the third day, the ruling Nyilas group surrounded the Embassy and took everyone away. We waited at home holding her supper, and when she did not return, we were frantic with worry.

Our cousin, Mendy, found us in this hopeless, lethargic state, when he risked exposing his false "Aryan" existence, for a touch of family life, and the taste of a kosher meal. He made inquiries about my mother, and found out that she had been taken from the Embassy and marched toward Germany. He also used his connections to arrange to take us to a Children's Home, under the Swedish protection of Raoul Wallenberg.

We left the Ghetto at twilight, wearing double layers of clothing, trembling with the unaccustomed freedom of movement, yet fearing the unknown. We were at the home for ten days when Mendy visited us. I asked him to go to our home, to look in at grandma's, and to bring us some clothes, to spare me the daily ordeal of scrubbing our clothes without the benefit of hot water. He returned soon with a big smile but no clothes. "Your mother is home, she escaped." We only heard the amazing details of her story later, when we were reunited.

My mother had plotted her escape from the moment of her capture. They were closely watched as they were forced to march 30 kilometers per day, taking her further and further away from home. She took heart in the knowledge that she did not resemble the typical marcher in sturdy clothes, but was wearing her regular winter coat with a fur collar, ordinary shoes, and she could easily pass for a middle class lady out for a stroll. While at a disadvantage in enduring the actual march, her appearance saved her life.

Out of her stupor, she overheard a passerby mentioning to her companion: "I am going to Budapest tomorrow." She stepped out of the line as in a dream, and started to follow the woman. Since they were close to the Austrian border, they were not so closely watched. The woman observed her and stopped to say: "You cannot follow me, I saw where you came from." "You have to help me," my mother answered. "I left three children and an old mother behind. I must get back to them."

The woman saw her determination and softened: "There is a train every day at eleven o'clock." She added: "Go to this address, tell them Mrs. Szabo sent you. They will give you a bed for the night. You can't stay on the street."

My mother followed her instructions, went to the appointed address, and simply took the train back!

* * *

It was 1946 – one year after the end of the war, and we were trying to put our lives back together. I went back to school and my mother was looking for a job. Uppermost in our minds was our father's fate: Would he come back? Would he find us? My mother even expressed her unreasonable fear that my father might blame her for the loss of our brother, killed by the bomb

that had devastated our apartment.

We waited daily for his arrival, hoping a semblance of normalcy would return. We needed his strength; his decision-making; his taking on the role of head of our household.

The windowpanes in our apartment had been bombed out. Though we covered the gaping holes with cardboard, it did not provide adequate protection against the wind and cold. Ironically, the landlord, who was a glazier, would not repair the windows while we were occupying the apartment, which originally had been his sister's. Small cruel ties remained as an aftermath of Nazism.

Into this daily struggle for survival, and our unrealistic hope of our father's return, came an unlikely savior – my cousin Yossi, who had miraculously survived the camps. He took one look at our dismal surroundings, saw our depressed state, listened to our hope for our father's unlikely return and decided to take over the situation. He was young, full of energy and had a plan to move us into a different direction. He urged us to move to Germany to a Displaced Persons' Camp, because from there emigration was possible.

He was very persuasive, but it still took him a long time to influence my mother. However, once he convinced her, she began in earnest to proceed with Yossi's plan. We did not have many things to dispose of and what we could not sell, we packed. Next came the arrangement with the "Bricha" – the illegal transportation out of Hungary.

Young people with few packages could sign up to leave, using a rugged route. However, this was not feasible for my elderly grandmother and mother. Finally, it was arranged for us to go in two separate transports. My grandmother and mother arrived in Vienna in time, but they were taken to a D.P. camp in Austria, and were not allowed to wait for us.

In the meantime, our Russian driver, who had been paid by the Bricha organization, simply turned us over to the Austrian border guards, who immediately sent us back to Budapest. We arranged to go on the next transport at once, knowing my mother would be waiting for us.

The next transport left one week later, and crossed the border without incident. However, before we could breathe a sigh of relief, the driver stopped in the middle of nowhere in a forest, and demanded money and valuables before he would proceed. Most people on the bus gave up their savings and their pitiful amount of jewelry, but we did not. We stubbornly hid our dollar bills and would not give in to virtual highway robbery.

