

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword by Ellie Kastel	3
Introduction by Simonne Hirschhorn	4
Acknowledgements	5
Bergstein, Magda	6
The Journey	7
The Chocolate Bar	9
Wedding	10
My Soul Yearns for You	12
When You Call Me Mother	12
Berkowitz, Margit	13
A Proud Day	14
The Holocaust	14
Blau, Leslie	19
Prologue	20
In Bondage	20
In Freedom	22
Epilogue	24
Blau, Sara	25
A Mother's Memoir as Told to Her Children	26
Brieger, Chaya	34
"Paper Clips"	35
Deutsch, Livia	37
A Wartime Story...	38
... And Liberation	39
Einhorn, Breindy	43
My Memories from Auschwitz	44
Feintuch, Lillian	47
Saved by a Nazi	48
Fogel, Gabriela	53
My Memories of the Holocaust	54

Grussgott, Nelly	56
My Father's Story	57
Kalter, Frieda	60
Recollections from the Past	61
Mandelbaum, Chavie	62
The Hashgacha Pratis of My Survival	63
Nagelblatt, Chana	65
The Man with a Heart	66
Osherowits, Pearl	69
My Life	70
Schwartz, Margaret	72
In Memory of the Holocaust	73
Spitzer, Ilona	80
Memories	81
Sussman, Sheindel	83
My Cinderella Story: In the Ashes	84
How I Met My Jewish Prince	85
In the "Goldene Medineh"	86
Tauber, Trudy	88
A Very Unique Story	89
Weiss, Sylvia	91
Selection from "Above"	92
Afterword by Simonne Hirschhorn	100
Glossary	101

FOREWORD

Club Nissim was born in September 2001, and the intention of the staff of the Boro Park Y, the UJA/Federation and the Claims Conference was to provide some meaningful programming for the survivors living in the Boro Park Community. It was an idea whose time was long overdue, but we had no idea what were the interests and needs of the survivors living in our community, and whether we would be able to meet those needs.

The past seven years have seen the development of an innovative program that has gone beyond our original plan. We could not have dreamed that as of June 2008 over 1,000 people would register to attend Club Nissim and that on a daily basis, 200 survivors attend the program at the Boro Park Y. A program that was meant to enrich the lives of its members has also enriched the lives of the children of the survivors, the staff, and the community as a whole. Club Nissim, appropriately named by the group members, enables its members to live full and rich lives, full of learning, creativity and enrichment. It has also enabled survivors to age gracefully in their homes with their families, with the support that Club Nissim can provide.

The brave men and women who have contributed to the Living History II have enriched our lives by remembering their past and putting it down for this and future generation to read and remember. They have given us a treasure of pain and of hope.

On behalf of the entire Jewish Community we applaud your efforts, your willingness to share your past, and your keeping alive the memory of those who perished in the Shoah.

Ellie Kastel

Executive Director, The Boro Park Y

INTRODUCTION

It is always gratifying when an endeavor is crowned with success. Such was the case with our first volume of Living History, which saw the light of day in December 2007. It was met by our members with so much enthusiasm, and so many inquiries whether we would produce a second volume, that—indeed, we had to do just that!

This time, we are happy to be able to present even more authors than the first time – eighteen women and one man have been writing feverishly in order to meet our deadline. In a few cases, our contributors submitted manuscripts that they had already written previously. Even though the goal was not necessarily to create a Holocaust memoir as such, these authors all chose to write about their Holocaust experiences, since they all felt that these testimonials must be preserved for posterity. What unites the various testimonials is the unspeakable terror that all these survivors lived through. What separates them—and makes this anthology so engrossing—is the different conditions under which they survived—death camps; labor camps; living under a false identity; protected by a non-Jew; hiding in a suitcase; being given passports by a kind stranger; and the sad little girl who had to see her father perish on the other side of the Atlantic, because those in power were unwilling to help.

The result is an anthology that is both beautiful and harrowing; cruel and poetic; inspiring and profoundly touching. Nobody could read it without shedding tears—and nobody could read it without marveling at the personal strength, heroism and determination that shine forth in these narratives. Particularly moving is the unshakeable religious faith that pervades the entire volume—the faith that holds fast, even in the face of the most grueling horror, that the Almighty can—and will—make miracles at any time, and that His Redemption will come for us all; may it be speedily and soon! These authors are here to testify to the miracles—indeed, they are all living miracles themselves!

This volume is in honor of the holy ones who perished, and of the miraculous ones who survived.

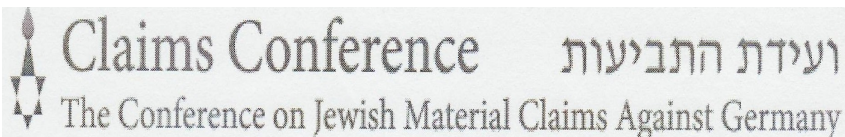
Simonne Hirschhorn
Program Director, Club Nissim

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MAGDA BERGSTEIN



Magda (Miriam Gittie) Bergstein, née Spitzer, was born in 1929 in Miskolc, Hungary.

She came to the U.S. in 1949 and established her own business on the Lower East Side, selling ladies' garments. She is a prolific writer, whose work has appeared in *The Jewish Press*, and various other publications.

Mrs. Bergstein has three children, eighteen grandchildren and—*keynahora*—"many" great-grandchildren. She lives in Boro Park.

MAGDA BERGSTEIN

The Journey

I wondered many times – was it the deep rooted, unwavering belief that was implanted in my every fiber by my ancestors that gave me the courage to go on, not to give up at some of the very trying periods, such as "Appell" time, the counting of the prisoners twice a day. It took place at dawn, with the stars above looking down at us, with frost or icy rain in the air. Dressed in rags, starved, humiliated and shivering we were chased out of our wooden board bed, where twelve of us had huddled together to keep us from freezing. Once, I looked at the morning star that was about to depart and in desperation I asked G-d Almighty, "Why do You keep Your face hidden from us?" At that second, I felt a sharp, agonizing pain. The Nazi strap landed on my back, scaring and frightening the bloodsucking lice, who in their panic scattered in all directions in chaos, and started a merciless attack on my exhausted body.

Those cultured beasts thought of many different ways to humiliate us. One day it was announced that we would be treated to entertainment. A concert would be given to the prisoners in Lager C. Thirty thousand of us were seated on the ground. The mood was quite festive. The Nazi beasts, walking about in their shiny boots, well groomed, the manicured fingers toying with their silver-handled revolvers chatted and exchanged pleasantries, like the latest method of torturing our people. It was all very classy, and they were in a state of extreme elation. The Nazi plan to annihilate our people was progressing beyond expectation. It was smooth sailing all the way to the crematorium. Everything was going perfectly.

The prisoners had built a podium and the members of the orchestra started walking up the steps to the stage. The conductress took her place and gave the signal to the young lady prisoner artists to start playing. In a while, beautiful sonatas were heard; then a medley of famous love songs, followed by excerpts from the works of several famous nineteenth-century composers, played exquisitely on the piano. Later in the program, a beautiful-faced young girl with expressive soft brown eyes made her violin cry, followed by another prisoner whose enchanting voice sang a famous opera.

The German beasts applauded enthusiastically, all the while discussing how to improve the efficiency of the gassing of inmates. All through the concert, it was business as usual. The crematorium was working full time and the smoke of the chimneys made the beautiful sky black. There was yet another symphony played expertly by the prisoners. The wagons full of Jews were arriving at a terrific speed from all over Europe. The final solution was being carried out most efficiently with speed and excellence. Not a voice, not a sound was heard in protest from the whole world. The plan was working splendidly. All one had to do was give the prisoners an extra portion of bread and they were ready to carry out the most horrifying and grueling acts on their fellow inmates.

"Ha, ha, ha," the sadistic Nazi animals broke out in thunderous laughter that overpowered the violin's cry and cut through my soul like a poisonous snake. I felt a mental chill and my body shivered in repulse. The concert came to an end with a fine selection of very light and happy motives expertly done and delivered. The lice on my body started an insane dance in their drunken, happy mood, and I felt a terrifying chill down my spine.

"Achtung! Achtung," came the terrifying voice of the "blockelteste." She spoke sharply and authoritatively, giving us orders to line up for showers, which were some distance from Lager C. It was routine for the prisoners to be taken to the shower room and handled like animals. Those who naively protested the barbarous treatment were subjected to increased sadism. We were marched along the barbed wires, passing a shallow ditch of human skulls and bones staring at us in the places where the flesh had melted. It was nauseating, and the smell was abominable. I shuddered and turned away from the horrifying scene. Perspiring and shivering at the same time, my mind refused to accept the facts that my terrified eyes were exposed to. The fear and nausea in my throat threatened to suffocate me. I felt a great numbness within myself. I did not realize at the time how deeply and permanently the pain had cut into my heart and soul. As a result of those nightmarish days, I became extremely vulnerable and sensitive to all the suffering and pain of my people, past and present.

I now walk along with my innocent brothers in the icy Siberian prison, feeling their pain, living through their suffering, for I knew pain and torture. I feel the unbearable hurt of my dying brothers who were victims of the terrorist guns and died as martyrs. I share the loss of their loved ones. I identify with them in their hour of sorrow, for I know the agony and horror of losing one's dearests. My vulnerable heart relives the dark hours of the crusades against my people, the inquisitions, the pogroms and the persecutions that my brethren were subjected to through the centuries. My soul weeps with my people in those tragic last hours in Masada. I mourn along with all the mothers whose loved ones fell in martyrdom defending our G-d-given land by the guns of a modern day Haman. For I know the nightmare of death...

Before the last stars disappeared, we were up and out in the courtyard to be counted by the humans turned animals. Shortly after, we started our march to the German factories. A number of SS guards accompanied us, carrying their shotguns with them.

Not only our hearts and souls were darkened by the misery, but our eyes never saw the sunlight through those icy chilling winter months while slaving for the German beasts. It was night again, when accompanied by the cursing repulsive sounds of the Nazis, we were marched back to our living quarters, completely exhausted, dragging our tired legs as if they belonged to someone else. We ate our bowl of watery soup, then fell on our wooden boards and succumbed to nightmarish sleep. It was always the same dream. I was driven, chased, tried to run, but could not. My legs froze to the ground and I lay lifeless, empty, trampled by the enemy like a hunted animal with no chance of escape.

Sometimes in my dreams I saw my loved ones in the far distance, at the end of the horizon, waiting for me, waving to me. I flew towards them free as a bird, carefree and happy, at the speed of lightning. And as I came just about to touch them, they vanished to nowhere. In chaos and desperation, I ran downward from a mountaintop crushed by an avalanche, and then lay lifeless in a dark pit.

Once I gave a frightening shriek and was awakened by one of the inmates sleeping next to me. "Wake up, wake up," she said while shaking me violently. "Do you want them to hear you?" she cried in a desperate voice. "We'll all be punished." I opened my eyes and lay in a cold sweat. "I cannot bear this suffering and misery," the voices inside me cried out. They were forever crying, nagging, and questioning, searching for some answer, for some miracle. All was so very sad and unfathomable and complicated. I spent the rest of the night staring at the great emptiness around me, unable to move, and inside me was nothing but numbness.

Suddenly I heard frightened voices coming from outside. I ran to the window in panic. The shouting became more intense and my terror stricken eyes witnessed the active Nazi whip in the hands of the bloodthirsty guards. I saw many of the women fall to the ground with their hands flying grotesquely in a desperate attempt to dodge the Nazi whip. There came the sounds of more screams and cries and finally they were shoved into the building, but not before many of them were dragged and trampled upon. A new transport of women prisoners had just arrived to Auschwitz.

The Chocolate Bar

There was nothing extraordinary or unusual about that train ride to Manhattan one dreary late autumn morning. My brother and I happened to be on the same train on our way to work some forty years ago. He sat down on the empty seat next to mine, gave a deep sigh, and began speaking to me. It was more of a whisper, as if he was not certain if what he was going to say should be said.

"That chocolate bar for my children, that piece of chocolate, and my children were pushed from me and they vanished, and I was unable to protect them in Auschwitz. My fingers found that piece of chocolate in my pocket and the pain was unbearable," he blurted out in one sentence. It was obvious that he was suffering from great pain. I looked at him with great concern, as if when doubting one's sanity. But then he continued with a faraway, searching look. I was quite puzzled and somewhat frightened.

"On my way to Auschwitz, my three little children, my beautiful angels," and tears filled his eyes as he spoke of this painfully tragic event. The train reached the next stop. People were exiting and entering, occupied with their own daily routines. But he, my brother, was unaware of their existence. His mind was occupied with a time long past, with another train heading to Auschwitz in the darkness of the night. He could almost hear the monotonous cry of the wheels of the train, rushing, speeding, and carrying his beloved family toward their unknown destination. He had reached into his pocket and broken off several pieces of chocolate, putting them into his children's tiny fingers, trying to pacify and reassure them in their frightened state.

Once again he stopped trying to fight back the tears that filled his eyes. Turning toward me he continued to speak to me once again. "Tatty, Tatty, may we have another piece of chocolate?" they had begged him. "No my precious ones," he had heard himself saying to his children. "Later, my sweet angels, later, when we arrive I'll give you the rest of the chocolate." He gathered them into his arms, as if trying to hold onto them forever. "Soon," he had repeated his promise to them once again, and assured them that they would get the rest of the chocolate at the end of their journey.

I touched his arm softly, trying to stop the flow of tears. He took a deep breath and on he continued once more. "I was separated from my babies before I realized what was happening and I was left with the piece of chocolate that I had promised them at the end of that horrifying journey. Why did I hold on to that piece of chocolate? Why didn't I give it to them?" he kept repeating, shaking his head in great pain. The train came to a sudden stop that brought us both back to reality. He walked off the train still in a daze, drying his wet eyes. The train carried me on to my destination. This incident was never mentioned again, but it shook up the very core of my soul.

Recently he departed from this world, returning his soul to its Maker. His devoted wife, his fine grandchildren, and I accompanied him on his last journey. While sitting *shiva*, I could not help

but think of that train ride, the painful incident that he related to me so many decades ago. I thought of the indescribable suffering, the pain that he had carried all those years in the very core of his soul. I thought of that chocolate bar that hadn't been handed to his precious babies and how that had tormented him.

My tears just wouldn't stop, as people came to express their sorrow to his family. I hardly heard their voices. In my mind's eye I saw him as he was running with happy excitement, elated, towards his beautiful children, his precious babies. His beautiful children were running toward him excitedly in a blaze of joy; they embraced each other as they were reunited. "Tatty, Tatty, we love you so much," they sang to him. He wiped away their tears of joy with his kisses as they held each other in ecstasy. He watched in joy as the blazing brilliance of the Gan Eden melted the chocolate bar on his babies' lips.

Wedding

I enter the elegant wedding hall. The music is heart-warming. The photographer is busy snapping pictures of the wedding party, while making funny comments in order to achieve the best shot of the celebrants. The guests are exchanging good wishes with each other. The ceremony is impressive, almost flawless. I take my place at the festive dinner table amongst my friends, mostly survivors of the Holocaust. We are all excited, in a happy mood. We compliment each other's stunning new outfits, smart hairstyles, and good looks. Then, like a bolt of lightning, something inside of us snaps and the conversation turns to Auschwitz.

"Remember," one lady speaks up with a deep sigh, "the rags we used to cover our bodies with in Auschwitz and how we used to huddle together and lean on each other's backs to warm our bodies and keep us from starving," she reminisces. "Oh, G-d in heaven," several women respond. "It's happening once more. Here we go, Auschwitz again," they shudder. "The past is present to torment us once more." One of the waitresses turns to us, requesting our order for the main course. Minutes later, we are being served an elaborate meal on a festively set, elegant table.

We are about to cut up our meat when one of the girls turns to the friend beside her. "Remember the bone we found while marching in that icy winter of 1945? We found that bone on the road and several of the girls made a grab for it. We sucked it and sucked it and then we handed it over to the rest of the girls so every one of us would have a chance at it." A nausea comes over all of us at the table, and we break out in a cold sweat. "Throughout the years," she continues her story, "whenever the incident comes back to my mind, I cannot help but wonder what type of bone it was. Did it belong to a dog?" her voice trails off in pain.

None of us at the table are able to touch another morsel of our meal. We are back in Auschwitz, marching through the frosty winter. A sudden painful expression on our faces, a faraway searching look – in spite of the fact that we are guests at a wedding, elegantly dressed, with entertainment and all. The ghost of Auschwitz, Bergen Belsen, is with us constantly.

The wedding of one's own children and grandchildren especially requires a tremendous amount of self-control and inner strength to keep one's emotions at bay. You would like so very much to be joyous with your child. It is the most important day in your child's life, but inside you is a turmoil, a storm brewing, and you feel you are going to lose control, unable to cope with the pain. The gnawing, painful question flashes through your mind. Where are all my loved ones, my close family, at this very precious time in my child's life?

You walk down the aisle with your son or daughter toward the wedding canopy, and you are unable to erase the painful fact from your mind. Your parents, your sisters, your brothers, your aunts, your uncles, your cousins – none of them can share your beautiful day. None of these people who really cared about you and loved you witness your joyous hours. They aren't here to share your excitement or take pride in you. None of them are present to wish you a hearty Mazel Tov. You bite your lips to stop from screaming aloud, and wipe the tears that suddenly fill your eyes, hoping that none of the guest have noticed your strange behavior.

The music is playing very loud. The band is presenting a medley of lively wedding songs. Someone grabs you by the arm and pulls you into the circle of dancers, and, to your amazement, your feet are moving to the rhythm. The cameras are clicking away busily, but in your mind, your heart, you feel a storm brewing. Why can't it leave you in peace for at least this one day? Why must it tear at the broken branches? Why must the past hunt me eternally? Your eyes are glued to the exquisite gowns your friends are wearing. But in your mental world, you see them and yourself in the torn rags of the concentration camps. Instead of the elegant coiffures that crown their heads, in your mind's eyes, you see them and yourself with shaved heads among the sea of human masses.

You adjust your hair nervously and carefully smooth an imaginary crease in your gown. Your eyes search for your children anxiously amongst the guests. You know you must find them, for only then will you be able to go on. Only their presence will have a tranquilizing effect on your state of mind. Fortunately, they notice your inner struggle, your searching look, your moist eye, and they understand immediately. They rush up to you with their own children beside them.

"Mommy, Bobby, we need you. We love you," they whisper, touching your face tenderly, yielding emotional support. "It will be alright, Mommy," they say warmly. Your grandchildren hold your hand affectionately, sensing how very much their presence means. As if by miracle, their very closeness chases away the dark black clouds of Auschwitz hovering in your heart. "We love you," they repeat tenderly. I gaze at their lovely faces and my lips whisper, "Thank you so very much, Hashem."

My Soul Yearns for You

My soul yearns for your love, your tender touch
Your embracing arms, your loving smile
Your ever-compassionate soft dark eyes

I wish, I yearn, to be a child again
To be in your calming, loving arms once again
To feel you cuddle, sing a lullaby
And my face lights up, but then I fear
My heart will break once more in pain

So I close my eyes and again I am a child
Your loving face rests now on mine
I put my tiny fingers on your heart
And I hear you whisper
"We'll never, ever part, my child..."

When You Call Me Mother

Another year's passed by so fast
Once little girls young ladies are
And again, I'll try to express
Although I know it's useless
To put into words that love of mine
The wonder, what your presence does
The joy of your heavenly touch
The sun and moon, they all seem dark
When I look into your lovely eyes.

If I would be asked what's the sound
That makes the world go round and round?
And if I would be asked what is your wish
And what is your desire?
The nicest thing that I could think
The only sound that makes me sing
The happiness that fills me
When you call me "Mother."

MARGIT BERKOWITZ



Margit (Miriam) Berkowitz, née Lieberman, was born in 1912 in Kassa, Hungary.

In 1955 she came to the U.S., where she attended Brooklyn College, in addition to being a homemaker and raising her family. For many years she also filled a community position requiring a woman of the utmost *yiras Shomayim*. Mrs. Berkowitz is a highly educated woman who loves to read. She has two children, five grandchildren and one great-grandchild. She lives in Boro Park.

MARGIT BERKOWITZ

A Proud Day

In my old country, March 7, 1926 was printed with gold in the calendar. On this day we had a big holiday; the birthday of the first president of Czechoslovakia, Tomas G. Masaryk. Everybody liked him; he was the “*tatichek*” or “daddy” of the country. After the Communist revolution, all of Europe suffered from depression and inflation. Only Czechoslovakia had plenty of natural resources for industries; chemicals, flour mills, and sugar refineries. There was a large cotton trade, and manufacturing of porcelain, glass and beautiful crystal. People were working and there was no unemployment. Our currency had the highest worth in Europe. The green passport (which is what it was at the time) brought big honor to tourists who traveled with it. The citizens were happy, the workers had good wages, and people bought clothing, furniture and luxuries, and spent money on entertainment.

The school system created ambitious students. My school was directed by Dr. Bozena Frazova, a wonderful pedagogue. We quickly learned the Czech, Slovakian and German languages and also Esperanto, which the President wanted everyone to learn. We grew up democratic and emancipated. Dr. Bozena Frazova, who was a student of Masaryk, used to say, “Girls, don’t settle for being a teacher or a seamstress; go and be a watchmaker or a mechanic like a man!” Her motto was “Knowledge Is Life”. I learned what it means to be emancipated.

I am writing this memoir today, remembering the March 7 holiday. I was given the honor of reciting a monologue in front of President Masaryk. This was a great honor, because I was a Jewish girl with a Hungarian accent. I recited in Slovakian, “Fly away to mother Prague / I salute you, dear father / Greet you with all my heart / How fortunate have been these seventy-eight years!”

The Holocaust

(As told to Tali Arieff)

We lived in Slovakia, where the deportations started earlier than in Hungary. We stayed in Slovakia until Pesach of 1942. By then all the Jews had already been deported. We were hiding in the chimney of our home – that is where we celebrated our Yom Tov. I didn’t have any children yet, so I fled with my husband and nephew to Hungary. I was born in Hungary, so I had papers. I don’t want to talk about how we got there. We hired a *goyishe* driver to smuggle us to Hungary, I don’t like to remember this. In Slovakia, if the Nazis had found us, we would have been shot; but in Hungary there was another danger – there they were shooting Slovaks. I felt like a Hungarian, but I was afraid for my husband, who was born in Slovakia and was a soldier who had defected from the army. We stayed in Hungary for two years and were reasonably comfortable, but then the deportations started in Hungary as well.

My husband decided that we should pretend to be Hungarian goyim. I found a bunch of

personal documents in a closet. They belonged to a Gentile woman who had divorced her Jewish husband and obtained court permission to use her maiden name. I took these papers and pretended to be her. I felt like her – I *was* her. I discovered that she was a loose woman who worked in an apartment in an amusement park. I dyed my hair light blonde so I would feel different. I went with my husband to live legally in an apartment under her name. I saw an ad in a newspaper for a studio apartment in Buda in a blue-collar, *goyishe* neighborhood. The building superintendent sublet the apartment to us from a woman who had left to go to her parents in the villages while her husband was in the army. I paid half a year's rent and signed the contract for six months with an option of renewal, if her husband would still be at war then. I felt safe, though my husband was very scared and wanted to go to Romania, to an area where there were no deportations.

A man from Romania was sent to us with a note from the Jews, saying that he was trustworthy. We paid him to smuggle us to Romania. On Shiva Assar b'Tammuz, we left for Romania. We were fasting. We took a train to the river by the border. When we got to the train, there was another woman there with two girls and a baby. We were waiting for nightfall to cross the border. A fisherman's son came to take us across the river in a little boat. All of a sudden, we heard "Hands Up!" and two Hungarian policemen of the vicious Gendarmes, carrying guns and bayonets emerging from among the reeds, which were very tall because it was late in the season. The bayonets gleamed in the moonlight, and we were terrified.

They put handcuffs on us. I was handcuffed to one of the Gentiles, not to my husband. My husband was handcuffed to a different girl. They took us to the police station and asked us what we were doing. My husband was taken to an interrogation room first, but his voice carried, and we heard every word. Right away he told them that he was a Jewish refugee from Czechoslovakia who was trying to get to Romania. "I have a wife, but I left her at home," he said, trying to protect me. "Why did you leave your wife at home," the guard asked. My husband answered, "She's a sickly woman, so I left her there." They took away all his possessions and sent him to another empty room with a policeman at a desk. My husband sat down on the floor. Then they called me.

I took out my pocketbook with my good *goyishe* identity papers, and said my name was the one on the documents. "I met this man and liked him," I said, "so we got together." He said, "Really?!?!?" I said, "Yes, I'll go with any man who calls me, and he was nice to me." The guard said, "He is your husband!!!" I said, "No, I divorced my husband – here is the divorce document." The guard asked, "Why did you get divorced?" "Because he had a bad nature," I replied, "he had three things that start with a 'K'," (meaning a gambler, a drunkard and a womanizer, since these three words all start with a 'K' in Hungarian). So he threw me some very dirty words and sent me out. There were no chairs; I had to sit on the floor. Then the kids were interviewed.

We stayed through the night, sitting on the floor, hungry and thirsty. At dawn, some regular policemen took us to Seged, a beautiful city, to another police station with SS Germans. There were other Jews there. We were interrogated again. They sent me away, and I passed my husband who was standing between the Gestapo guards. I signaled to him, "Don't worry, we'll be together!" I was taken to a regular Hungarian police station. I got my pocketbook back. They undressed me completely, and saw the jewelry I had hidden on my person. They took this away, along with my suitcase. Then they brought me some goulash. I had been fasting for two days, so I ate it. They gave me a regular room and I lay down.

There was a *shikse* there, who was imprisoned for stealing from the ghetto.

They took me back to Budapest and gave back everything except the money and jewelry. They interrogated me again, and I told the same story as before. The guard whipped his whip against his strong boot and screamed, “Why are you lying?” I was horribly frightened, and he spoke to me with very crude words that a lady can’t repeat. Then they took me upstairs to a room with a few loose women and beds. The women spoke in a very unrefined manner. Then there were noise from airplanes, and everyone hid in basements, but we prisoners were left in the room.

The next day, they gave us food; soup and bread, better than the Germans’. They didn’t ask me any more questions. In the morning, an official in dark pants and a white jacket came in and asked if anyone wanted to go to work in another police station. I raised my hand, and two more girls came along. We left through a huge door with a giant key. They told us that we were going by electric train to 92nd Street. There, we worked as cleaning girls and we washed and canned vegetables. They gave us good food – meat and beans and bread – and we got as much as we wanted. After four o’clock, we went back with two policemen who warned us not to steal. The other girls told me that after three weeks we would be released. The next day we went back, and this went on for a few days. All the time, there were bomb planes circling above, so sometimes we wouldn’t go to work.

I was thinking that it would be very easy to run away. When I got out of the train one day, I heard music and singing – it was soldiers, marching to the front. I turned away from the guards and managed to sneak back onto the train! I bought a ticket to the last stop – a station that was close to where I had lived and worked. It was already nightfall. I went to a woman I knew, and asked to spend the night with her. She told me that she didn’t have a bed, but that I could sleep on two chairs in the kitchen. I was exhausted and fell asleep.

In the morning, I took the train back to the Jewish ghetto, because I thought I had caught an illness and wanted to see a doctor. I told him the whole story. He said that my wounds came from being dirty and that I needed a warm bath. Then he gave me a note and said, “This will get you into a certain house with a yellow star where they will give you food and everything you need. You can stay there over Shabbos, and then go back to pretending to be a goy.”

At this place I heard some information about my husband. There was a young man there whom I knew, and I asked him to come with me to my apartment in Buda. He was dressed and looked like an Italian gentile. He asked the super whatever had happened to me, using my false identity. He was told that I had left, but that my rent was paid and my apartment full of my things. So I went back home to the apartment, washed myself, and the wounds disappeared. I was home and free! But—what about my husband?

A certain Mr. Marine, a Hungarian Jew and a Bobover chassid, looked like a born *sheigetz*. He came to ask me if Rivche, the Bobover Rebbe’s daughter, and her two children Esther and Yanek, could stay in my apartment. I took them in. In exchange for my doing this, they assured me that they would take care of my husband, who was in the same Gestapo prison as her sister. We lived together from before Rosh Hashanah and everything worked out wonderfully. She would cook kosher food for the jail where Reb Chatzkel Duvid, another son of the Bobover Rebbe, and her mother Babtche, were imprisoned.

The feeling in the air was changing. Szalasy became the ruler of Hungary. This was the most

terrible day of the war. He was killing Jews, one after the other... By the hundreds, he threw them into the Donau river... People fell like leaves from a tree. I can't talk about it. My husband got home that day. He had escaped without waiting for the Bobover; it was a miracle. He said he had been accompanied by *malachim*. He had some bread, so he showed it, because having bread was a sign of being a free man. He ran over to some German officers and asked in Hungarian to be taken to Budapest. The soldiers gave him a ride in their truck! I was very, very happy. This was the fifteenth of October, and it was terrible in Budapest.

My husband made a bunker in a hollow area under a window in our apartment. He sent me to a carpenter to get certain large boards of wood. I went twice so I wouldn't have to shlep so much. My husband built a wonderful bunker there, went in, and closed it from the inside. When it was closed, you could see absolutely nothing. If anyone rang the door bell, he would run in. The only problem was a suffocating lack of air in the bunker.

November got worse. Then, in mid-December, the door bell rang, and who was there? Babtche with Reb Chatzkel Duvid! They begged us to take them in. Reb Chatzkel Duvid went into the bunker with my husband. Babtche stayed for another two days, till they found a place to stay with a Polish goyte. Rivche was desperate for chicken soup for her mother, so I went to the market and bought a chicken. My husband *shechted* it, and they cooked a kosher chicken soup!! The alter Rebbetzin was *mechaye* from this chicken soup and she *bentched* my husband. I went to get them other foods as well, like cheeses and butter.

At the end of December, I bought a Christmas tree, so as not to arouse suspicion. On December 31, we heard loud booms – the front had moved to Budapest! We went to the basement for safety. Then, there was a huge crash, but it was the house next door, *baruch Hashem*. My husband and Reb Chatzkel Duvid came running downstairs from their bunker. People said, "Where did you come from?" They answered, "We were next door, but the house got hit by a bomb." Then we saw Russian soldiers with tanks. We were trembling and shaking in the basement.

All of a sudden, two Russian soldiers in white jackets came down. One of them gave me a shoebox, containing a small loaf of black bread and some sugar cubes. I asked him his name, and he told me it was Ivan. (My son Yitzchak's English name is Ivan, in this soldier's honor.) Then the soldiers went upstairs. They thrust their bayonets into everything they could find, including the bunker. It was a *mazel* that no one was there!

This was basically the end of the *pachad*. Reb Chatzkel Duvid left to areas that were already firmly occupied by the Russians. We stayed in the apartment for another four days. Then there was a big snowstorm, and we decided to leave. Rivche, her children, my husband and I left to a nearby neighborhood that was under Russian occupation. My husband shlepped Rivche's suitcase.

When we got to our destination, we told the Russian commander of the town that we were Czechoslovakians, who had fled. The officer was furious that we had left a Russian area. However, we had left while it was under German control, and we tried to explain this to him. We were sent to a very elegant apartment, but they told us to come back the next morning for questioning. Rivche and the children stayed in that town, but my husband and I ran away to another town further off. We escaped among the coals of a freight train.

Baruch Hashem, we were saved! We were free! All the people from our apartment moved to Eretz Yisrael and America. Rivche got remarried. Her children grew up and built families.

Many of these people are no longer alive, but their families continue.

LESLIE BLAU



Leslie (Yitzchak Moshe) Blau was born in 1921 in Budapest, Hungary.

He came to the U.S. 1957, where, in addition to working as a knitter in the ladies' fashion industry, he attended graduate school at CUNY. Leslie Blau is the author of a book about Bonyhad, his wife's home town. He is a devotee of art and music.

Mr. Blau has two children, two grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren. He lives with his wife in Boro Park.

LESLIE BLAU

Prologue

As a survivor of the most tragic period of the twentieth century, the Shoah, I feel privileged to be able to sit down at a desk and write my Memoir...

To tell my story is to tell a tale that brings light on my travels “*me’avdus lecherus*.” More than fifty years ago, I came with my family of ten to our beloved new country, the U.S.A. It was not easy – to start all over again to make a livelihood and to make it secure; to make sure that my family would be taken care of! In spite of all those tremendous difficulties which were part of our new life in the beginning, it is not difficult to remember our past. It was natural for me to attend the yearly commemorations and never forget what happened to us!

In Bondage

Born in Budapest, Hungary, I got the best education – my parents made sure of that. I was enrolled into The Jewish High School. Our teachers were top-notch professionals of their respective fields. Graduating in 1939, registering at the University was not an option for me. The prevailing anti-Jewish laws made it impossible for Jews. So I had to learn a trade. I became an apprentice in a knitting factory. All my classmates from the Jewish High School were drafted in 1941 and – as they were Jews – became members of the dreaded Labor Service Department. Jewish boys had to serve in their own civilian clothes with a yellow armband on their right arm. Unfortunately, this group was sent to work into the infamous copper mines in Yugoslavia and most of them died there from terrible hardships and hunger!

I never received my draft card, but in 1943 posters were all around the city, calling on all Jewish males who were not drafted to the labor service to register in one of the worst military barracks. So I went. They found my draft card, which had been mailed to the wrong address. This may have been one of the many reasons that I became a survivor! That day, they were looking for Jews who worked in the textile industry. Our unit of 240 men was sent to a suburb of Budapest called Ujpest, and we started working in the two largest textile mills to alleviate the manpower shortages. This was our daily routine; long working hours, day after day.

After a year or so, the allied powers started to bomb the city of Budapest, and we were sent after work to clean up the ruins. On one occasion we were sent to a location on the hilly part of the city (called Buda), where a misplaced bomb had damaged the residence of a famous opera singer. We had to clean up and salvage her piano and cotta (musical note books). We did a terrific job and were able to recover her precious notes! She was very happy, and served us each a portion of bread with strawberry jam. “What else can I do for you?” she asked. On my request she started to sing a well-known aria – Delilah's song, from “Samson & Delilah” by Saint-Saens. This was something extraordinary indeed – imagine a famous artist singing to a group of Jewish servicemen with yellow armbands!

Then came 1944, and things started to get more dangerous. I took a risk and approached one of our officers, whom I regarded as an exception to the rest of our rulers. I talked to him and mentioned that, if given a chance, I might be able to get a so-called Schutzpass, Protection Passport, issued by the Swiss. He listened to me, and with lots of courage decided on the spot that the

next morning he would go with me to the Swiss Consulate, at the famous Vadasz Street location.

Two blocks from the place, he advised me to go into one of the apartment houses, in order to remove my yellow armband and get into the Swiss Consulate. To reach the building was no problem, but to get inside the Consulate was a tremendous undertaking! The street was very crowded, as hundreds of Jewish people wanted to enter. Policemen tried to keep order in front of the friendly Consulate. After waiting for a long time, I was able to enter the building and mentioned that I had an appointment to see a certain Dr. Koenig, who was a teacher in the Jewish High School. It did not take long to get Protection Passports for me and my family, but to secure papers for my whole unit of 240 comrades was a large undertaking. I had to spend the whole night there.