A few miles later, the driver stopped again and went through the same routine, collecting more valuables before proceeding. We discussed our position with our fellow travelers. We knew the driver would not deliver us to our destination because he would fear punishment. Therefore we decided that the next time he stopped, we would all get off the truck and disperse in all directions, which is what we did. It was dark in the woods and we heard the driver screaming curses at us in Russian, but he could not find us. After a while he left, but came back again looking for us. We waited for him to leave and then gathered together and soon found a truck willing to take us to Vienna.

The hospital that served as a gathering station for refugees was huge. We immediately went to the administration looking for help to find my mother, but their bookkeeping system was pitifully inadequate. They had no records and told us that everyone who arrived was sent to a Displaced Persons' Camp. We took a list of D.P. camps in Austria, and began to search for my mother and grandmother.

It only took us one week to locate them, because we accidentally met some friends who had seen them and knew where they were. The authorities had been no help at all.

We had a joyous reunion. However, our journey was not over. We had to arrange another border crossing into Germany. We traveled to Salzburg amid breathtaking scenery, which we could not appreciate because we only wanted to quickly reach a camp where my grandmother could rest.

The end of October was near and the weather was getting colder. In November we finally found a guide who would take us over the perilous crossing into Germany. We left under the cover of darkness, silently following our guide who haltingly led us. We had to cross a shallow river and our guide offered to carry my grandmother. He picked her up and started to cross the river. However, my grandmother complained so much that the guide finally put her down in the middle of the river. Then, out of desperation, Jossi picked her up. There was no way to either leave her there, or to explain the danger we were in.

We finally reached the other side and saw friendly faces offering us blankets and shelter against the November winds. They were fellow Jews, happy to see more people escape and join them in the relative safety of the D.P. camps.

After having seen the gentle way Jossi had handled my fragile grand-mother, I was secure in the knowledge that I had found my future mate.

CHANA SHAPIRO



Chana Shapiro, née Horn, was born in 1931 in Lizensk, Poland.

She came to the U.S. in 1951, after having spent four years in an Austrian DP camp.

Mrs. Shapiro is the mother of four children, who have given her thirty-one grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren. She lives in Boro Park.

CHANA SHAPIRO

Summer in Ulonov

When I was a little girl before the war, I used to go every summer with my mother and my brother *alav hasholom* to a Kur Ort. It was a big city and there were a lot of people there during the summer. I enjoyed this vacation but what I really remember are my vacations with my grandmother, *aleha hasholom*.

After I was finished with the first part of my vacation, I went by train to another small town where my grandmother and my aunts, uncles and cousins lived. (They were killed by the Nazis, *yemach shemam*.) When I got off the train, my uncle, *alav hasholom*, was waiting for me and we went with a horse and carriage to Ulonov.

When I was there everybody treated me like a princess. All the children wanted to be my friends and my family also treated me as someone very special, and I was always looking forward to going there.

CHAIA STERN



Chaia Stern, née Pollak, was born in 1931 in Borsa, Romania.

She came to the U.S. in 1963, having lived in Belgium for some years.

Mrs. Stern is a passionate knitter, and creates magnificent doll's clothes. She has two children, and—*keynahora*—"many" grandchildren and great-grandchildren. She lives in Boro Park with her husband.

CHAIA STERN

My Story

(As told to granddaughter Lea Schlesinger)

I was born on September 21, 1931, in Bohrzsa, Romania to Yaakov Chaim and Shlimu Pollak. My siblings were Meir Yossel a”h, Srul a”h, Shimon, Pinches a”h, Moshe a”h, Rechel, and Rivka a”h.

Meir Yossel was a Hungarian soldier who was captured by the Germans and deported to a concentration camp. He died of hunger three days before liberation. Srul was in a forced labor camp in Hungary when a typhus epidemic overtook the camp. The Hungarian commandants burned down the entire camp in order to prevent the disease from spreading, and Srul perished in that horrific blaze. My brothers Pinches and Moshe perished in Auschwitz together with my parents. Shimon was also interred in Auschwitz, but he miraculously survived the war and is currently living in Israel, as is my sister, Rechel. My sister Rivka died during the war in the Ukrainian city of Sledede. While I don’t know much about my parent’s families, I do know that my mother was the oldest of four siblings. She had two brothers and one sister, Mechel, Meylich, and Rechel, respectively.

I lived at home until the tender age of four. My parents were far from rich, and were unable to provide me with the trappings of a comfortable life; however, they more than made up for it with an abundance of tenderness, love, and affection. In 1935, my parents sent me to live with my mother’s married sister, Rechel Rosenberg, and her husband, Alter, because they did not have children of their own and they possessed the monetary means to care for me. My mother’s mother, Laya, also resided with the Rosenbergs because her husband Leib passed away, leaving her widowed at a very young age.