The next morning, without my insignia, my yellow armband, I took the public transportation, and had the good luck that nobody arrested me and I was able to get back to my barrack. Here I was not so lucky; the guard, a low-ranking private stopped me. Of course I could not tell him where I had been, and who had helped me get there. I got beaten up real good! But upon my return to my barracks, my comrades carried me on their shoulders. They knew that, at least for the time being, their lives were saved!

A few months later, the authorities recognized that the number of Schutzpassen issued was much larger than the government had agreed upon. Soon after this, we were ordered to report to a large school compound in the City, where all the Jews with Swiss Schutzpassen were gathered. As I got news that our deportation to the West was imminent, I told my comrades that during the night we should all try to escape, and everybody would be on his own.

In the morning I started out with one of my friends, using public transportation, and luckily we got to the Consulate. After a while we were able to get in and reported that we had deserted our labor service unit and must find refuge in the Consulate. It was not easy. The building was very crowded indeed. Like a military barrack, there were makeshift beds all over the place. Ground floor, first floor, basements – every location was really crowded. The quiet of the nights started to change, as one of the leaders of the house pointed out to me – the almost continuous noise of shootings marked the approach of the Red Army. But we still faced dangers. Indeed in the following days, the Arrow Cross gangs entered the building twice with arms and started shooting. They stormed and rampaged all over and ordered everybody – including myself – out to the street. They started to march us toward the Danube, but at the last minute a special unit of the military arrived, and let everybody back into the Consulate again. A tremendous miracle – my life was saved again!

A few days later, a friend went to get my mother from one of those Swiss protected houses. Can you imagine my joy, when I was able to hug my Mama! There really was no room at all, so I gave her my place for the night and took a guard duty for every night thereafter. On another day, the second floor of the Mizrachi compound got a direct hit. One person was injured. I volunteered together with three others, to carry the wounded to a nearby Hospital – all arranged by the Consulate. Although we went through a virtual war zone, we came back unscathed. Another miracle!

Then came the dawn of January 18, 1945. On my guard duty, I noticed an armed Russian soldier hitting our door with his gun. I could not believe it – we were liberated! Running down to my basement, where, as every morning, a violin played Brahms' Lullaby, it seemed so unreal.

As I told my friends in the basement that we were liberated, nobody wanted to believe it. And when I said "I saw it with my own eyes," they slowly started to climb outside to hear the news for themselves; they started to cry, then laugh... It was a picture I will never forget.

In Freedom

It is January 1945. I step out with my mother from the Swiss Consulate and we start walking toward our apartment. No public transportation is available. Seeing the devastation all around, with the bombed-out houses – it is a terrible sight! After a long walk, we reach our home. The house wasn't hit and our apartment has not been touched at all. But we, as everybody else in the city, have many problems. Just buying food is very scary indeed...

Soon, news came from my cousin in Bonyhad. He invited my mother and me to come and stay with him. He had lost his entire family and, as the Jewish Community leader, he was very busy. His priority was to prepare the basic necessities for his returning Jewish brothers and sisters. My task was to help reorganize his family's famous department store, which had been robbed and looted completely. In reality, mostly men came back from the Labor Service – girls and women rarely, as they were generally sent to Auschwitz.

After Pesach, the Orthodox Jewish School Principal's three daughters came back from Auschwitz. Their parents, siblings and grandmother had all been lost. The middle daughter, Sara, was a striking, blonde beauty in spite of the suffering she had endured. We met quite often, we wrote to each other, and she lent an appreciative ear to the poetry I was writing. Seeing the deep and special love I held for my mother, Sara decided I had husband potential, and she made up her mind: "I'll be happy to marry you!" On Rosh Chodesh Iyar, 1946, we got married in a simple ceremony. (My cousin made a happy match with the oldest sister!)

We lived there in Bonyhad for another eleven years. As the regime became communist, our store was taken from us, and I had to find work as a statistician in an office. Then came the Revolution of 1956, a crack was made in the Iron Curtain (by Churchill), and soon we were on our way to escape. We started out on December 3, 1956, but as we got close to the Austrian border, we heard that the border was completely sealed. It took us another couple of days to get a local guide to help us to reach the border. After many difficulties, we were able to accomplish our goal, and arrived in a little Austrian village, called Lutsmannsburg.

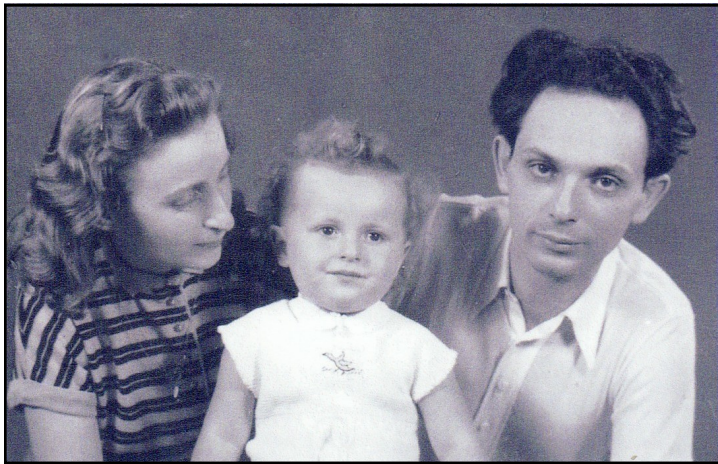
The Austrians were friendly, but overwhelmed by the amount of refugees. From here, we went to the next camp and then to the next one. Close to the end of the month we finally reached Vienna! Here the Jewish Organization the HIAS arranged for us to stay in a Hotel. I began working in their office as an interpreter, as I spoke German and some English. In the beginning of 1957, the HIAS sent most of the Jewish refugees to Salzburg. We were directed to the Camp Roeder military barracks. Here I worked with the HIAS representative, Dr. Krohn, until the middle of August, when they closed the office.

At that time all of us were directed to our new destinations. My family was sent to Vienna, to fly to the United States. We arrived here on August 22, 1957. After a short time, we were able to move to Boro Park, where our first rented home was at 1133 53rd Street. My wife, an excellent seamstress with an artistic degree, soon found an operator job in a knitting mill; a few days later I became a night knitter in another factory. Mama took care of our daughter and son, and soon they started to go to school. In due time our children graduated in their schools with excellent marks. I became a salesman in the wholesale ladies sportswear business. In 1960, we were

able to buy our present home. We were happy to enjoy our freedom in this beloved country. In due course my daughter finished college and became an English teacher, giving a course in the Holocaust.

I made sure that from the very beginning, my wife and I participated in the yearly Holocaust Commemorations. In 1983 we went to a Commemoration in Washington D.C. For three days we attended meetings near the Capitol, where the American Gathering took place. Eli Wiesel received a symbolic key to the future Holocaust Museum from vice President Bush. We, the 15,000 survivors, had a chance to listen to President Ronald Reagan. This was really a very special moment for us survivors – I will never forget it!

In 1989 I took another most meaningful trip together with my wife and daughter. We attended a class reunion in the Jewish High School in Budapest. An American reporter came with us to the Jewish Cemetery, where we visited the graves of our teachers, killed in the Shoah. It was a very painful and emotional occasion for me to *daven* at a certain mass grave, which bears a Memorial, listing the name of my father.



The author with his wife and daughter in 1951

In the year 2000 there was another story to remember – visiting my roots! This time I went to Hungary with my wife, daughter, a niece, my grandson and his wife. After spending a week in Budapest, we made a trip to Bonyhad, where the town and state representatives came to see us with the local TV station – a red carpet treatment, because of my book about Bonyhad. They made an interview with me, which was shown later in a series about former residents. But the highlight of the trip was our visit to the old Shul, which is more than a hundred years old. We all cried, seeing the terrible condition the building was in. I couldn't control myself; I couldn't stop crying for a very long time!

In 2005 we received the honor of participating in a candle-lighting ceremony. This Commemoration took place in the Hunter College and we lit the second candle. The Newsday had a picture the next day of how "Survivor Sara Kuttner Blau helps commemorate the 6 million Jews who died at the hands of the Nazis." I stood on the podium, next to my wife, together with my daughter and granddaughter – I don't have to tell you how I felt...

Epilogue

It is now more than fifty years since we arrived here to our beloved country; when our lives were changed forever. Soon we will celebrate Pesach, and at the Seder table we will remember the lives of our people in slavery in Egypt.

As it is said, at the Seder we should feel that we were part of their lives, as if we had been slaves and that now we have been liberated, and are living as free people. For us Survivors, this comes

very naturally. Boro Park is our home; as it is home to the largest population of Survivors anywhere. These past fifty years have given us freedom and an opportunity to enjoy it – what a feeling to live here in the center of the free world!

Besides being able to make a living, we have enjoyed the many opportunities New York can offer. We have been able to educate our children and grandchildren in the best yeshivas and universities. As lovers of the arts and music, we have loved to visit museums, the opera and the concert halls. And as we age, and are slowing down somewhat, we are still happy, as our beloved organization, Club Nissim, makes it possible for us to revisit many of those places we saw in our younger years – and even to discover some new ones!

SARA BLAU



Sara Blau, née Kuttner, was born in 1924 in Bonyhad, Hungary.

She came to the U.S. as a young married woman in 1957, where she worked in the fashion industry as a sample maker. Now retired, she enjoys music, exercise and swimming.

Mrs. Blau has two children, two grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren. She lives with her husband in Boro Park.

SARA BLAU

A Mother's Memoir as Told to Her Children

My memory of those who perished in the Holocaust – my parents, brothers, grandma, and my sister ... where shall I begin... When we went to the ghetto, in the spring of 1944, my father was not home with us anymore. My oldest brother, Joseph, who went to college, came home for Pesach. After we moved to the ghetto we begged him to go back, but he didn't listen to us. We were without the protection of men, only women and children, and he insisted on staying with us and moved with us into the ghetto.

We stayed in the ghetto for approximately two months, through July. We were placed together in one room; not even one room per family, but several families in one room, and we had maybe only one street where all the Jews were concentrated in the same area, and from all around Bonyhad, our town, and Bataszek and Szekszard, people were gathered here.

Gyöngyi, my elder sister, was sent away by my mother to work in a field somewhere with the peasants, so that maybe she would have a better chance to evade the ghetto and have more food to eat. She was twenty-two at that time; I was nineteen; my sister Rose was sixteen; and my youngest sister, Edit, was twelve. My grandma was eighty-three and my mother was forty-four when we went to the ghetto. My father, who was forty-seven, and my younger brother, Marcel, known as Marci, were in the labor service already. Joseph, my oldest brother, because he was brilliant, was at University. Most Jews couldn't attend schools of higher learning anymore, but he was an exception, and had he chosen to go back, perhaps he could have avoided the ghetto and his fate... Life in the ghetto was terrible, but Joseph knew German, so he got a position where he helped with translation. He would escort people to and from interrogations, and these people were often tortured when questioned, and he, my sensitive brother, had to witness this.

Later on, during our stay in the ghetto, the girls were sometimes selected to clean the homes where the German officers were stationed, and there were periods when we girls feared that perhaps they would want more from us than just housekeeping. Once, when we were serving at one of those parties, they encouraged us to take baths there, and that would have been a luxury not available in the ghetto, but we refused politely, lest one of those officers enter. One of our girlfriends, who was very brave, said she would take a bath, and we girls stood guard while she bathed.

Life had been beautiful years ago, before this period. My mother came to live in Bonyhad at a very young age with some relatives, and she was sixteen when she fell in love with my father. She came from Ujvidek, which at that time was in Yugoslavia, and in those days one could not cross the borders easily, so my father had to sneak her over the border, so that they could be together. That was a love story! My father taught generations of students in Bonyhad. He was both an acclaimed teacher and a principal of the Orthodox Elementary School, who also taught Jewish history to the High School students. He could reconcile both the Judaic and the secular worlds.

But the time soon came when we realized that something was in the air, and some even managed to dig up their backyards or hide some valuables in their attics before they were sent to the ghetto, but this information was beaten out of them during interrogations. There must

have been anti-Semitism in our town while I was growing up, but we were raised in such a way that we really didn't feel it much because we were friendly with our peasant neighbors. I felt it when I was in High School, because I recall an incident after the Germans came, when my so-called friends would avert their faces and not even say hello. But if those in positions of authority in Budapest knew, we, the ordinary people, were not aware of it. Although we heard rumors, we didn't know anything concretely, nor did we know how bad it was in Poland, because the newspapers available to us didn't print these things. But I do remember that we heard of Hitler, and there were anti-Jewish laws, but we couldn't do much about that.

When we moved to the ghetto we were only allowed one piece of luggage. There were Hungarian police gendarmes who assisted the Germans, and no one from the "ordinary people" stood by us as we were marched to the ghetto. Even now, we did not anticipate our fate, though we realized that this was a frightening, unreal thing, to simply move people out of their homes and intern them into a one-block area. Yes, we were very afraid, but still we had no idea of the extent of what was in store for us, and what could we do? It was strictly stipulated when we could go outside – there was a curfew – and even then, we could only be in the ghetto area that was situated around the Synagogue and its courtyard. It is impossible to describe all that transpired here in the ghetto, the tortures of the interrogations, but we still had hope. We were together.

Then one day, instructions were given. Everyone could take one bundle and then every Jew must appear in the courtyard. There we spent either a day or a night, I'm no longer sure. We were told that if anyone had anything of value to surrender it, because we would all be searched, intimately, and if anything were found on us, there would be serious consequences. Nobody wanted to hand over anything, so during the night people dropped their watches or jewelry into the latrines. Despite this we were searched, in all hidden crevices, for possible hiding of any valuables on our persons. There were rooms where this was done, and later we heard that the gendarmes went through the latrines as well.

We were marched approximately three kilometers to the railway station, the old and the young with difficulty, because we were already undernourished. We were there for a while and some good Gentiles threw us some edibles. From there we were taken to Pecs. Here we were placed into what could only be described as a large stable. Horses had been stabled here once. We were squashed inside, made to lie down on the bare ground and await our fate. I don't remember exactly, but we must have been told that we were going to be resettled, work together and get a little place to live and stay. What did I think? I realized that this was not the norm, but what could I do? At least we were all together, though without most of our men-folk, just some elderly men and some very young, but we hoped for the best. What could an ordinary person do – women without men, children alone, under the threat of guns pointed at us? So we would work. We were together. This too shall pass. This is what they always told us: There's nothing to fear. You are going to work. You will get a nice family house. However, by this time we were not optimistic. We had heard of people receiving letters from those who had left before, saying that they were OK, and working. But maybe these had been written under duress, for our benefit?

So we stayed in Pecs for two days until they gathered more Jews from the countryside and then they loaded us onto the cattle wagons. Water was strictly rationed. I believe there were one pail of drinking water (and one for elimination), carefully monitored so it should be sufficient for the old and the very young, but needless to say it was not enough because the journey took three days. It seemed like an endless journey. The doors were sealed; the windows were slats, which

were shuttered. Throughout we were afraid. It was clear in my mind that nothing good could come of this.

Imagine that stink; the hungry and thirsty people who had passed out by the time we arrived; and when those cars were opened we discovered that some had already perished. Things happened quickly, but when the doors were opened family members still tried to find each other and stick together. I recall that when we got out, the surroundings seemed peaceful and pretty – or maybe it was just the relief of being out of the wagon. So I still hoped that what had been promised would actually happen – we would work together, get a little place, we would be "resettled". But then I saw those striped uniforms and behind those wires, people, and I realized something was very wrong! It all happened very quickly, one, two, three, and G-d must have stolen our senses or something, for we didn't scream, we didn't panic. They were directing us into rows of five, and as we were going, we didn't even have a chance to say a word to one another; perhaps a good-bye?

Behind us, the SS were pointing their guns at us, when all at once I realized I did not see my mother and our youngest sister. As we got out of the wagons, I saw my mother helping a neighbor of ours with two small children. She must have held on to one or both and my sister must have stayed close to her side as well. Even then, I did not know what it meant that she was in another line, because the refrain was always, "You will be reunited, you will see each other again, you will end up in the same place anyway." Our elderly grandmother, frail and broken from the long trip, was supported by my older sister, Gyöngyi, who would not let go of her, when a Pole approached and dragged her away. Gyöngyi cried, "She needs my help to walk, I'm going with her," to which the Pole forcibly pushed Gyöngyi back and said, "I'll take care of her, don't worry, I'm taking her to a good place, I don't want her to have to walk." Now we know what that meant; he saved my sister's life. The Polish man, having been there for some time, knew what each line meant...

I recall Mengele was there, dressed handsomely, sitting on a horse, pointing LEFT and RIGHT, the significance of which we as yet did not know. We said no good-byes and we still believed that we would be reunited. We were young, attractive girls, with long blond hair, my older sister and I, and the SS, with some older Jewish women to assist them, took us into a large room, ordering us to take off whatever we were wearing. Yes, we were completely naked. These women probably had no feeling left in them, having been here for some time, as we later learned, but now we wondered how one Jew could do this to another. But guns were pointed at them too, and this is probably how they saved themselves.

At this point there were no longer any men here. We were told we would get "new clothes" and then our heads were shaved — BALD! Believe it or not, there were no hysterics or outbursts. I can only say, thinking back, that G-d must have dulled our senses, all our abilities for rational thinking. We were "disinfected." Maybe we were given something to drink, I don't know, and maybe there was something in it, because we just went along with everything, and our menstruation also ceased. I don't recall having my monthly period at any time in the camps. We were given a bar of soap and told we were going to take a shower. In our case, it really was a shower, but only much later did we learn what happened to the others with a bar of soap in their hands. They did not get a regular shower. They were gassed.

We soon learned that there would be frequent selections for work, and yes, on occasion, we heard rumors of some being burned, but we knew nothing concrete, because surrounding our area there were beautiful fields and flowers. On occasion, new arrivals came, and we heard

music — concerts were given — so who knew?! After the showers, we noticed clothing in piles from which we were given things to wear, but we didn't get to choose a size that fit, we merely took what was on top; so it could be that a small girl got something too large and a big girl something very short, with her skin showing. There were no underclothes, and for our feet, wooden clogs of indiscriminate sizes. We were situated in Lager C. There were no bunk beds, only bare floors. I can't tell you exactly how many we were in our barracks, but this I know, that we sat or semi-reclined six women in a row, with our legs apart so one fit within the other, one on top of another, day and night, whenever we were in our barracks; this was our position here in Auschwitz.

In the morning and at night, in order to verify that everyone was accounted for, we had "roll call" and until those numbers checked out, we couldn't return to our barracks. We always stood together, we three sisters, and sometimes these roll calls took a long time, because if they counted 199 and there were supposed to be 200, the counting would begin again. And no one dared disappear for fear of repercussions, and the barbed wires were electric and that was the only place to run to, but it would mean instant death. Some Polish kapos and the German SS always guarded us. The temperatures during roll call could vary. I remember standing there, sometimes in the blazing heat of the sun, and at other times shivering in the cold. I also remember wet and marshy grounds after a torrential rain, our feet soaked and sinking into the mud. Some people collapsed from the blazing sun beating down on them, and you couldn't run to anyone's aid, or you'd be the target of someone's wrath. That person had to come to and stand up on her own, or risk being dragged off straight to the crematorium.

When we walked back to the barracks after roll call, we could hardly walk straight, but if we happened to have the strength to speak loudly, the block attendant, the kapo, would hit us in the head — to maintain order and quiet. Maintaining order was one of the goals. Remember, we had to sit or recline, spread-eagled, we were fed twice a day — a small piece of black bread, which we had to ration to last the entire day, and a small amount of soup, with what appeared to be bits of grass or coal or ashes. It was hard to determine; it looked like dirty dishwashing water. If you weren't there, you really can't imagine what it was like. It is hard to paint an accurate picture of what transpired there.

Another experience was using the latrines. You couldn't go when you had to, or wanted to, but only when they "allowed" you to, and then you did not go alone but they had these long lines of latrines in the ground, and you all sat down together, at the same time, whether you needed to or not! Furthermore, you were under constant supervision, even here, and scrutinized, and told to hurry, hurry, hurry. You could not sit at your leisure, and complete your business normally.

In Auschwitz, all we did was to be subjected to daily roll calls twice a day, to stand there for hours, then returning to our barracks to sit in that uncomfortable position, one closely up against the other, day and night, and not everyone could adjust or tolerate this position, or this proximity, or these conditions of utter discomfort. Later — I don't recall whether this happened in Auschwitz or Thorn — there were another three sisters in our group, the Engelman girls, who from the very beginning couldn't tolerate the conditions or the "food". All three perished and we girls dug their trenches and buried them. Perhaps this did not occur in Auschwitz, because those who died there were taken; we did not bury them.

We were in Auschwitz, I believe, for a few weeks only, because this they told us: "if you are asked or are selected for work, GO — volunteer, for that may be your salvation. Get out of here! It is not safe." By then we had realized we were not going to be reunited with our family. It was

all a ruse, a lie!

I remember one selection – and you never knew exactly what the selection was for – we had heard that it would be for the crematoria. The selection came and Mengele was there, and it was for work, but if you didn't want to go, you could stay behind. That was when I remembered that selection for work was better, for the alternative surely wasn't! Rose, our younger sister, did not look her age of sixteen, but appeared much younger and was now quite frail, so we tried to keep her between us, my older sister and I, and so when this particular selection was made by Mengele, just pushing one to the right, one to the left, indiscriminately, he asked us, "SISTERS?" and we said "YES", and so it came to be, that all three of us, by the hand of G-d, were selected together for work! It was a miracle – he could just as well have selected Rose for the other line; she looked so young.

This is how we got to Stutthoff. There we were subjected to another selection and there I remember some who were left behind to die. From here we were taken to Thorn, a work camp. This was a terrible place. Under harsh December weather conditions, with the snow up to our knees, we lived in tents, on bare floors, wrapped in rags that we found covering our gray clothing that we had received in Auschwitz, and with our wooden shoes. We had only one blanket for several girls, and we lay next to each other. We had a small dish, used both for food and also for our personal needs of "bathing" which in essence was delousing ourselves. This became a nightly preoccupation for those who still cared. Needless to say, there were those who no longer bothered, nor had the strength after a day of our work routine.

Our work consisted of digging trenches with heavy, cumbersome farming implements that enabled us to break up the earth, which was sometimes frozen. We women tried our best to complete each day's quota, with the SS guarding us and shouting "LAPATA, LAPATA" – "quickly, quickly". Poor Rose, my sister, wouldn't have been able to meet her quota under the best of conditions, so we tried to cover for her and complete her task. This wasn't always easy to accomplish. This was our routine, day after day. And if someone got sick and couldn't do it? It happened one day that my older sister, Gyöngyi, got sick and got into the infirmary, and I remember someone telling me to better get her out of there fast, because from there no one comes out. I dragged my feverish sister out of there and we tried to cover for her the next day at work.

I think Thorn was where we spent the most time from all the camps we were at. I recall spending Rosh Hashanah here, so that must have been September, but mostly I remember the harsh winter months, so that means we must have been here through December and January. In Thorn we made lifelong friendships with the two daughters of the Bataszeki Rabbi, Edith and Magda. They were very spiritual girls who knew about the holidays and always sustained us. We five – the three Kuttner sisters and the two Low sisters – became a group, sleeping next to each other by night, working next to each other by day. With us also was Sari Weiss who perished later, during the Death March, when having no nourishment, she sustained herself on snow and contracted pneumonia. This brings me to the Death March.

Word reached the Germans that the Russians were approaching in January of 1945, because they took us, hungry and thirsty, at a very rapid pace, just literally schlepping us, on what became known as the Death March, in order to try to elude our Russian liberators. At this time, Rose was not in very good shape; she could barely walk. (Not long before, still in Thorn, one night she had lost one of her wooden shoes in the snow. That was another "adventure" as I tried to find one shoe in the dark, groping in the snow, and by G-d's miracle, the shoe was found.

Imagine, she would have had to go to work the next day, in the snow, and shortly after that on the Death March, with only one wooden shoe! There were some who had their shoes, and developed serious frostbite.) I recall them telling us, "those who can't walk can stay behind and they'll be taken in wagons", and we feared what that might mean! We very briefly entertained this idea for Rose, because she was so run down and her feet were in bad shape, but we quickly thought better about leaving her behind. Until now, we had survived because we were together! We did not want to be separated. And thank G-d, because later we heard that those who stayed behind were immediately shot!

The Death March lasted approximately three days. Those who couldn't keep up were shot as we walked. We arrived at Krohne, at a prison site, and here they locked us up and told us that by 3:00 a.m. we would be killed! After the long march, there were not many of us left anymore, maybe a third had survived the march, and at this point we had no will to live anymore. We just didn't care! However, in middle of the night, maybe at 2:00 a.m., looking out through a small window, we saw large flames. Someone called out "Bromberg is burning!" and hardly was this uttered when one of the Polish Jews, an assistant to the German SS, cried out, "Kinder, ihr seid frei!" "Children, you are free!" G-d made a miracle! For surely, had this occurred an hour later, we'd have been shot! But believe it or not, none of us moved. Though I heard the words, I could not budge. All of a sudden, I had neither strength nor will. We literally stayed in that position for three days. Outside, the war was raging. We were still in a war zone. Our captors had run off. We could have gone anywhere, but we were so depleted. Here's where we buried more of our dead – Sari Weiss who had developed pneumonia from eating snow constantly when she had nothing else. We had wanted to take her to a hospital, but where? Someone told us she just needed proper nourishment – eggs, maybe milk, but where were we going to get that? And so we were liberated but had nothing to eat and nowhere to go.

After several days, when we more or less came to our senses and got our bearings, we went out and scavenged for food – rotten potatoes from garbage cans, because we were so desperately hungry. You can imagine the effect on our weak digestive system. Later, together with the Low sisters and Zippy Berkowitz, another friend, we decided to make our way home. We started to walk. We wanted to beg for food and when a poor Polish peasant woman left her kitchen, Zippy, in desperation, removed the pot and its contents, lifting it all, straight off the top of the oven. Imagine! Later, we found an abandoned, empty house and we settled in to organize ourselves, to get cleaned up a little bit. Because I was handy with a needle and thread, I even made pants from our blankets for our journey home, as we were still in our gray outfits of the past few months.

All of a sudden, some Wehrmacht soldiers appeared. We thought we were done with the Germans, but these seemed a better sort. They tried to make us go with them, but as they were fleeing the Russians, they didn't linger for long. Then, when we thought we were O.K., we realized that we had to avoid the Russians who tried to entice us and convince us to return to Russia with them. They needed a labor force. Not only that, but some were quite aggressive, wanting to force themselves on the girls! We tried hiding under the beds and barricading ourselves behind doors, but eventually had to run from our liberators. We were among the lucky ones, my sisters and I, and our two friends, the Low sisters. Some, like Zippy and her sister, having survived the camps, soon found themselves in Russia before they found their way home! We also had to leave behind Dora who survived, but was too weak to make the journey at this time.

So the five of us started our journey home, walking on our own two feet. To this day, I don't

know how we did it! There was no mode of transportation and we had no map, but somehow we began. We reached Slovakia at first, but that took weeks. Here, Jewish boys who had survived greeted us, and for the first time in a long time, we ate in a soup kitchen and slept in clean beds! These boys helped us to continue our journey home, sometimes walking and sometimes even on trains. In the same pants that I had sewn from those blankets, we finally arrived in Budapest. At least we weren't in rags anymore! I'm not sure who first recognized us, but I remember when a good friend, Sidi, who had survived in the Budapest ghetto shouted, "Here come the Kuttner sisters!" Then Dora Weiss heard about it. She had been a good friend of our mother's; she had also survived in the ghetto and was never deported. She immediately took us in and we spent Pesach there. She reminds us to this day that all we wanted to do was eat, and no matter what was cooked, it never seemed to be enough. Furthermore, when we ate, we sat on the bare floors, so accustomed were we to doing that. This went on for a while, I am told.

From Budapest, we finally made our way to our hometown, Bonyhad, because our hope was still to be reunited with family members. You see, we still didn't know the extent of the tragedy, the full story of the camps. By the time we arrived to our town, Ernest Barany and Joseph Hirschfeld had established the Bonyhad Jewish Relief Agency for the purpose of aiding anyone who returned from the camps. These men had set up and organized the entire enterprise themselves. Having survived the Labor Service and having lost their first families, their sole mission was to aid others, to make sure that anyone who survived would have some dignity restored, and so everyone who returned got a new start, whether it was undergarments and a shirt and pants or a dress, or money to begin businesses, or whatever it took. Ernest had a department store of ladies' goods and though it had been looted by the time he returned, he was a charismatic figure, a doer, with a good reputation, who soon established a credit line and put people to work. Sewing stations were set up, and I began to sew for the women and girls. Here I met my future husband, Leslie Blau, Ernest's cousin, who went up to Budapest to secure goods so the business could be started up again.

Before the war, it was customary for anyone with daughters to stock up on materials, in bulk – damask – for clothing for the future for a trousseau. In our family, we had four girls, so when merchants passed through, my parents would buy material in bulk and store it so we should have it when needed. Before we went into the ghetto we had hidden these treasures in wooden chests; and some items which I had already sewn and hand embroidered – because this was my talent, my training – we had entrusted to a neighbor, but needless to say, when we came back, we got nothing back. When I think of all the things I made because I was industrious and skilled, and nothing remained, is it a wonder that today, nothing of such handiwork interests me? It's not an excuse, maybe, but I'm not interested in doing anything like that ever again!

Yet in the Barany home, Ernest had set up sewing stations, and for the purpose of helping out, I did sew clothing and outfits for those in need, those who returned from the camps. Since I now worked for the organization, and so did Leslie, having moved down from Budapest in an effort to help his cousin with the after war effort, we saw each other often. I saw how good he was to his mother. I remember saying to him, "I envy the one who is going to become your wife because you are so good to your mother." His mother became like a mother to everyone, because so few women that age had survived. She cooked for all the young people who were without parents, and every Shabbat or holiday, these young people were looked after by "Mama", as she became known to everyone, she, my future husband's mother, she, who would become my mother.

We soon realized that no more family members would return. My mother had been only forty-

four, my father forty-seven. My brother Marcel or Marci, who had been in the labor service, we learned through a newspaper ad placed by a priest, had been buried in Tata, near Budapest. Having survived the war, he had suffered an appendicitis attack en route back. He had been taken to a hospital, but because he was a Jew, he was refused treatment. All this – one day before liberation! We located the priest who told us how ashamed he had felt and that he had buried him and marked his grave with a wooden plaque and the word "*Yevorechecho*". We thanked him for his kindness and placed a *matzevoh* on my brother's grave.

Regarding my brother Joseph, the Guttman brothers were the eyewitnesses to his death in Auschwitz. He was left out in the snow to freeze to death. Regarding my mother and Edith, they must have died that first day upon arrival in Auschwitz, when my mother came to the aid of a woman with two small children. My father, who was in the Labor Service already in 1940 – I have the last letter that he wrote to us, in 1941, still filled with optimism.

Sometimes I still think that if I hadn't lived through those times, and witnessed that period in our recent history, the whole thing would have been unbelievable to me. And I think – what else could happen? And I think that one must tell the story to the younger generation, so that they in turn will continue to tell our story, so that people will remember and not allow things like this to happen ever again. You, my children, have to remember – you have to tell the story to your children; you have to remember, so that this will never happen again!!!

CHAYA BRIEGER



Chaya (Catherine) Brieger, née Mermelstein, was born in 1930 in Carei Marai, Romania. She came to the U.S. in 1948, where she worked as a seamstress for thirty years, in addition to being a homemaker and raising her family. Mrs. Brieger has three children, who in turn have given her—*keynahora*—"many" grandchildren and great-grandchildren. She lives with her husband in Boro Park .

CHAYA BRIEGER

“Paper Clips”

I was born in Romania on August 28, 1930. The first week of May 1944, when I was fourteen years old, we were taken to the ghetto in our hometown. We stayed there for one week, and were then transported to another city for another week. We were put into a cattle wagon and transported to Auschwitz. It took about three days to arrive in Auschwitz.



The author, shortly after her liberation from Auschwitz

Recently, I saw a documentary called “Paper Clips”, about a class of non-Jewish eight-graders in Whitewall, Tennessee, who collected six million paper clips in memory of the Holocaust victims. I was especially touched by what this class did, because they were raised in a small village without any Jews.

The eight-graders put all the paper clips that they collected in a cattle wagon that had once been used to transport Jews to Auschwitz. They turned this wagon into a Holocaust Memorial. This was particularly painful to me, because of how I was taken to Auschwitz in a similar wagon.

When I saw the film I was very moved, and I decided to write a letter to these eight-graders, because I wanted my family to be remembered. Below is a copy of my letter:

January 12, 2006

Dear 8th Graders,

I saw the documentary film about the six million clips. I was impressed that you all got together to do something lasting for the six million innocent Jews. My family is also part of it.

I broke down when I saw the wagon that took us to Auschwitz. I was your age. I was sent to a working camp to upper Celizia, Poland in June 1944.

You may ask how did I survive? It was a miracle.

In the beginning of January 1945 we went on a death march. In the evening we slept in a barn. In the morning the S.S. guards and the dogs left u s. It was still in the middle of the war. We stayed on a farm for two weeks.

We were liberated on January 21, 1945. After that we went back to a big city. There our pictures were taken as an identification card.

This is a short summary. In 1948 I immigrated to America. I am a proud citizen of the United States.

My advice to you 8th graders is stay in school. Education is the key to success.

Sincerely Yours,

Catherine Brieger

LIVIA DEUTSCH



Livia (Sarah Leah) Deutsch, née Schwartz, was born in 1930 in Kecskemet, Hungary.

She came to the U.S. in 1949. Now retired, Mrs. Deutsch worked for many years in the family business—jewelry retail.

Mrs. Deutsch has four children, fourteen grandchildren and a steadily growing number of great-grandchildren.

She lives with her husband in Boro Park.

LIVIA DEUTSCH

A Wartime Story...

This is a true story. It happened to my sister and it affected both of us. This is a story of a miracle – one of perhaps many, needed for our survival during the last months of the war. The date was December, 1944. The place, Allendorf, a town in Germany. We were in a slave labor camp, transported there from Auschwitz about five months earlier. There we had already lost every other member of our family, even though we could not, and would not, believe it to be so. We hoped that when the war would be over we would be reunited with our loved ones.

We worked in an ammunition factory, one thousand Jewish women, mostly young girls from Hungary. We were a downcast group, always tired and hungry, but we did our work and we were kept alive in return. My sister and I worked side by side. She was in charge of our department and I was her assistant. But on this cold December morning I was in the infirmary with serious burns I had suffered during an accident at work. Another girl was assigned in my place as a substitute. That day, after arriving in the factory, the workers were kept waiting. In a short while an SS Aufseherin, one of several dozen who were guarding us at all times, came in and told my sister and the substitute that they must follow her to the Bureau. Something in her voice warned them of danger. Their first thoughts were for those left in camp. My sister was concerned for me; my substitute was concerned for her mother. They were brought to the office of the Gestapo, the most dreaded, brutal, inhuman institution ever created by the Nazis.