The few years that I spent in Vatradora prior to being deported were idyllic. I was on the receiving end of a whole lot of attention, and I was pampered with the material goods my parents could not afford to give me. My mother used to visit me from time to time, and I remember going to visit her once when I was approximately seven years old. All in all, my childhood in Vatradora was as happy and carefree as that of any child today.

As the Germans advanced towards Romania in 1941, they used our city as a throughway, and that’s when the pogroms started. We lived in constant fear for our safety and lives, but we were still allowed to live in our own homes. It was Hoshana Rabbah, 1941, when the Germans announced that everyone had to gather as many belongings as they were able to carry, and that we were going to the train station. We gathered what we could, but how much can one person carry? Needless to say, the local goytes stood at the doors, eagerly waiting to take over our homes and our possessions. At the train station, we were boarded onto trains and shipped to Bessarabia.

We were dropped off in a tall synagogue courtyard that was situated on the banks of the Niper River, and that’s where we were all forced to sleep. The goytes would bring basic food staples to the gates of the courtyard, and that’s how we received our sustenance. After a week in the courtyard, the Germans began to transport us across the Niper River. Life was extremely difficult, and very many people succumbed to despair and committed suicide by throwing themselves into the river.

Two weeks passed before it was my turn to be shipped over the Niper, and I was fortunate in that my mother’s mother, married sister and brother, as well as my two sisters were on the same transport as I was. We arrived in Mogilev, another town that bordered the Niper. Mogilev was mostly occupied by the Germans, who enlisted the aid of the Ukrainian militia, but

also had unsolicited help from Romanians who were all too eager to help the Germans get rid of the Jewish “problem”. I remember getting off the boat and the first thing that struck me was the rampant destruction everywhere I looked. There was not a single building intact. We were all herded into a schoolhouse and there we slept, lined up on the floor like sardines. Lice and other vermin became a problem, and it was at this point that people started becoming discouraged and depressed. When my aunt Ruchel Leah contracted lice, she wanted to throw herself out of a fourth floor window.

From Mogilev, the Germans moved us in groups of about fifty families to Ukrainian towns that they had conquered. My family and I were among the transport that was shipped to Sleddee. Here too we were initially placed in a schoolhouse, approximately twenty-five to a room. Those who didn’t fit in the schoolhouse building were sequestered in the silos and sheds of surrounding farms where they lived together with mice and other farm creatures.

Winter came and it was bitter cold. Our existence was ghetto-like, in that we were not officially allowed to leave town; however, we still snuck out to try to get food from the Ukrainians. We all had something to offer, and we were able to get food by trading some of our possessions. My sisters and I used to go out in the fields to collect the stalks of wheat that had fallen to the ground during the farmers’ harvest. We were on constant alert for guards and soldiers, and we had to drop our gatherings and run for our lives if we saw them. When we were successful, we would bring home the wheat, grind it on a millstone, add some baking soda and water to create a dough, and from that we would make pita on the stove.

Another way in which we got food was by begging. Since the townsfolk never really saw Jews before, they were mostly sympathetic to us and gave us scraps of food. Each peasant family had a ferocious-looking dog on a long chain. Once I went begging with my aunt Rechel, and we were almost at the door when their dog attacked my aunt and viciously bit off a large chunk of flesh from her forearm. After that incident, Rechel didn’t go begging anymore.

From that point on, my grandmother was constantly at Rechel’s side because my aunt suffered from a terrible kidney ailment. During the winter of 1941, she became gravely ill. We tried saving her using petrishke soup, and we valiantly tried to make her comfortable by removing a door from its hinges so that she could lay on the door instead of on the floor. I remember how parched her throat was, and how she was constantly asking for “nas”, some moisture to soothe her cracked lips. She also asked for an “eppeleh” and it was only through Divine intervention that we found an apple to feed her. It was heartrending to watch her bloat from day to day on account of her kidney failure, knowing that nothing we did could alleviate her pain or cure her condition. When she died, we buried her in Sleddee as best we could in the frozen ground. During the first winter, pneumonia was widespread on account of the freezing temperatures and our inadequate clothing. My sister Rivka, a six foot-tall willowy beauty, contracted the dreaded disease and died in early 1942. The ground was frozen solid, so we were only able to bury her in a shallow trench.

Right after the winter, two things happened. First, the Germans ordered all Jewish men and older boys to report for work duty. My uncle Alter was deported at this time. Second, we were removed from the schoolhouse and distributed among Ukrainian families.

Spring 1942 brought with it a horrific outbreak of typhus, and the disease claimed the life of my uncle Meilich. My grandmother used to don her *tachrichim* every Rosh Chodesh and she would pour her troubled heart out to Hashem. After Meilich died, she became very depressed and ceased this Rosh Chodesh tradition.

The family with whom we lived, a mother and her daughter, treated us quite decently because they received some money from my mother’s brother Mechel, who lived in Satmar. My family in Satmar was only deported in 1944, and somehow Mechel learned of our situation in Sleddee. My sister Rechel’s recollections of these years are clearer than mine, and she always tells me how much the Ukrainian family adored me. The Ukrainian custom at mealtime was for

the adults to sit on chairs around the table, and for the children to sit on little mats near the adults. There was one bowl on the table that contained the food, and each person would receive a wooden spoon with which to eat directly out of that bowl. Of course dinner invitations were never extended to us Jews, but my sister says that I was always the exception – the family used to take me into their home and make a place for me among themselves. Borscht was a main staple, and I remember once when I was sitting with the family, they were about to serve me borscht when I noticed something floating in the bowl. I lost my appetite and declined to be served. I later found out that the floating particle was pork. I was so thankful to Hashem for preventing me from eating meat that was not kosher.

The winter 42-43 was just as cold as the winter preceding it. To make matters worse, there was little sympathy from the surrounding Ukrainians because they too were suffering. Their men were enlisted in the army, and they didn't have a lot of food for themselves, much less to share with us. We were a bit lucky in that there was an over-abundance of sugar beets. Between the broiled beets and potato peels which we stole from the pig pens, we were able to get some nourishment. Salt was a rare commodity, so whatever food we did have was bland.

One night in the dead of winter, we heard loud knocking on the door. We opened the door and found that it was Romanian civilians and Ukrainian police ordering us to get out immediately, not to pack anything. It was so cold that the stars showed like diamonds on the snow. We walked in our nightclothes, sock-less feet stuffed into shoes and boots, barely covered by our night blankets. They commanded us to walk to the edge of the town. When we reached the destination, the goyim left us stranded and we were forced to find our own way back. These senseless treks were forced upon us by the heartless beasts just to satisfy their urges for amusement and torture of Jews. These shenanigans continued on a constant basis, without orders from the German army.

The Skulener Rebbe, Reb Lezer Zisya Portugal, a'h worked very hard to save as many of the deported children as he could. In the spring/summer 1943 we received word that all orphaned children should gather in Mogilev to be transported to Yash, a city in Moldova, Romania. Yash was occupied by the Germans, but its Jews were not deported. Don't get me wrong – the Jews suffered their share of pogroms, but at least they were able to live at home.

All of us children were herded, five at a time, into bathtubs where we were scrubbed clean and given some very basic provisions for our trip to Romania. About 120 children were put onto a train. In 1944 we arrived in Moldova in a town called Hush. There we were divided among families. I went to a family where the mistress of the house was a seamstress with some children of her own. I was approximately eleven years old at the time, and I became a mother's helper. After staying there for a while, I was transferred to another family, where I became a companion/babysitter for their daughters.

At that time, Hush served as the front line between the Germans and the Russians. There was a big shopping center in the middle of the city, and the German army turned that into their base of operations. Around Pesach 1945, the Germans fled in defeat, but not before they burned the entire shopping center to the ground. Thereafter, Hush became a Russian-occupied city. The Russians assumed control of the city, established a command center and proceeded to set up Russian rule.

We lived there for about a year, and then an order was issued for every child who came from Russian-occupied southern Bukhovina to be handed over to the Russians, since they were considered Russian citizens. There was a sixteen year-old girl named Etty, who went with me to the command center where we told them that even though we were from the northern part of Bukovina, which was never occupied by the Russians, we would still like to return to our families there. The kehilla in Hush was responsible for the children's welfare, and since the Russian decree, they did not want to keep the children in Hush any longer for fear of angering the Russians. All children were handed over to the Russians, who shipped them to various parts

of Europe.

I was taken to Bucharest, where I was placed in an orphanage. We started to do field work, not unlike kibbutz life, in preparation for our aliyah to Israel. The orphanage had an OU kitchen, staffed with sixteen girls who were older than the Hush orphans because they were refugees who survived Auschwitz. I begged these girls to take me in because their kitchen was strictly kosher.