There they were met by two high-ranking officers for interrogation. My sister, who had the more responsible position, was their main target. She had no idea why she had been brought in. When she tried to ask about the purpose of the interrogation, she was brutally silenced, and instructed that she had to answer their questions, but was forbidden to ask any. The substitute almost collapsed with fright, but she was forced to remain standing erect at all times.

They were accused of sabotage, the most serious of all crimes in wartime, punishable by death for anyone convicted of it. The accuser, the German foreman of an earlier shift, had noticed a handful of small stones in each of the two vats they worked on. These vats had to be filled with different kinds of explosive materials while heated to a certain temperature. Once melted into hot liquid, the mixture was piped into empty grenade shells. We had a scant knowledge of this operation, but were always under German supervision.



The ammunition factory, photographed shortly after the liberation

Imagine, if you can, the plight of these two girls facing their accusers, those bloodthirsty agents looking for more innocent Jewish blood to spill. How my sister stood up to that interrogator, with her limited High School German, she does not know until this day. She remembers what they were after. They wanted to know who had advised them, and who else might be involved in their act of sabotage. As the questioning continued, the situation grew more and more tense. The very air in that room was filled with danger. The Gestapo was judge, jury and executioner rolled into one, and there was no defense for these two Jewish girls who had been brought there to be destroyed in the first place.

Just when it seems that only a Miracle from Heaven can save them, a miracle does occur! Help comes from an unexpected source. Remember the SS guard who brought them here? Now she comes forward and asks permission to speak. She comes to their defense. Her statements are short but decisive. She denies all charges. "These girls do not do sabotage. I do not believe they would do a thing like this. These girls want to go home." Her words work like magic, and the girls are allowed to leave. Once they step outside, the two girls lose their composure. They fall into each other's arms, sobbing violently, with only Valleria, the SS guard, trying to calm them. They return to the factory and resume their work at once. That evening in the Mess hall, the head SS guard came looking for my sister. She was a cruel person, but this time she was all smiles. She came to meet my sister, the girl who was cleared by the Gestapo.

It took my sister a few days before she told me, during a visit at the infirmary, what had happened. I, too, was devastated. We realized how much danger we faced daily, and how helpless we were. I asked to be released from the infirmary at once, and to start working with my sister again immediately. We promised never to be separated again, even for a day. And thank G-d we were able to remain together until the day we were liberated. That is another story of miracles to be told at another time.

...And Liberation

In the beginning of March, 1945, the ammunition factory where my sister and I, and 1,000 other girls had been working was closed due to a lack of supplies. We wondered what was in store for us next. We had no access to real information, but we heard many rumors. We knew that the Germans were losing the war badly, but we were still held tightly in their clutches, as helpless as ever. Our lot was worse than before. Food rations were reduced to below starvation level. We were losing strength rapidly, and along with it our morale. We heard that we were to be evacuated on foot to a distant camp, and the threat of annihilation was indeed real. Our only hope was to be liberated before that could happen. This is the story of how it came about.

We were kept working for the next few weeks. The camp director, an SS officer named Wuttke, sent us out in small groups to dig trenches for the German defense line. Meanwhile, the front was getting closer. At night, we could hear its deadly noise – music to our ears, but frightening nonetheless.

On March 28, we were recalled to camp in the middle of the day. The order had come to evacuate, and we were to leave the very same evening. Chaos was everywhere as we stormed the storage rooms for some food, finding only potato peels, which were inedible at best. Our guards threatened to kill us unless we stopped at once, and we were locked in our barracks for the rest of the day.

We left camp in the evening, heavily guarded, not knowing what the night would be like. Ill-



The barrack in the Allendorf camp

and watched as we walked by. Suddenly, I felt a small metal box placed into my hands. Its shape seemed to be that of an old-fashioned box of shoe polish. Disappointed, and thinking "What good is this to me?", I passed it to my sister. Imagine the joy we felt when she discovered that it contained chocolate! What a treat it was! We hadn't tasted anything like that during our entire captivity. We shared it with those nearest to us, and in moments it was gone, but the memory of its taste has remained with me until this day.

equipped for the endless walk, wearing wooden shoes, we carried our miserable belongings, only to abandon them after the first few hours. We were allowed to rest only when we had to give the right of way to retreating troops. We kept walking until our bodies and souls were utterly weary. As the night slowly gave way to dawn, we reached the outskirts of a sleeping town. We were led into a large barn, and exhausted, we settled on the straw to sleep.

Late in the afternoon we were ordered outside. We noticed that all the old guards had left, and we had a new crew. There was a lineup, but no head count. Nor did we receive any food. The Germans were in a big hurry to leave. A few girls managed to hide then and there, but the majority had to go on. The second night of marching proceeded much like the night before – only one small episode brought us a moment of pleasure. We passed a group of soldiers resting at the side of the road. Some of them stood

We walked on until daylight, and arrived in a small town where we were led to a school building. Sitting on those school benches made sleeping impossible. My sister and I had a small amount of bread, saved from our meager rations, and we ate some of it. Most of the girls were starving by now. They tried to slip out of the building and go begging for food in the houses nearby. A few succeeded, but were all chased back with whatever weapons the Germans had at hand. The girls were lucky to escape serious harm.

We remained inside the building only until noon, when suddenly it was surrounded with armed guards. Once again we were ordered out to continue on our way, not waiting for the evening, as was their original plan. The Germans had an urgency to move us faster. We had a great reluctance to do so, but for the time being they were still our masters. Now we shared the road with throngs of civilians, people either bombed out, or trying to escape from the Americans. They too were on foot – vehicles were for military use only. Checking among ourselves, we noticed a number of girls missing. Obviously, they were able to escape, and hide somewhere. We wondered if they were safe. Could they be free already? And above all we wondered: DID WE MISS OUR CHANCE TO ESCAPE?

Would we be held prisoners until the very end? Would the Germans do to us what they had threatened to do all along? These thoughts went through our minds as we trudged along, and we recklessly decided to try to escape at once, without waiting for the dubious safety of darkness.

Four of us – my sister and I, a cousin, and a close friend – decided to hide in the ditch that ran

along the road. As the column passed, four more girls, who guessed our intention, spontaneously joined us. The others passed, but although we were partially hidden, we were noticed by a guard. The guard alerted Wuttke, who returned on his bicycle. He demanded that we get up at once, but he did not draw his revolver to threaten us, no doubt because of the large number of civilians passing by. We remained sitting as if glued to the ground. He tried a different approach, and promised that we would get bread in the next town, no small treat to starving prisoners!

One of the girls among us, named Suzy, kept her cool and some of her wits, as she stood up to negotiate. "We are only asking for a little more time to rest," she pleaded. "We are all sick and in pain. Please let us sit a while, and then we will follow you," she promised. She stopped two well dressed civilians, who happened to stroll by, and asked them to intercede on our behalf. She told them of our plight and our request, and as astonishing as it may seem, they sided with us, and urged Wuttke to trust us. Reluctantly, he got on his bicycle to leave, but Suzy was not finished yet. She ran after him, and implored him in a most sincere tone, to please save our bread rations until we caught up with the column. Only after he promised to do so, did we feel secure...

We waited until he disappeared from view. Now we were on our own, just miles from the front line, facing more danger than we realized. We had no plan, but needed to act quickly. Hiding in the woods was ruled out, to be captured there as runaways was just too dangerous. We decided to walk back along the very same road, hoping to reach the Americans that way. We had no idea how far we had to go, or how we would cross the German defense line, but we were willing to risk it all to gain our freedom!

Hastily, we tore off the numbers which were sewn to our garments. We could do nothing about the letters KZ printed on the back of our clothes, but since we walked facing all traffic, they were not immediately noticeable. The road was literally jammed, and we had to walk on its very edge. Still, we felt conspicuous, and the direction in which we were walking made us look suspicious. Our intention must have been clear to whomever took notice of us, and many did, even in those last frantic weeks of the war. We were stopped by people of various degrees of authority and questioned about our identity. Our story was a hastily concocted one. We claimed to be Hungarian workers (being Jewish was not mentioned), whose factory had been closed. We were now on our way to the nearest town looking for work and a place to stay.

Few, if any, believed our story. Some recognized us for what we were, but all seemed to be in too much of a hurry to bother with us. They warned us of the trouble we would be in, if and when we would be caught. Ignoring hunger and weariness, we continued on our way, and at dusk we reached the outskirts of Ziegenheim, the town we had passed two days ago. It had not been liberated, as we had hoped it would be. It was teeming with retreating German troops. Undecided, or careless, we kept on walking. What happened next was a frightening incident which probably saved us from a harrowing one!

In that town there were SS troops and a Gestapo presence, and had we come to their attention, we might not have made it after all. What saved us was this: we were noticed by a German officer directing his troops, who turned to look after us. Perhaps he saw the KZ stamp on our backs, or just guessed our identity. At any rate, he stopped whatever he was doing, got on his bicycle, followed us, and then rode in a circle around us. Suddenly we were terrified! We ran off the road, and retreated behind the houses. Upon reaching an open field, we decided to separate, and take different directions. My sister and I remained together, stumbling in the darkness,

and hoping we were not being followed. In the distance we saw the shape of a barn, and when we reached it, found that the door was slightly ajar. We rushed inside, and to our great relief, we found a large number of girls who had escaped before us. We exchanged whatever information we had, and settled down to wait.

That night shooting erupted all around us. At times we could hear troops taking positions immediately outside the barn, but luckily no one entered, and we remained safe inside. The fighting was light, perhaps just enough to cover the German retreat. Then there was silence. When we peered outside in the morning, the houses around us displayed white flags, the sign of surrender. A short while later we saw the tanks. They came in endless waves, and we knew they were American. It was an unstoppable movement that swept the Nazi hordes out of power and to total defeat.

We wept for joy. This was the moment we had lived for, the last ten months. When we were able to leave the barn a few hours later, I took my first steps as a free person. Just being able to walk unguarded was an indescribable joy. I realized that the ordeal of the past year was finally over. I thought of going home. I thought about my parents and my sisters, and how worried they must be about us. How I longed to be with my family! I thought of returning to school, and of getting my life back again. All of this seemed possible to me then, and those were the happiest moments of my life!

Except for my sister and myself, no other member of my family survived Auschwitz, and we never went home again.



The author (left) with her sister Rivka and cousin Hella Gross

BREINDY EINHORN



Breindy (Berta) Einhorn, née Klein, was born in 1931 in Sighet, Romania.

She came to the U.S. in 1956, after spending several years recuperating in Sweden, having been brought there by the Red Cross after the Liberation.

Mrs. Einhorn has three children, and — *keynahora* — enough grandchildren and great-grandchildren to keep her busy.

She lives in Boro Park.

BREINDY EINHORN

My Memories from Auschwitz

Since early childhood, as far as I can remember, we Jewish people were always hated by the gentiles. Many times I came home from school very upset and with tears in my eyes, because we Jewish children were punished by the teachers for being Jewish.

Then in 1944 came the Ghetto, which meant that we had to wear a big yellow Magen David star on our clothes and were not allowed to leave the ghetto. The Ghetto meant that a few families were placed in one apartment. We were four families in three rooms; our windows were painted white so we couldn't look out into the street. One of my uncles lived with us and he looked from a corner window what was going on in the street. One morning he almost got killed, because of looking out. A Hungarian SS man noticed it and shot at him, but didn't hit him. We stayed only a few weeks in the Ghetto.

One morning, we were gathered and put in one of the biggest and nicest shuls in town and stayed there overnight. It was a night full of panic. The following morning the Hungarian SS took us to the train and put us like animals in a closed train; about one hundred people in a wagon, with very little food and no water. We traveled like this for five days until we arrived in Auschwitz. Jewish workers opened the wagons and all the time they kept saying "give away the small children to the older women." Nobody understood what they meant. In a hurry, they placed five people in a line, separating the men and women. The selection came and Mengele (one of the most powerful SS men), selected one person to the right and one to the left. Going to the right meant life, and to the left was death – the real word for this was "the crematorium".

As we reached Mengele, he took me away from my mother and grandmother and selected me to the right side. I tried to run back but I got a painful blow on my shoulders. This was the last time that I saw my mother and grandmother. My mother was thirty-six years old, and her mother was sixty-two. I was twelve and a half years old, and with my childish mind I didn't understand that I had become a real orphan. I cried bitterly, but was comforted later by my cousin Cila, who had also been selected to the right side. From there we marched to the bath. There we were all changed from normal-looking people to monkey-like animals, and we were treated even worse than animals.

As we entered the bath, we were welcomed by about a hundred young girls and women and an SS man. He announced in an inhumane voice that within a few minutes we had to be undressed. We just stood still, unable to get undressed in front of a man, but he repeated his order a few times, and warned us that we would get punished if we did not obey. At first, we just took off our dresses and shoes; it was very hard to part with our personal belongings and throw everything on the floor. After we were completely undressed we went in, one by one, in a smaller room, where our hair was shaved. They gave us a gray dress but no shoes. We went to the barracks, which was to become our new home. As we were entering the barracks, we were scared at the sight of the inmates looking out from there. "Look," we said, "they are going to put us together with men!" We had no mirrors and could not see ourselves, but we looked the same way they did, with no hair on our heads.

In the barrack, thirteen people were placed on one shelf; we only had enough room to sit and

keep our feet from being stepped on. We slept in the same position too. Auschwitz was our first destination, and I stayed there about six weeks. Seeing that we had been parted from our families, some good-hearted people tried to comfort us and said that we would soon meet our dear ones who were sent to the left side. Other people, who envied us that we had come only recently, while they had suffered for years, said “can’t you see that crematorium with the high chimney – that’s where your dear ones have been buried!”

The crematorium was just in front of our block. We were so naïve that we couldn’t understand what was going on there. In Auschwitz we had selections almost every day. It meant that the SS chose the strong and healthy-looking girls and women to be sent to work, and the remaining to the gas chamber. As I was very young, I was never chosen to work. Once they wanted to send me to die, but the angel of life came to me. A good-hearted *blockelteste*, a young and nice-looking Jewish girl who had been chosen by the S.S. to take care of us, took my hand and placed me among the ones who had already been selected for work. In the beginning, I was afraid that the SS man might recognize me, but I was very glad; I knew it meant life to leave Auschwitz.

From there, I went to Hamburg. As soon as we entered the wagon we realized something pleasant: no more SS men. They had been replaced with “Wehrmacht” men. Our new home was a tremendously big room with about two hundred beds on the second floor. There we went to work and received food. The only bad thing was that every night we had to go down to the bunker in the cellar because of the frequent bombarding. Sometimes it took as much as three to four hours until it was calm again. It was cold and dark in the bunker, with nothing to sit on except the cold, dirty ground. Often we didn’t go down; we didn’t care about the lightning and noise of the bombs, which shook the windows. Nobody was afraid. Many of us ate up the last little piece of bread we had left for the next morning, so at least we wouldn’t die hungry.

I clearly remember that one night we were supposed to leave the room and go down to the cellar. My friend and I didn’t want to go down, so we hid on the floor under the lower bed. A few minutes later we heard steps, and recognized the Wehrmacht man, who had come to see that everybody was in the cellar. With a little lamp in his hand he looked at each bed. The room was dark and every step he took towards me I felt death approaching. One, two, three – and he was standing in front of my bed. I could almost touch his leg with my hands. But my fate was to live!

From Hamburg we were sent to Saltzwedel and again had those horrible SS men, and even women, who were even worse. We only remained there for a few weeks. From there I went to a place whose name I have forgotten, but the memories from there are bad and they are still alive. We were put together in a big room with twenty beds and no windows. Every morning we had to stand at “Zählenappell” like in Auschwitz, while they counted us. Even in the coldest weather, we first had to take a daily shower with cold water in an unheated room. We left this place to go to the last destination: Bergen-Belsen, also called “the second Auschwitz”.

The difference between the two places was that in Auschwitz the gas chamber killed the people and in Bergen-Belsen, hunger and thirst. No food at all. We arrived there two weeks before the war ended. We were the last transport, and when the big gate closed behind us, one of the SS said “it is closed forever.” He naturally meant that nobody would get out from there alive. Horrible was the sight that met us when we entered the block; all the people were skeletons, very weak and barely able to talk. The only words we heard were: “give me water, water.” Soon we realized that we were being mixed up with the dead. In front of the barrack, there were piles of dead people everywhere. The only thing we did all day long, was hunting from

one garbage can to another in order to find some food, and we were happy when we found a potato peel or a little hard, old bread. But the last few days we could hardly find even that. We lay in our beds without any hope to survive. Suddenly, we heard voices. A few weak voices cried, “get up! Don’t die – the war is over! We are free!” We could hardly believe it. We welcomed the news, but we were all in bed, more dead than alive.

Not many women would like to be older than they really are, but I wish I were, because then I would have remembered more. I was only a little over twelve years old when the war started, and so I can’t remember my aunts, uncles and cousins, whom I never met. I don’t even remember where they lived, so I can’t search for them.

Well, this is my brief story about a very, very tragic year of my young life. And from now on, let us hope and beg the Almighty G-d to spare our coming generation from everything evil and may there always be Peace and Shalom on earth. Amen!!!

LILLIAN FEINTUCH



Lillian (Chana Lea) Feintuch, née Rosenfeld, was born in 1938 in Balmazujváros, Hungary. She came to the U.S. in 1949. In addition to raising her family, she managed one of the family stores for many years, and found time to tutor dyslexic children.

Mrs. Feintuch has three children, eight grandchildren, and, so far, one great-grandchild. She lives with her husband in Boro Park.