One day I was told by the orphanage director that I had a Romanian soldier waiting for me at the gate. He introduced himself as Ernest Szabo, my uncle Mechel's son-in-law. He told me that my grandmother was in Satmar with my uncle, Mechel. He gave me a full report as to who survived and who didn't. Mechel's wife and one of his daughters hadn't come back from the camps. Other than that, everyone miraculously survived Auschwitz, and was living in Satmar. He also told me that my older sister, Rechel, had been living in Satmar and only recently left to Western Europe. When I heard that my grandmother was still alive, I got all excited and insisted on going to Satmar. I was her favorite granddaughter, and had shared most of my life with her. I knew I was scheduled to leave to Israel on the second transport ship, but I wanted to see my grandmother before I made the aliyah to Israel.

I went to the Joint and picked up the money they gave to every orphan, 75,000 lei. I bought a train ticket and journeyed from Bucharest to Satmar with my meager belongings bundled into a wooden suitcase. The passengers were squished together like sardines. Soldiers were mixed with refugees, elderly and infirm packed together with the young; it was a disastrous hodgepodge of humanity. I was frightened and kept my money close to my chest to avoid theft. I arrived in Satmar, and there I was truly lost.

Most of the residents spoke Hungarian, a language which was foreign to me. I was afraid of horses and buggies, so I decided to make it to my uncle's house on foot. I had no idea how far it would be, but I knew that it was a long walk. After walking for many hours, I saw a Jewish man with a long beard and peyos, and asked him if he knew where my uncle's house was. He said in Yiddish, "yes, my child, you still have a way to go." Upon arrival at my destination, I opened the gates, and promptly collapsed onto the cement porch. My grandmother ran out, gathered me in her arms and cried, "Oh, my child, I will never let you go again!"

A young man, Moshe Stern, was among a group of approximately thirty boys who came back to Satmar as Russian POW's. Moshe's father davened with my uncle in the same shul, so he knew our family. Moshe used to come over for visits, especially on Shabbos, but nothing really happened between us because Moshe was trying to escape to the West. After many futile attempts, he realized that he was not destined to leave, and he proposed marriage. I accepted, and we were married in Satmar on Rosh Chodesh Nissan, 1950.

Moshe and I started building a life together, but it was far from easy. I didn't work, but my husband worked extremely hard. The religious freedoms we have today were unheard of in Romania at that time. Keeping Shabbos was impossible, as was adhering to the laws of kashrus. Going to shul was forbidden, and it was very difficult to say yizkor for those we lost. We were blessed with two children. My daughter, Shlimu, was born 1951, and my son, Yeksiel Yehuda (Zalmen Leib), in 1953.

In 1954 my husband was jailed for seven years by the Russians on various trumped-up charges. He sat in a myriad of jails in Romania, and I was not able to visit him during this time. It was a very low point in my life. I had to take a job doing several shifts in a garment factory to support myself and my children. The Skulener Rebbe arranged for my husband and other prisoners to receive amnesty, and my husband was released from prison in the winter of 1960. His amnesty was granted on two conditions: that he pay a monetary fine, and that we leave Romania within a very short time. We sold everything we had, but obtaining our visas was very complicated.

The visas we got were to Israel, but I knew that I had an uncle and a cousin in Bel-

gium, so we made a stop there. We truly wanted to remain in Belgium, but Hashem had other plans. The Belgian officials didn't like the fact that my husband was a former prisoner, and they stamped our passports in such a way that it would be impossible for us to remain in Belgium past 30 days. We found out that in the Netherlands there was an opening in the kosher bakery in a city called Encayda. The Netherlands didn't accept refugees, but since we were offered jobs there, we were allowed entry.

However, we quickly realized that the Netherlands was not for us, so we enrolled in the HIAS program that would send us to America. When we finally arrived in America in September 1963, we were put up in a hotel for a few weeks, and then we settled in Boro Park. The HIAS paid our rent for one year, and we enrolled in night school. My daughter was registered in Bais Yaakov, and my son attended Chasan Sofer yeshiva. My daughter got married in 1970, and my son in 1972. Both of my children live in Boro Park, and are the proud parents and grandparents of wonderful, Chassidishe children.

My husband and I live in close proximity to our children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren, and we treasure every moment that we get to spend with them. During the bleakest years of my youth, it was unfathomable that I would live long enough to get married, let alone to a man like Moshe. Once I did get married and was blessed with my two children, it was beyond the realm of my expectations that I would be zocheh to raise them in an environment that enabled us to live as frum Jews without the fear of persecution.

The hardships I endured have imbued me with a deep sense of gratitude to, and awareness of, Hashem, and I await the day when the coming of Moshiach will unite my past and my present to create a most glorious future in Yerushalayim.

SHEINDEL SUSSMAN



Sheindel Sussman, née Trebich, was born in 1930 in Suposubotca, Yugoslavia.

She came to the U.S. in 1950, having lived in Austria and Italy for some years.

Mrs. Sussman has five children, thirty grandchildren, and — *keynahora* — "many" great-grandchildren. She lives in Boro Park with her husband.

SHEINDEL SUSSMAN

My Childhood Friends

I, Sheindel Sussman, born in Yugoslavia, was the youngest of three children. I had two brothers much older than I. We lived in a very small town and I was the only Jewish girl in town. I had very few friends. The friend I loved most was an animal and I still love animals. Once, my brother brought home a newborn sheep that he had found on a road side. I was so happy with her. I made her a basket with a pillow to sleep on, and also fed her with a milk bottle. She grew big and was very attached to me. I loved her. When I left the house she used to stay by the door and cry after me.

I also had a dog, which I also brought up. I got her from a friend as a puppy and she was very loyal to me. I loved her. Then we had chickens and goats. My brother had a horse. Once she tried to bite me, so I was afraid of her and never went to close to her again.

I also loved sports like bicycle riding, and swimming. When it snowed I used to go up the hill and come down in tubing or a sled. Everything was nice and fine, I just missed having Jewish friends.

TRUDY TAUBER



Trudy (Yehudis) Tauber, née Feigelstock, was born in 1931, in Vienna, Austria. After having lived in South America, she arrived in the U.S. in 1948. She used to work as a Kindergarten teacher, and these days she volunteers for children with special needs.

Mrs. Tauber has two children, eighteen grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren. She lives with her husband in Boro Park.

TRUDY TAUBER

Encounter with My Grandmother

At the age of eight I met my paternal grandmother
The only grandparent I was ever to meet
The encounter, a blessing, gave me security.
I was a very sick, confused, unloved little girl –
Incomprehensible, how much I had gone through at such a young age.
To be in her presence meant hope, strength, positivism, and love for life
Everything she represented brought closeness, warmth, never to be forgotten,
Unfortunately, only to last a few short months, and then never again.
My grandmother was very much ahead of her time;
Intelligent, smart, well rounded,
True talent from soup to nuts,
Able to communicate with young and old
Also with people of all backgrounds:
An arrogant politician, or a business person;
Fit to be a Queen's prime minister
Among other things a designer, a manager with great cool.
A real Balebosteh of the past
Her second nature were the classics:
Good books, dance and good music.
In other words, her weakness was art, she was my inspiration
A woman who prayed three times a day
Read the translation of the Parsha every Shabbos morning.
Last but not least, studied the works of Rabbenu Shamshon Rafael Hirsch zt"l
Her modesty was the beauty of her generation and far beyond;
A memorable, humble Jewish matriarch!
She is history, gone with the wind
Just Jewish piousness, aristocracy and humbleness.
"Grossmutter"
You are my pride and joy,
But mostly my "HERO"!
Loved by everyone who came in contact with her,
Except by Hitler, who took her away.

Anny

This story took place at the time when Hitler marched into Vienna, Austria – what the world refers to as the "Anschluss." Until November 1938, after Kristall Nacht, our family had

had a maid by the name of Anna (nicknamed Anny), for about three years or so. From before the fall of Austria until she left, this Anny was my sole protector. I was only a little girl of seven, not in the very best of health physically or mentally. I had gone through a great deal already for my age.

My mother could not take care of me. My three older brothers had left home in 1937. My father was never home. He was under terrible pressures. When home life did not get better, I was always angry and depressed and full of fears. My anxiety made me paralyzed. I could not relax, or do anything else for that matter. If I would not have had Anny who constantly protected me, I can't even think what would have happened to me. I felt alone, very alone, at this tender age.

Anny was my only guardian. Among other occurrences, we had to wear the yellow star when going outdoors. She never even put the star on me, wherever we went or whatever we did. I was her "little sister." She was blonde; I was reddish with fair freckled skin. The SS never gave us any trouble.