LILLIAN FEINTUCH

Saved by a Nazi

We could never have believed that our lives would be so drastically changed from one minute to the next. Our lives in Hungary were very comfortable, and we had many friends. My father had a business, and he would often give a credit to whoever needed it, to Gentiles as well as Jewish customers. He was a very caring, loving person. In 1944 the Nazis took his business away. It was very hard to get food because we were Jews, but our Gentile friends brought us lots of products.

In April of 1944, my father had a chance to move us over to the Ghetto, but the next day he was taken away to Munkatabor, a slave labor camp. After Pesach we were told to pack up our belongings – as much as we could carry. My mother ran, and the first thing she packed was a box of candles for Shabbos. She was a real *tzadekes*. (Other people never thought to do so – they packed more valuable items). Every Friday she would cut a candle in three or four pieces, and she lit only two pieces each week. My mother also took all the flour that she had in the house and baked something from it. That really came in handy because we were very hungry.

This time we were taken to the Debrecen Brick Factory ghetto. The conditions there were horribly degrading. One day a Nazi came and announced that families with four or more children should take their belongings and come down in the yard. My oldest brother, who at the time was twelve years old, told my mother “Look, there are families who have more children than we have and they are staying.” But my mother said, “The way the *Eibishter* will lead us, is the way we will go.” That was the first miracle that saved our lives; the people who remained in the Brick Factory ghetto were all taken to Auschwitz.

We had to walk a long time until we got to the cattle cars that would transport us. While we were walking, the Hungarian goyim were lined up as if we were in a parade. I thought to myself “How good it is for them – they can go home to the comfort of their own homes and be free.” We were in that cattle car for at least twelve days. It was very crowded, and we sat on the floor. We didn’t get anything to eat or drink. But we still had a little food from home. Many people died in those wagons. All of a sudden, the cattle-car stopped and was standing still all day in the hottest sun; the cattle car couldn’t go any further because the tracks had been bombed. We were close to Auschwitz, where they wanted to take all big families with many children, in order to get rid of us in the crematori-



The author's parents, Bracha Rivka and Shimon Rosenfeld



The author as a little girl, shortly before the Nazi occupation

um. When the tracks had been cleared, the train started to run back again. Some of the men who were looking out of the tiny window said “Baruch Hashem! They are taking us back home.”

But the train stopped in Strasshof. We were not allowed in the barracks until we had been disinfected. It was Friday night, and it was raining heavily. We had to sleep outside, on the ground, and my mother covered us with every coat she had brought along. She herself didn’t lie down all night; she was watching over us to make sure we were well covered. My thoughts were on the beautiful shabbosim we used to have at home...

The next day, my three brothers were separated from us. When it was almost dark, my mother took my hand and said, “Let’s go find your brothers.” As we were walking, a Nazi came along and hit my mother on the leg with a rubber stick, and told her that if he ever found her wandering around again he would blow up both our heads. But my mother was determined to find my brothers. She waited until it was pitch dark. Then we went out

again to try to find them. This time Hashem was with us. We went from one barrack to the next, until we finally found the boys. We were so grateful that we were together again!

A few days later we were taken to Vienna, Austria, to an empty schoolhouse. There were countless people squeezed together in one room. They gave us straw pads for beds. During the day we had to pile them on top of each other, because otherwise we wouldn’t have had room to walk around. The bombs fell every day, and one day, in our haste to escape the bombs, my shoes were left behind and got bombed. By then it was cold, and here I was, with no shoes to wear. My mother found some rags and papers that she wrapped around my feet and tied them securely so they shouldn’t fall off. The next day she took me to work with her; she didn’t know what else to do with me.

My mother was working outside, digging the ground in order for cables to be put down there. An Austrian woman came along and looked at me and said to my mother “What is this child doing outside in this cold weather?” My mother told her the whole story. The woman had pity on me, and took me into her house, which wasn’t far away. She made me sit near the warm oven and gave me some food. In the afternoon she gave me an apple. She saw that I didn’t eat it, so she asked me “Why don’t you eat your apple?” I replied that I couldn’t possibly eat it, in the knowledge that I had three brothers, who were also very hungry. I had to take it with me and cut it in four so each of us could have some. In the evening, before my mother came for me, the woman gave me a pair of shoes, which I will never forget. They were high-topped, with laces, and they were a beautiful shade of gray.

Then we moved into another schoolhouse. My mother and her coworkers were able to run inside one of the shelters whenever the bombs started to fall. But one day the Germans told them that Jews were not allowed inside the shelters. So they would run across the street where there was an awning, and they huddled together there. All of a sudden, they saw that a firebomb fell in an angle into that same shelter where they had been forbidden to go. Many Germans were injured and died.

Even that Pesach, in 1945, my mother wouldn't let us eat bread. She washed working overalls in exchange for beans, and all week we ate beans instead of the bread, which came in very handy right after Pesach. Then we were on the death march.

Right after Pesach, we were told to pack up and leave, because the Russians were near by and the Germans didn't want them to liberate us. So we went on the "Death March". We walked for a few weeks. While we were walking, my mother was always looking for a lake, a brook, or any other kind of water, where she would wash out our clothing.

One day my mother got so sick that she could no longer walk. She took off her knapsack and sat on it. She fell asleep and couldn't go any further. My youngest brother started to cry, because we were all alone. He told my mother that we had to start walking, that we were all alone, and we needed to catch up with the rest of the group. My mother could only whisper to him "Soon my child, soon, we'll start walking." But of course my mother couldn't; she had a fever. So she just sat and nodded off a little bit. By now, the German soldiers didn't care anymore what anybody did – they, themselves, were scared to be caught by the Russian army, which wasn't far away. They were just happy to pass us over to other German soldiers at the end of the day.

My oldest brother, Yitzchok Mayer, went to find a stable for us to stay in, where my mother could lie down and rest. He was very lucky, because he found a very nice man who had a big barn. He told Yitzchok Mayer that we could stay there for the night. He put down fresh straw in the corner of the barn. The cows and horses lived there too. We felt like we were in a four star hotel at the very least, because most of the nights we had spent under the skies. In the morning, the man came to the barn and invited us into the kitchen. He served us the most delicious breakfast – something that we hadn't enjoyed for more than a year!

Then Yitzchok Mayer went to look around, to see what to do and where to go, and by a miracle he found another Jewish family of a husband, wife and two children. They had also been left behind, because the husband had also gotten sick and wasn't able to walk any longer. We were so happy that we were no longer alone! All of us were standing around on the street. The adults were trying to figure out how to catch up with the group, when, all of a sudden, we saw a Nazi soldier come running towards us. I heard the adults say "This is the end of us!" They were all saying the Sh'ma – but the soldier didn't care about them. He came straight over to me and stopped right in front of me. He started to cry, and told us that from afar he had thought that I was his daughter, whom he hadn't seen for several years. I had very blonde hair, and didn't look Jewish at all.

He told us that he didn't want to be in the army, he was forced to be a soldier. Then he asked us what we were doing there. The adults told him everything and they also told him that we were trying to catch up with the rest of the group. He told us not to go there, that where they were being taken was not a good place. Later, we discovered that most of the people on the march had been killed.

The Nazi soldier told us to remove the yellow stars from our clothes, and that if we were asked any questions about who we were, or what we were doing, we should claim to be Hungarian refugees who were afraid of the Russians, and that we were running away from them as far as we could. He also told us in which direction to go. He said we should go up the highest mountain we could find. He gave us some food, kissed my forehead, and said “Good luck to all of you!”

We walked as far as we could, and finally came to a very high mountain which was called Louso. Luckily, we found an old lady who let us stay in her barn, which had an attic. She would have given us food as well, but unfortunately, her daughter from Vienna was staying with her because she was scared of the constant bombing in the city. The daughter suspected that we were Jewish, and she didn’t let her mother give us any food. It was very cold there and a lot of snow on the top of the mountain.

Outside the barn, there was a box where they kept tiny potatoes for the pigs. When no one saw us, we used to take potatoes from there. Yitzchok Mayer used to go around and beg for food every day. Once he was almost caught, and had to hide in a big bush until it got dark. My mother, myself, and the other brothers were walking back and forth all night waiting for him to return. We were frantic with worry; it was very scary not to know what had happened to him. At last, at dawn, we saw a shadow walking towards us and as he came closer we saw that it was my brother coming. It was just a great miracle that the Nazis had not caught him – it was one of our happiest days, to see him well and alive!



The author with her brothers Yitzchok Mayer, Meshulem Feish and Asher Lemel

Shortly after that, in the middle of May 1945, we heard that the war was over at last! We had not realized, since we were in hiding. My mother packed up our few belongings – now we wanted to go back to Hungary to find my father.

Transportation was very difficult and sometimes the trains would stand still for days. Finally we got back to Hungary, and so lucky that we found my father alive and well. The material things that had belonged to us were nowhere in sight. Everything had been taken from us. My

father started a dry goods business, but the inflation increased from day to day, to the point that it was very hard to make a living. Communism was also growing from day to day. I was enrolled in a Catholic school. The nuns and the other children treated me very well, even though they knew that I was Jewish. We stayed in Hungary a little less than a year. My father saw that there was no future for us there. So we went back to Germany, to a DP camp in Waldstadt.

We lived in wooden barracks, and it was very cold in the winter. My mother used to warm up bricks and put them into our beds to warm us up a little. We only ate kosher food, and there was a very limited amount of it, so we still didn't have much to eat. We wanted to go to America, but the Hungarian quota was the worst. It took us until the end of 1949 to get to the USA. My mother's parents had come to America in 1939. They lived in Bridgeport, Connecticut, and we went to live with them – we stayed there for about a year.

We had many relatives in New York, who were all very *frum*. Many of my mother's cousins were Rabbis. One of them lived in Brooklyn; he was the Kazeve Rebbe, Rabbi Moshe Shmil Rottenberg. He was able to get us a furnished apartment with an old lady on his block. She occupied the living room and the dining room in the front; the kitchen was in the middle; and the three bedrooms in the back were our apartment. We had to share the kitchen with her. It was very hard to get an apartment in those days. The old lady was crazy, and every night she used to run back and forth and yell and scream to herself. We were so worn out that we tried to ignore her.

Then luck came our way again. A grocer, Mr. Reichberg, knew of a very nice apartment, and he wanted to give it to us – not because he liked us better than anyone else, but he realized that, with four teenagers my parents would need lots of groceries, and would be the best customers all round. The apartment was across the street from where his store was located, and it was really very nice. It was newly renovated, so we had a very nice bathroom; the floors and the walls were also very good.

Finally, after six years of being homeless, we finally had a home of our own! I caught my mother kissing the walls and thanking Hashem for all the good things we had. We were a very happy family, sitting down every night to a most delicious home-made meal that my mother created. She used to make us invite lots of our friends for dinner.

GABRIELA FOGEL



Gabriela (Braindel) Fogel, née Müller, was born in 1935 in Michalovce, Czechoslovakia.

She came to the U.S. in 1960, after having lived in Israel for over ten years.

Mrs. Fogel, a health and nutrition conscious woman who loves music, has two daughters, five grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

She lives in Boro Park.

GABRIELA FOGEL

My Memories of the Holocaust

In 1942, at the age of seven, I witnessed Jewish people being assembled in a school building in the town Michalovce, Czechoslovakia, and shipped to death camps in Poland and Germany. I saw a tall man in a black coat, and tall black boots, guarding the crowd to make sure no one escaped.

Before the war, my father was a wealthy businessman who owned a store that sold wholesale retail groceries and miscellaneous items. We owned a beautiful house; upstairs was the residence, and downstairs the business. Jews were not allowed to own businesses, so a gentile person became the owner of the business. For that reason, my father was not picked up yet in the year of 1942.

In the spring of 1944, I was sent to Budapest, Hungary, to live with my aunt. I was smuggled through the borders at night together with two people. As the war progressed and it was no longer safe to stay in Budapest, I was smuggled back to Slovakia, the town Nitra, where my mother and father had moved also. There, my father was arrested by the Gestapo, and he was never seen again.

My mother gave birth to a baby boy on June 15, 1944, in Nitra. After my father had been taken away from us we walked around in the streets, not caring what would happen to us. Some peasants from a nearby village approached us, and begged us not to walk around in public, since we could easily be arrested. And in any case, they pointed out, if we were arrested, we would not be reunited with my father, since men and women were separated in the concentration camps.

The peasants offered us shelter in their village, so we went with them to their home in Rišňovce. My mother and the baby stayed indoors all day, but I had to go to Church on Sundays and play the role of a Christian, with my heart pounding from fear and disgust. Apparently, I did not play my role well. By mistake I crossed myself with the left hand instead of the right.

As soon as it was discovered that we were Jews, the police came and knocked on the door. When he saw a woman with two children he apologized, and said "I thought there was a man living here, not a mother with two children." He left us alone. We then realized that it was unsafe for us to stay in Rišňovce. We packed up and left. At the railroad station in Nitra we were caught, and asked to identify ourselves. My mother had forged Aryan papers, and the police immediately recognized the forgery. We were taken to Sered, and from there to Theresienstadt.

In that wagon, on the way to Theresienstadt, my mother was still able to nurse my baby brother. She was thirsty and had to scrape off the ice that had formed on the inside of the walls, in order to get something to drink. This was the first transport to Theresienstadt, in December 1944, since there was no more room in Auschwitz. In Theresienstadt, my mother and my little brother were placed in special building, where mothers could nurse their babies and got special treatment. They received good food and medical supervision. My mother pumped some of her milk and gave it to another woman who needed milk for her baby. I myself was in a separate

building, where children my age lived, called Jugendheime. We performed for the Red Cross of Switzerland.

I used to go out to the street to search for my older brother Eric, who had been sent to a children's institution in Miskolc, Hungary, but the manager of that facility refused to release him. My father had sent somebody to try to smuggle him out. There was a railroad track in Theresienstadt, where people were shipped back and forth between different death camps. That was where I would sit and watch for Eric, but I never found him.

When the war ended in May 1945, we went home. The railroad tracks were not working properly, so we had to go first to Zlaté Moravce, to the same lady to whom my mother had given her milk. Her name is Klara Chlamtač. She accommodated us in her huge, wealthy home, until the railroad tracks became functional. When we arrived home to Michalovce, we found our home burned down by the Russians. Only the exterior walls remained intact. So we lived



The author with her brother Eric before the war

elsewhere until our house was rebuilt again. The Germans killed my father, Ignatz Müller on March 25, 1945, for taking a piece of bread. He was beaten to death. My older brother, Eric, was never seen again and we don't know where he died.



The author with her mother and baby brother Tibor (Yisroel) in 1945

NELLY GRUSSGOTT



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

She came to the U.S. in 1940, where she earned a BA in Early Childhood Development, and a MA in Special Education. She was a teacher in Public School for twenty-five years.

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

NELLY GRUSSGOTT

My Father's Story

I was born in Berlin, where my parents owned a successful textile business and led a good Jewish life. In 1933, when the Nazis came to power in Germany, the harassment and persecution of the Jews began gradually. By 1936, the anti-Semitic laws became so increasingly unbearable, that by 1937, my father having obtained a visitors visa, left Germany for the United States, where he had a sister and brother. During his stay in the U.S., my father, Itzik (as he was known), lost no time securing the necessary paperwork for affidavits, which would enable my mother and me to join him in the U.S. That was his goal and fervent hope. It was not to be.

After one year of safety in America, my father's visitor's visa expired. He would have been able to extend it, but he did not. He was not worried about himself; he was more concerned about the status of his wife and daughter in Germany. Consequently, in 1938, my father left the U.S., and went to Belgium, which at that time was still neutral. He felt confident that with the appropriate affidavit in hand, we could, together as a family, immigrate to America.

It was not long before my father was informed that, because of his Hungarian birth, his re-entry to the U.S. would be significantly delayed. Tragically, a visa was denied him because of the immigration quota system which had been put in place by the U.S. government. My mother, who was of Czechoslovakian birth, was not affected by the quota and therefore, it would not be as difficult for her to obtain a visa.

My mother and I traveled from Germany in order to visit my father in Belgium. Our family was reunited for the last time. We spent one week together in Antwerp. Being that my mother and I were on a waiting list to emigrate from Germany, we had to return home and wait for our papers there. In 1940, with the war raging through Europe, the situation for the Jews in Berlin had become horrific and it seemed there was no hope left for us. Miraculously, my mother and I were granted our visas to the United States. Thanks to my father's heroic efforts while in this country, my mother and I escaped the fate that was to befall those who remained in Europe.

My father, realizing that he would have to remain in Europe, unable to join us in the U.S., had his hopes and dreams dashed in an instant. He became deeply depressed. In a letter from my father shortly thereafter, written to us from Belgium, he describes his reaction to the visa denial and told us how he broke out in a cold sweat, and of his foreboding sense that he would never see us again.

Almost as soon as she got off the boat, my mother began repeated and strenuous efforts to obtain a visa for my father. She traveled to Washington, D.C. regularly, meeting with congressman who assured her that they would introduce a bill in Congress which could help reopen my father's case. That glimmer of hope encouraged my mother to feel optimistic. However, that sense of optimism was short lived. Over a period of several months, we were sent letters regarding my mother's appeal. They were signed, H.K. Travers, Chief of Visa Division, who in all his letters, which I carefully kept to this day, concluded with the following statement: *"Section 58.57 of the aforementioned regulations provides that the Board of Appeals may not reconsider any case until after a lapse of a period of six months."*

During the long, lonely years ahead, while I was growing up, I never stopped missing my father, my beloved father, so dear to me, who had loved me like no one else. His absence left a deep void in my heart. Every night, I cried in my pillow, praying to Hashem that my father be granted the visa. A kindly neighbor suggested I write to Eleanor Roosevelt. She advised me to appeal to Mrs. Roosevelt's sense of humanity. Maybe she could use her influence to save my father. I put that appeal to pen and paper, addressed it to the First Lady of the United States, as an immigrant when I was twelve years old. Shortly thereafter, I received a reply from the State Department (which I still have) opening with *"My Dear Nelly"*, informing me that they had received the letter which I had addressed to Mrs. Roosevelt, and that *"an unfavorable conclusion was reached after consideration by the Review Committee and the Board of Appeals."* Again it would have to be a matter of six months before father's case could be reopened. This response to me came at a time when every six minutes, six hundred Jews were being killed. Looking back, I wonder if this response evidenced indifference, ignorance, insensitivity or worse.