She even took me to the Park or centers of entertainment and recreation for children, where Jews were not allowed to go. She actually jeopardized her own safety, in order to make me feel better. I suspect she loved me. I sincerely loved her. When she finally had to leave, I was completely destroyed. I was sure the Nazis would catch me. I was petrified! All my life I have wanted to know what happened to this good Anny. Unfortunately, I never found out, and the rest is history. Many books could be written about this and many other stories from people who were war children.

The world should never, ever forget us.

Afterword

Club Nissim – A Daily Miracle

Club Nissim was so named by its members in recognition of their miraculous survival. Each man and woman in the club is a living miracle, and this is what unites an otherwise heterogeneous group of participants. Another facet that unites most of the members – and makes the group unique – is that it is comprised almost entirely of Jews who were born religious and have remained so throughout their lives. Our program offers a wide variety of activities, and is visited four days a week by a large number of “regulars” and another, equally large, number of sporadic participants. To many, Club Nissim has truly become a “home away from home.”

Even in the midst of an active, hectic workday, I am struck by the almost incomprehensible reality of the Survivors, which I am privileged to be part of. There is a lot of pain in our midst; many losses, stresses, and terrifying memories; and yet, one of the most striking facets of our group is the extent to which the vast majority of our members have chosen to embrace life, and to try to “make up” for some of the joy that was lost in their youth. Perhaps the following two anecdotes from Club Nissim’s chronicles can illustrate this dichotomy:

We are visiting the Pieter Clayson Wyckoff House, a small Brooklyn museum that depicts the Dutch historic roots of New York City. We have a guided tour, and the group is very interested, commenting and asking questions. A box of innocuous-looking, Dutch wooden clogs is standing in a corner, and as the group passes by, Mrs. R, a beautiful, dignified and very “together” woman, clutches my arm and says, “That is the kind of clogs they made us wear in Auschwitz!” In one second our pleasant little outing has taken on a nightmarish quality. Mrs. R goes on to tell me how she witnessed a young woman literally being killed by her clogs. “She was very short and petite and the clogs were much too big and heavy for her. She couldn’t run in them, and the deep mud sucked her down. I saw her drown in the mud, and there was nothing I could do. If I had tried to help her, they would have killed me.” Mrs. R has tears in her eyes, and so do I. A few of the other women hear us talking, and say with heavy sighs and shudders that yes, they, too, recognize the clogs from Auschwitz. Such is the daily life of a member of Club Nissim.

* * *

Chanukah is celebrated roundly at Club Nissim, with some type of Chanukah “observance” each day. One afternoon we have a big party with lunch and performances by the members. During this past year—2004—we have been able to create two exciting creative outlet venues – a small drama group, “The Nissim Players,” who have performed twice before, and are now putting on a little comedy for an appreciative crowd; and our newest venture – a female choir. “The Nissim Women’s Choir” has its world premiere this day, and gives a recital consisting of beautiful Chanukah songs in Hebrew; some familiar favorites, and some lesser known works. The play is really funny, and the song is truly beautiful, and the audience is thrilled. “The choir really contributed so much to the atmosphere – it was so festive and uplifting,” many of the ladies tell me afterwards. Oh yes, it was – and most of all, there was real poignancy in the moment; knowing where these women have been, what they have

gone through, how they have triumphed over evil, and that now they are lifting up their voices in joy!

One of the songs contains the refrain “Nes gadol hayah po” (“a great miracle happened here”), according to how this song is sung in Eretz Yisroel – perhaps because our choir mistress is Israeli. Here in the Diaspora, we usually sing “Nes gadol hayah **sham**” (“a great miracle happened **there**”), and a woman in the audience points out that the choir is singing the song “wrong.” That gives me my cue and I jump to my feet to make an impromptu speech. “They are singing the song absolutely right,” I say, “because we have a real miracle here, right here in this room – this is the club of miraculous survival, and these are miracle voices, singing to us now, even though so many voices were silenced! Who would have believed this sixty years ago! It is really so: **a great miracle happened here!**”

The anthology that you have just read is a legacy of this miraculous Club Nissim, with all its strength, power, pain and – yes, giggling, jubilant joy!

Simonne Hirschhorn

Program Director, Club Nissim

GLOSSARY

A”h “Alav/Aleha Hasholom” — see below
Alav hasholom May he rest in peace
Aleha hasholom May she rest in peace
Aliyah “Ascent” — immigration to the Land of Israel
Al Kiddush Hashem — see **Kiddush Hashem**
Anschluss The joining of Austria with Germany in 1938
Anyuka Mommy (Hungarian)
Apuka Daddy (Hungarian)
Bais Yaakov “House of Jacob” World-wide Orthodox Jewish school system for girls, founded in the 1930’s
Balebostah, balebosteh Skilled housewife
Baruch Hashem “Blessed be the Name [God]”
Bashert Intended (by Heaven)
Brocho Blessing
Challah White, braided bread, baked for Shabbos and holidays
Cheder Elementary Jewish school (ages 3-approx. 10)
Chesed Loving-kindness
Choson Bridegroom
Davened, davening Prayed, praying
Dor Generation
Eretz Yisroel The Land of Israel
Frum Pious; strictly Torah observant
Gehinnom “Gehenna”, hell
Gelungene Clever, talented
Gemach (Acronym of the words Gemilus Chasadim “Deeds of Loving-kindness”) Community institutions for free loans (and sometimes gifts) of money and other necessities
Goyim Non-Jews
Goytes Non-Jewish women
Grieners “Greenhorns”, newcomers
Grivenes Pieces of crisped chicken skin; by-product of **schmaltz**
Grossmutter Grandmother
Hashem “The Name”; a way of referring to God
Hoshana Rabbah 7th day of Sukkos (Feast of Booths) – a particularly sacred day, when the world is given its final judgment for the rest of the year
Juden Verboten Jews forbidden [to enter]
Kehilla Congregation; community
Keynahora No evil eye [should befall him/her/them]
Kiddush Hashem “Sanctifying the Name [God]” To sacrifice [one’s life] for the sake of commitment to God
Kol Bo “All [is] in it” An all-in-one store that also provides certain services
Leider Tragically, unfortunately
Leshono habo b’Yerushalayim Next year in Jerusalem
Malach Angel; divine messenger
Meilitz yosher “Straight intermediary” Somebody who intervenes in heaven for human beings on earth
Mezuzah, mezuzos “Door post” – capsule containing Torah excerpts, fastened to all the door posts of a Jewish home

Milchig Dairy foods – may not be mixed with meat or meat utensils/dishes
Mit mazel With [good] luck
Mitzvah, mitzvos Divine commands and/or prohibitions
Mitzvot – see **mitzvos**
Moshiach The Messiah
Motzoei Shabbos The “exit” of Shabbos; Saturday evening
Neni Aunt, auntie (Hungarian)
Neshamos Souls
Nissan 1st month of the year, corresponding to March/April
Nissim Miracles
Nyilas The Hungarian Nazi party
Papa hat Gelt Daddy has money
Parnasa Livelihood
Parsha The weekly portion of the Torah
Pesach Passover
Petrishke Parsley root
Peyos Side curls, worn by devout Jewish men and boys
Potur Exempt from duty (Talmudic term)
Rabbenu “Our Teacher” – honorific for important, influential rabbi
Rav Rabbi
Reb Mister; Sir – special honorific, used with first name
Rebbe Rabbinic leader of a Chasidic sect; also a rabbinical teacher
Refuah sheleimah Complete recovery (from illness)
Ribbono Shel Olam “The Master of the World”; God
Rosh Chodesh The day of the new month; half-holiday
Rosh Hashana New Year; holiday when the world is judged
Rov – see **Rav**
Schmaltz Rendered chicken fat
Schutzpassen Protection passports
Seudas hoda’a “Meal of Gratitude” – grateful celebration of a fortunate event, in the form of a festive meal with speeches
Shabbes The Sabbath
Shaliach Messenger, representative
Shavuot Feast of Weeks; holiday commemorating the Revelation at Sinai and the Giving of the Torah
Sheluchim Agents, messengers
Shlepped Dragged, carried
Shul Synagogue
Siata DiSh’maya Help from Heaven
Sivan 3rd month of the Jewish year (corresponds to May/June)
Tachrichim Burial shroud
Talmid chacham “Wise disciple” – person who is advanced in Torah study
Talmidim Students, disciples
Tefillin Leather straps with capsules containing Torah excerpts. Worn by men on the head and the arm at weekday morning prayers.
Tehillim The Book of Psalms
To be zocheh To merit, be deserving [of good fortune]
Torah “Teaching” The 5 Books of Moses. In a wider meaning of the concept, the Talmud is also included; the entire teaching that a God-fearing Jew is committed to living by
Yemach shemam “May their names be extinct” (said about particularly heinous enemies)

Yeshiva Talmudic school for males

Yiden Jews

Yizkor Memorial prayer for the dead

Zocheh – see “**To be *zocheh***”

Zt”l “Zecher Tzadik Livrocho” – may his/her memory be for a blessing