May of 1945 was a great celebration for most Americans. Survivors in Europe were contacting their relatives and being reunited. For my mother and myself, it was a time of hope and anxiety and ultimately, despair. There was no contact from my father or any trace of him. If we had hoped that we would be a family again, we soon realized that would not happen. We had to accept the fact that my father had been killed. But still, I dreamt that maybe, somewhere,

somehow, my father was still alive and would miraculously come back to us. Maybe, I thought, he had amnesia and could not contact us. I guess one could characterize all of my hopes and yearnings as wishful thinking.

Fifty years after the war ended in 1995, I heard about the establishment of Project Search, sponsored by the American Red Cross. I contacted them, somewhat reluctantly, since I had little confidence in their ability to gain any information concerning my father. To my amazement, a representative from Project Search informed me that my father had been part of a convoy that was eventually routed to Sobibor, one of the Nazi death camps, where he and nearly 1,000 other victims were killed. This information



The author with her father in Berlin, in 1937

was made available due to the fact that the Nazis kept meticulous records. My father's legal name, Ignatz Friedman, country of origin (Hungary), and date of birth (May 9, 1898), as well as date of death (March 25, 1943), were accurately documented. After more than fifty years, the mystery of what actually had happened to my father was solved. This does not make it less painful; however, I am no longer left wondering with uncertainty. At least I am able to observe my father's *yahrtzeit* on the correct date.

In April 2001, sixty-one years after I had fled Germany, my son convinced me to accept an invitation from the German government to visit Berlin. Accompanied by my son, I went with mixed emotions. Upon my arrival in Berlin, I focused my memories mainly on my early childhood where I had spent happy times together with my parents and extended family. Although there were many sights to see in West Berlin, I was more eager to see the place where I had lived, in the eastern part of the city. Not only did I find the house I had lived in, but also the park where I had played, the kindergarten, and the elementary school I had attended. It was most remarkable to me to find all of the streets and places intact, considering the fact that most of Berlin had been bombed. Most amazingly, I found the spot where my father and I had posed for a photo in 1937, when I was seven years old. Sixty-four years later, standing on that same spot, I posed for a photo again – with my son Yitzchak, who was named after my father.

They say you cannot go home again, but being in Berlin with my son gave me an opportunity to feel a sense of closure. I had come full circle.



The author in Berlin with her son, in 2001

FRIEDA KALTER



Frieda (Frima) Kalter, née Ohrenstein, was born in 1915 in Mannheim, Germany.

She came to the U.S. in 1941. She worked for HASC, caring for children with special needs, and also ran the family business for some time. These days, babysitting the great-grandchildren is a top priority!

Mrs. Kalter has four children, who in turn have given her—*keynahora*—"many" grandchildren and great-grandchildren. She lives in Boro Park.

FRIEDA KALTER

Recollections from the Past

I was born in Germany, which was, and still is, anti-Semitic. Nevertheless, we Jewish children had our own lives. My best memories are from kindergarten. I could barely wait for the next day to come, when I would get to play with all the other children. We had arts and crafts, and always made beautiful decorations and pictures. The teachers were extremely nice and kind. We learned a lot of songs. Even though the Christian children called us “Jew, Jew”, I had a lot of non-Jewish friends who were nice to me and became good friends. In the afternoon, we went to Hebrew classes, gym class, and ice-skating in the winter. As a teenager, being active in sports was something very important to me.

When I grew older, I would help my parents in the furniture business at lunchtime. It was not until Hitler came, that things became much harder for the Jews. They closed my parents’ business. My parents and my two brothers were forced to leave Germany. My non-Jewish friends deserted me during the war, out of fear that they would be associated with a Jew. Our lives changed dramatically, and I had to attach myself only to my Jewish friends. Even the German Jews didn’t want to associate with Jews from a Polish background, like me – my parents came from Poland. This was very terrible! The parents did not want their children mingling – they felt that they were a better class of people than Jews from other places.

In 1939, my husband, myself and our six week-old daughter were deported from Germany. We traveled for two years through Italy, Spain, and Portugal, until we ultimately immigrated to the United States, where our other children were born. My brother, Manfred Ohrenstein, became a New York State Senator, which my parents were very proud of.

I am very grateful to live in the United States because it gave me freedom of religion and a place to live. Hopefully we will all end up in Eretz Yisroel when the Meshiach will come!!!

CHAVIE MANDELBAUM



Chavie Mandelbaum, née Lewi, was born in 1936 in Cracow, Poland.

She came to the U.S. in 1957 as a new bride, and devoted over thirty years to teaching in a Jewish Orthodox girls' school.

Mrs. Mandelbaum has three children, who in turn have given her — *“ken yirbu”* — grandchildren and great-grandchildren. She lives with her husband in Flatbush.

CHAVIE MANDELBAUM

The Hashgacha Pratis of My Survival

Krakow Ghetto - 1942

It was a cold, frigid morning when all ghetto inhabitants were told to report with their work cards, leaving the elderly and the children at home. I was six years old and my sister five. Mommy dressed my sister and me in our navy shabbos dresses, told me to take care of my five year-old sister, kissed us good-bye and left. Minutes later, the German trucks screeched to a stop in front of the apartment building and started loading on the elderly and the children for an unknown destination, tragically, never to be seen again.

When the German came into our apartment and saw two beautiful girls dressed in matching outfits, he decided not to load us onto the trucks but find our parents. He took us to the middle of the town where all the Jews had to report to, and started yelling: "Who are the parents of these children?" My father turned around when he heard the shouting, and could hardly believe his eyes when he saw the German holding our hands. He ran to him and said "These are my children!" The German pushed us into my father's hands and mumbled "Take them, these sweet children, take them!" At first my parents didn't understand, but they did later, when we came back to the nearly empty ghetto...

A few days later, the Germans were rounding up children again, telling the parents that they would be better off in a "Kinderheim". My fifteen year-old aunt Blanca (my mother's younger sister), came along with us to see where they were taking us. We were herded onto the trucks and slowly riding through the almost "Judenrein" ghetto, when we stopped due to congestion. Then, miraculously – that was *hashgocho pratis* – my little sister needed to go to the bathroom, so my aunt asked the German who was watching the truck if we could go and he said yes. Right away my aunt looked around to see where we could hide, and she saw a courtyard. In the courtyard she looked up and saw a ladder sticking up from an attic. She softly called *Am'cha*, "your people", (a word that was used as a code when Yiden wanted to identify themselves to each other). Suddenly the ladder was lowered down, and all three of us climbed up. Through *Yad Hashem* we had stumbled across a Jewish hide-out with at least twenty people sitting practically on top of each other.

The nights were spent searching for food. After two days we heard a man calling my aunt's name: "Blanca!" She looked through the small opening, but it wasn't her that he was looking for. An hour later he came again and called "Eva!" This time I looked through the small opening, but he wasn't looking for me. A few hours later he came again, and asked my aunt if she knew anyone on the other side of the ghetto, so that he could bribe the German guard – the man was a Jewish caretaker. My aunt told him my father's name, and where he worked, and so, the next morning, my sister and I were put into a big woven basket, hidden by pots and pans. My aunt put on a yellow armband and walked across the ghetto with the man. And so, we were reunited with our parents – but not for long.

At that time my parents were still working in a German factory in Krakow together with Polish gentiles. My father, a"h, was a very charismatic person and everybody was his friend. He arrived to work one day looking very worried. A fellow worker, an eighteen year old Polish girl, asked him what had happened. He told her about his children, and the girl agreed to ask her

parents if they would be willing to take us in. The following day she came with a positive answer, in exchange for all my parents' possessions, plus the weekly wages they were getting from the German factory (these Germans were not Nazis, *yemach shemam*.) We were "officially" adopted by the Polish family as their grandchildren. With our blonde hair and blue eyes we looked more Polish than the Polish themselves. We knew that we were Jewish, but couldn't understand why our parents had to leave us with this Polish family. I knew and felt that Hashem was watching over me all the time, and this *emunah* and *bitachon* stayed with me all my life, b"H. My parents survived with the help of Schindler, and came back to Krakow six weeks after the war ended, in 1945.

My "adoptive family" went to the Jewish Committee right away and told them that they had two Jewish girls and the Committee could have them. But the Jewish Committee asked if they could please keep us for another few weeks because they had no space for us. Meanwhile, the family started sending us to do all kinds of errands. One day, tragedy struck: our Polish "Mother" decided to send us both shopping – me to one store and my sister to another store in the opposite direction. Hashem wanted me to live, because when I came home I found that there had been an accident – a Russian tank had run over my sister (by mistake) and she was instantly killed. The whole Jewish community was trembling when they found out, particularly since the Polish family had wanted to give us back already. My parents returned two weeks after this tragedy, and words cannot describe their feelings when they discovered what had happened...

We stayed in Krakow until 1949, when we went to Israel, our homeland. There I grew up as a true Bas Yisroel and went to school like any other normal girl. Hitler, *yemach shemo*, tried to finish off the Jewish nation but – *am Yisroel chai!* We will live forever, because we are Hashem's children!

CHANIE NAGELBLATT



Chana Nagelblatt, née Tischler, was born in 1934 in Krosno, Poland.

In 1950 she came to the U.S, where she went to school, and later worked as a medical secretary for many years.

Mrs. Nagelblatt is the proud mother of two sons who, in turn, have given her several grandchildren. She lives with her husband in Boro Park.

CHANIE NAGELBLATT

The Man with a Heart

This story took place at the time when Hitler marched into Poland "Krosno," in September 1939. Our family was very close-knit. We were five children under the age of seven. Our grandparents lived with us and took full care of us, since our parents worked in their textile business. My dear aunt sewed a coat for me with some fur trimming, but my parents forbade me to wear the coat. I did not understand why, and I cried bitterly. But the coat had a trimming of fur, and Jews were not allowed to wear fur. Among other occurrences, we had to wear the yellow star when going outside. Men with beards had to shave or else they were shot.

In 1942 they finally made a ghetto with barbed wire around the area. They refused to allow children or old people to live there; it was designated for working people only. My parents had to make desperate decisions. My mother gave me to a gentile family, and gave them money for my support. They promised to care for me till the end of the war.

My younger sister was given to a childless couple, who appeared to be happy to care for her. My four year-old brother was taken to the ghetto with my parents, only because they could not find anyone to take him. When my parents went to work, my mother hid him under her bed-ding. This little boy of four did not make a sound all day, until she returned from work.

In the meantime my keeper became frightened, and no longer wanted the responsibility of my upbringing. She took away my belongings and told her assistant to show me the way to the ghetto. I was nearly eight years old when I was shown the way. I had to walk nearly four kilometers until I came to the barbed wire fences. Gentiles saw me on the way, recognized me by the color of my brown hair; they jeered and called me "Jew" and other names. I continued on my way, trying not to hear or respond to their meanness.

I waited for my father at the gate of the ghetto until he returned from work. He was surprised. "What are you doing here" he said, "I thought you were safe." Of course he brought me into the ghetto. He took a suitcase, with a hollow stick for air, and told me to hide in there whenever the SS came to seek out children. I hid when they came, and they did not detect me. My oldest sister stayed with our grandparents in their house.

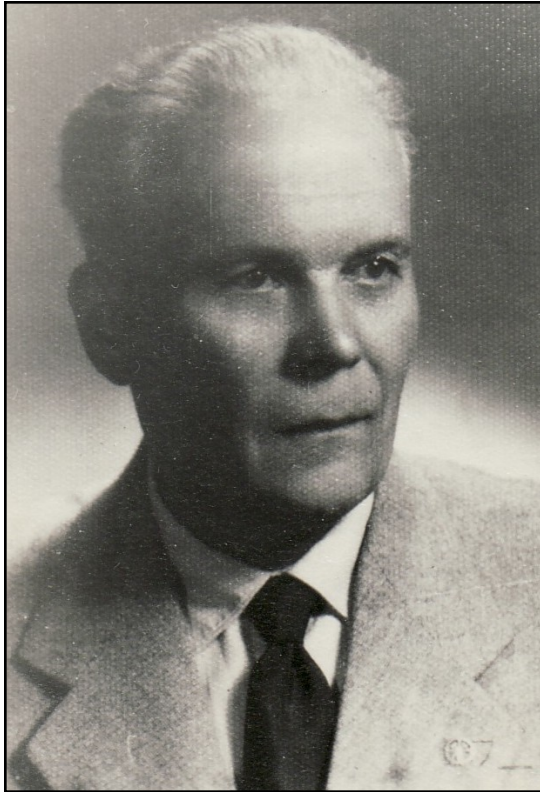
One day, without any warning, two SS soldiers entered the house and shot our grandparents. My sister and our ten month-old baby brother escaped to the ghetto. Things were coming to a head. The situation in the ghetto was worsening, and the children were a constant source of worry. My Uncle heard of a man, Stefan, a Polish gentile, who was willing to hide us for a fee. My uncle was afraid of approaching him, because many Poles offered their services for money, but ended up taking the money and killing the Jews.

My father decided to meet with him to size him up and make a deal. He promised him 200 zlotys a week for keeps, plus expenses for our food. Stefan was a bachelor of thirty-eight. He lived alone in a shack, which had an unfinished, dark cellar underneath. He was willing to share his fate with us, and in the process became our "Savior".

Our escape took place on a Thursday. My parents could not take everyone at once. Our little

brother quickly volunteered to stay with uncles and aunts. My sister and I admired him for his selflessness. Mother promised to pick him up the next day. We moved with trepidation; a new chapter in our lives was about to begin. As my parents made preparations to return to the ghetto, Stefan came to tell us that the entire ghetto had been evacuated. Everyone had been taken – uncles, aunts, cousins, and worst of all, our little brother was lost to us. We never heard from any of them again.

Stefan became our life-line. He brought us food, and even candles every Friday for my mother. They were hard to get, but when he realized what they meant to my mother, he tried not to forget. Nobody knew we were there. Since we had no toilet facilities, Stefan emptied our pail every night. He had friends who visited him occasionally. He tried to make his life appear normal. However, he became attached to us. Sometimes he would suggest that the children looked pale and undernourished, and that perhaps the money spent on candles should be used for food instead. But my mother was adamant – candles were food for the soul! He even suggested that perhaps we did not have enough money, and that we should not pay him. "No," said my father, "a promise is a promise."



Stefan—the man with a heart

At one occasion we got sick and started to lose weight. We noticed worms in our intestines, but didn't know how to treat the problem. Stefan decided to consult a doctor. It was January, which in Poland meant very harsh cold and lots of snow. Stefan made up a story that his elderly father was suffering from worms, but that he was too frail to be brought in to see the doctor. The physician advised him to treat his "father" with garlic, and to bring him for a check-up in the spring. On the way home from the doctor, Stefan bought a whole kilo of garlic—we ate it and after a short while we were cured.

In 1943, as the weather became a little milder, my father could not contain himself any longer. He had to visit our six year-old sister, who had been hidden with the childless couple. Despite our fears, he began the dangerous journey out of our hiding place. He came back ashen-faced, and trembling a few hours later. His tears flowed unashamedly as he related that the couple had panicked and returned our Sarah to our deserted house. The SS picked her up and she was taken to a concentration camp. We never heard of her again.

My mother's grief was overwhelming. She blamed herself for trusting the gentile couple. In July 1944 the Germans decided to make a last stand. The front was practically in our backyard. Stefan and all other civilians had to evacuate. My father had a long conversation with Stefan. Father told him that we had to stay, since we had no other place to go. Stefan was reluctant to leave himself, since by now he had begun to think of us as his only family. He brought us all the provisions he could gather – a little bread, honey and water, and not much else.

Stefan was a quiet guy, shy too, but his farewell message to us was a surprise. "You may survive or not, but always know that I did the best for you. When you reach the other world, pray for me; do not hurt me." Ironically, he was the one who felt alone and abandoned. My father tried to comfort him, and also advised him to get married. There was a Judge's daughter in the town who had given him the eye, but he was too shy to court her. He said goodbye to us, trying, heroically, to hide his emotions.

Our benefactor, Stefan, returned to his house after the liberation. He was prepared to find four dead bodies hidden away. He was delighted at our survival and was proud of the role he had played in it. However, when he took my father's advice and married the Judge's daughter, he had a strange request. He did not want his fiancée to know about us; he did not want her to know that he had harbored Jews. We understood. He had to live in a community that took a dim view of saving Jews, and he did not want to be blamed for his noble deeds. Stefan was a devout Catholic and believed firmly in the after-life. While he did not want to be ridiculed by his contemporaries, he believed that he would be rewarded in the next life for saving four innocent souls. We honored his wishes, and did not write to him. However, when he became ill, he told his son to write to us. My father was happy to help him by sending medications.

Our last contact with the family was when my sister visited Poland in 1990, and visited his house. The wife opened the door. Stefan was gone, she said. Did she know anything about the Jews in town? She did not. Our hero died without revealing the part he played in our redemption. Ironically, even though he was proud of his part, he could not share it with anyone; the person most responsible for our safety and survival remained anonymous among his peers.

PEARL OSHEROWITZ



Pearl (Penina) Osherowitz, née Glatzer, was born in 1933 in Buczacz, Poland.

In 1948 she came to the U.S, where she married and devoted herself to becoming a homemaker and raising her family.

Mrs. Osherowitz has four children, who in turn have given her—*keynahora*—"many" grandchildren and great-grandchildren. She lives in Flatbush.

PEARL OSHEROVITZ

My Life

I was born in the city of Buczacz in Poland. Buczacz was a small town, but many famous people were born there, including Simon Wiesenthal, Rabbi Shor and the famous artist, Chagall. Though I don't remember our Rav's name (because I was a very young child when the war broke out), I know that he wrote a very famous *sefer*, called "*Eishel Avrohom*". I had a good life in Buczacz. I had wonderful parents and an older sister. We were very well off; our income came from my father's brewery and restaurant. Then, in 1941, the Nazis came, and life became Hell.

The first thing the Nazis did was to round up all men between the ages of eighteen and fifty. They took the Jewish men to the Fedr forest and made them dig their own graves. Then the Nazis shot them with a machine gun. The sound was like thunder. Only one person survived, and he told us what happened.

The Jews were moved into a ghetto. There were "Aktions." I had blond hair and blue eyes, so I would run away. I ran away three times. During one Aktion, my parents sent me to a goyish family. When the goyim thought I was asleep, they started discussing what to do with me. They were speaking Polish, so they thought I wouldn't understand, but I did. They were debating whether to kill me or to send me back to my parents. They decided to send me back, and I arrived five minutes before the Aktion started.

My father was very well liked by his gentile clients. One of them gave us permission to hide in his forest, but stipulated that he would not supply food. My father brought another family to hide with us, with the understanding that they would get us food. We built a bunker in the forest, and the other family hid in their own bunker. Eventually, the Nazis found us and started shooting. I happened not to be in the bunker at the time, so I quickly ran away. My whole family was arrested and taken back to the police station. The couple that was in charge of getting the food was also not discovered, so they brought me back to town. I was reunited with my parents, who had bribed the Ukrainian guards to let them out of jail.

Later on during the war, after the ghetto had been liquidated and my father had been killed, a goy allowed us to hide in his house. But after our money ran out, he told us that he was too scared to let us stay. My mother decided to dress up as a goyte and go around begging for money so he would let us stay. One house she went to had a huge dog, and Jews were always afraid of dogs. But my mother told herself, "I left my children; I'm not going to be afraid of a dog!" She went in to the house. When the goyim who lived there saw her, they crossed themselves, because the dog never let anyone into the house, and this time it hadn't even barked! This was one of the *nissim* that happened to us.

Another time, we were on our way to a goy's house. The Ukrainian police stopped us. I quickly ran away, but my mother was arrested. My mother managed to bail herself out and bribe the guards to let her escape. But there were other Jews in jail who didn't have money to bribe the guards. My mother had very little money left at that point, but she told herself that if she survived the war but let others die, she would never forgive herself. So she paid for those Jews to be freed, too.

Every Jew who survived the war is a miracle, especially the Polish Jews. The Poles and Ukrainians were as bad as the Nazis. The Nazis couldn't always tell who was Jewish and who wasn't, but the Poles could. They would hand us over to the Germans.

After the war, my mother and I were the only ones to survive out of both my parents' entire families. The JOINT sent us to Seattle, Washington, and gave us a basement apartment. Next door to us lived a Jewish lady. She had a lot of complaints about the world. Because my mother knew many languages, the woman gave her \$1 to write to the heads of many countries, including the former Soviet Union. One morning, two tall FBI agents came to the door and wanted to know what the letters were all about. We were terrified because this reminded us of the Nazis. I didn't speak English, so I called the landlady, who explained. That was the end of the letter writing.

Later, my mother sent me to New York. There, I attended Beth Jacob Seminary under Rebbetzin Kaplan. When I was seventeen years old, I got married, and we had a family. Though I went through Hell, I also have a lot of *nachas*. Hitler and the Germans, *yemach shemam*, did not succeed!

MARGARET SCHWARTZ



Margaret (Sarah) Schwartz, née Sender, was born in 1926 in Beregszasz, Czechoslovakia, (later Hungary).

In 1951 she came to the U.S, where she worked for a number of years as a dental assistant and as a medical secretary.

Mrs. Schwartz has two children, ten grandchildren, and — so far — five great-grandchildren. She lives in Boro Park.

MARGARET SCHWARTZ

In Memory of the Holocaust

As told to her granddaughter, Leah Schwartz

I grew up in Beregszasz, a town located on the Carpathian mountain range between the Hungarian, Czechoslovakian, Romanian, and Ukrainian borders. In 1938, this town, which was under the Czech authority, was given back to the Hungarian government. This was a dramatic change for the people in town. For most of Beregszasz' history, the town was considered Hungarian, which is why the people in that region were happy to be given back citizenship in their homeland.

We, the Senders, were a very close family, with four children; myself, Eva, Gitta, and Amrom. My mother, Esther, was one of five children and the only daughter of the Katz family. We and my mother's family were very close, living in homes that were next to one another. We lived in the same courtyard, along with two uncles and their families. There were beautiful gardens around our homes.

We lived in the hills, where there was a beautiful breeze at all seasons, except for the winter. The family courtyard was surrounded by sour cherry, apricot, and walnut trees; our gardens grew many vegetables. We loved our land, and our town; leaving was a concept that was very far from our minds – we would live on the land that our family had lived on for so many generations. I would marry and raise a family in Beregszasz, in the beautiful landscape where I was born.

My family and the other Jews of Beregszasz were not happy with their town's annexation to Hungary. The Jews of Beregszasz had been proud of their Hungarian nationality in the past, but recent events had changed their perspective. While under Czech authority, the Jews of Beregszasz were full citizens of Czechoslovakia and were treated in a democratic fashion. In school, the state allowed us to learn Hungarian, we were taught our national history, and were even provided with a Jewish lesson by a Jewish teacher for three hours a week.

Once the Hungarians regained the land of the Carpathian territories they enacted their anti-Jewish laws upon us. I had been attending High School, but was no longer allowed to attend school; that was when I realized that my life was about to change. I was a good student and loved school. I remember coming home on my last day of school, and crying on my bed. Now that I could no longer go to school, what would I do? My world would never be the same again.

As time wore on, the people of Beregszasz were beginning to openly display their hatred towards the Jews. My closest non-Jewish neighbors became anti-Semitic overnight. Before 1938, Jews and Hungarians lived side by side, without much negative sentiment towards one another. The Jews in Beregszasz were lawyers and doctors; had businesses; and held important positions throughout the town. Many were successful, owned their own homes, and

lived a good life.

The Hungarians may have behaved in an anti-Semitic way, but we Jews never thought we would experience the horrors that went on in other places. Would our Hungarian leaders and neighbors let us be harmed? We couldn't believe it. After the war had begun in 1939, the Jews of Europe faced annihilation. We were aware of the threat that was posed against our lives, but thought that we would be spared. For most of the war period Hungary was left alone, and we said to ourselves that what had occurred to the Jews of the many countries that had become occupied by the Nazis would not occur to us.

The Jews of Hungary had felt that we were an elite. These feelings of superiority were, in part, a result of the Nazi agenda. The Nazis feared resistance from the Hungarian Jewry. They had faced the resistance from the Jews of the Warsaw Ghetto, in which many Germans were killed, so they created a rumor that the Jews of Hungary were going to be left alone. My family believed this rumor. We had heard about the brutal murders of our fellow Jews, but those horrors would not come to us.

Jewish refugees from Poland arrived in Beregszasz, and hid in our shul. My father, Chaim Sender, and the people of the town heard firsthand of the horrors that were occurring up north. They warned us and told us to flee as well, and for the first time we considered what might be in store for us. We realized that we would be better off going to Budapest, or a larger city, where it would be easier to hide, but argued against it. My parents were adamant about keeping the family together; we would not separate, regardless of any danger. They decided to remain in Beregszasz.

My father wanted to assist the Polish Jews that were in hiding. He came home and told my mother that she needed to make a package of food for the starving refugees. He felt that they should have a proper Friday night Shabbos dinner. But my mother was afraid. She feared that they would get caught by the anti-Semitic Hungarian gendarmes, and refused to pack up the food. Father would not hear of neglecting to help the deprived refugees. He said, "I will not eat at the Shabbos table, until I know that they too have food". He persisted, and she gave in. Once the package was put together, Gitta, my youngest sister, walked behind our father, as if they were not together, as he was leading the way to the synagogue. Gitta delivered the package successfully, and they returned home to eat the Sabbath dinner.

With the knowledge that the war was going to affect us in due time, my parents began the Pesach Seder. They put black paper across their windows, so that the war planes wouldn't see light and target our homes. At this time, in 1944, Beregszasz was in the middle of a war zone. I could hear the sounds of the fighter planes as the Seder progressed. In the middle of the Seder, we had to run out into the garden, to protect ourselves from the bombing – the planes were aiming only at houses.

That Pesach was the last time our family spent a holiday at home. We were aware that we had few days left; so my mother and we children used all the flour and sugar we had, to bake cookies. A few days later, German Nazis and cruel Hungarian gendarmes came to our door. They announced that each individual in the home should take their belongings with them. That was the last time I saw my home.

The Nazis took us to a brick factory, located in Hungary. They left us in the factory for a few days; then loaded us into cattle cars. I remember being stuffed into the wagon. I was

afraid and did not know what the destination would be. A Nazi told us that they were taking us to Kacskeemet (a part of Hungary that is famous for its apricots), so that we should pick fruit. We sat huddled next to each another in the cattle cars. We were all terrified. At first, I believed that we were going to Kacskeemet, but realized that it wasn't true when I glanced out of the small window in the car. From the window, I could see that we were traveling north, towards Poland, and not westward. The horrific stories that the Polish refugees had told us a few months before, were coming to life.

We traveled for four days and nights in the cattle wagons. When the train stopped, the car doors opened for the first time in four days. We were all let out. As I was coming out, I saw a few Jewish male prisoners in striped clothing. They whispered in Yiddish so that the Germans wouldn't hear: "give the children to the old ones". They were warning us, because the Nazis wouldn't let children or the elderly live, because they were both useless to the work camps.

At first the Nazis separated the men from the women. The entire event progressed very efficiently. We were very weak and could barely stand. We saw a good-looking Nazi with shiny boots and a stick in his hand, which he pointed to the right and left. He sent the young ones to the left and the babies and the elderly to the right. The separation occurred so quickly that I didn't even realize that suddenly my mother, sister Gitta and brother Amrom were no longer with me. I was left with only my middle sister, Eva.

I was in the group that was sent to the left. We were taken to a bath house where we had to take off all our clothes, except for our shoes. Male prisoners shaved our heads and bodies as if we weren't human. We were then shoved into the showers; afterwards we weren't given towels or anything to dry ourselves with. The male prisoners just gave us long gray garments, without underwear, which left us freezing. We looked at one another and laughed, because we were bald and looked very strange. Being that there weren't any mirrors around, each was unaware of her own appearance.

We were placed in a barrack with Jewish supervisors, kapos, who had been in Auschwitz for years. When we asked them when we would see our parents again, the supervisors laughed and said "Your parents? Your parents are up there," pointing at the smoke in the sky. We couldn't believe such a story, that our parents were already dead and that their remains were the smoke in the sky. I thought they were just being cruel, and I ignored their comment. I had just seen my family alive, not so long ago – they couldn't be dead.

The kapos were resentful towards us Hungarian Jews. They told us that when they had arrived in Auschwitz there weren't even any barracks. They had been forced to sleep outside in the cold, while the Hungarian Jews were lying comfortably in their beds at home; many of them froze to death. The ones that stayed alive had lost all human feelings, although there were a few kind ones. Given the horrors that they had experienced continually, they were convinced that they wouldn't get out of Auschwitz alive. Their reaction to the horrifying environment and constant torture was to just fend for their own lives, without regard for anybody else.

I developed a one-track mind. All I could think about was food and how to get my next meal. We lived in barracks that were crowded way beyond capacity. The beds were three-level bunks, with five girls on each level. We could neither move nor stretch, which made it extremely uncomfortable and difficult to sleep. Each night we would sleep trying not to move

a drop, so as not to disturb the others.

In the early morning, before sunrise, the Nazis would wake us up and have us stand in line. This system of lining up was called “Zählenappell”: five women would stand in a line in order of height. We had to stand perfectly straight, without any movement. An army couldn’t be more perfect. If a person would move, she would get struck. They counted us for hours at a time and twice daily. (I have recently learned that “Zählenappell” was part of a scientific experiment, in which the Nazi’s were testing human endurance for cold.)

The breakfast consisted of a large pot of colored water. There must have been some form of drug in the water. Everybody was calm and seemed to be in a “zombie” state. It didn’t make sense – there should have been some case of protesting against what was going on, but I never saw any form of dissent. I didn’t feel human either; I was also in a “zombie” state, and thought only of my next meal.

The meals weren’t even close to decent. The “colored water” was all in one bowl, and each person had to drink from it. Each one would watch to make sure that the other wasn’t drinking more than her share. At times, the Jewish kapos would wash their hair in our water, and then we wouldn’t have anything to eat. We were also given rationed bread that looked and tasted like sawdust. I would save it and eat a little bit now and then throughout the day.

After a few weeks, Eva and I were transferred to a different block with thirteen hundred girls. I was put to work in the “Brizinka”, the place where the prisoners’ luggage ended up. We wore white kerchiefs and sorted packages. Working there made it possible for me to “buy” things with my bread. I would trade my bread for important items, such as underwear (which I hadn’t received since the arrival), a spoon, and a mirror.

Once the work in the Brizinka was over, I was put to work outside, as a laborer. We were forced to do work that would usually be done by men. As we were working, the Nazis stood watching with large German shepherds, and would shout “faster, faster!” One day, while working as a laborer, I tripped and fell. My knee began to bleed; it got infected, and I could no longer walk. I was taken to the infirmary. The infirmary was only for show. It was set up for the Red Cross to witness their “humanity”; they should see that the Germans were treating the sick. It is odd that the Nazis killed healthy people, but treated the sick. Were the humanitarians of the Red Cross really unaware of the smoke above them that rose into the sky from the crematoria that were such a short distance away from their hospital? This concept continues to puzzle me.

My knee was treated by a Russian army prisoner, Dr. Lubova. She gave me anesthesia and performed surgery. While I was recovering, Dr. Mengele came to visit. He asked Dr. Lubova in German when the patients would be able to return to work. She replied in a relaxed tone “In a few days”. He barked at her “You will make everyone healthy in a few days!” I will always remember Dr. Lubova’s kindness. She saved and protected my life, which is something one can never repay.

While I was in the hospital, Eva came to visit as often as possible. One day she ran into the hospital, pushing the doorwomen away. She was afraid for her life. Eva had been selected for the gas chambers; the Nazis thought she had gotten too thin. My pediatrician from Beregszasz was working in the hospital. Each day she would come to visit, providing me with medicine and vitamins. Eva hid under my bed, and we waited for the pediatrician to

arrive. The pediatrician who had treated us as toddlers, didn't abandon us at this point. She immediately called an SS woman whose child she had treated, and said "Here is a child who is as dear to me as your child to you. So send Eva away in a transport so that they shouldn't look for her". Eva was sent on the next transport, leaving me alone in Auschwitz.

When I came out of the hospital, I didn't recognize anybody; I couldn't find any Hungarians and wondered if they were still alive. There was a new transport of Greek Jews. The Greeks died like flies, because the climate was too cold and their bodies couldn't endure such temperatures. All of the inmates, including myself, caught body lice. It was a very painful and uncomfortable experience. I was lonely and in pain, and I had no motivation to live any more.

On the last day of 1944, I was put on the last transport out of Auschwitz. Anyone who wasn't placed on the transport had to walk. Those who couldn't walk were shot down. On the train, I sat with German soldiers. They weren't Nazis and treated me as a human being. After a few days, the train arrived at Bergen-Belsen in Germany. As we were getting out of the trains, some Germans were passing by. We yelled out in German "Help us, we are Hungarian Jews. We need your help!" They didn't respond. Each passer-by walked on as if they hadn't seen us

Bergen-Belsen was a beautiful camp. At this point, all the prisoners were in a very poor physical condition and could no longer work. It was extremely crowded and there wasn't any room to move. I made a new friend, Barbara, who became my "sister" in Bergen-Belsen. Together, we stole a blanket and used it to make socks. Barbara was very handy, and taught me to weave. We wove socks and sold them for bread.

After a few weeks, the typhoid broke out and people died left and right. I didn't get the typhoid because I had been vaccinated for malaria as a child, and had become immune to the virus. Barbara became very ill and her flesh began to rot. I had never seen a living person's skin rot before. It must have been excruciatingly painful, because Barbara begged me to kill her. I couldn't do it; Barbara was like a sister to me, my only motivation for living, and I couldn't bear the thought of losing her. But soon Barbara died anyway; her body was thrown onto a pile along with the many other dead bodies.

I remained in Berge-Belsen from January to April. In late March, the British were advancing in the war, so the Germans shut off the water, left us without food, and fled. There was nothing to eat. The Germans had left us there to die. When I looked around the camp, I saw more dead bodies than living ones.

On April 15, 1945, the British liberated Bergen-Belsen. They were in shock by what they were witnessing. The Jewish prisoners were screaming "The British are here! The British are here!" Some ran to the gates, but I couldn't move, and remained on the floor, where I had been lying for days. The liberation didn't mean anything to me; at that point I no longer had a desire to live.

The British soldiers began the rescue operation, but they were ill-equipped to handle an operation of this magnitude. They would mark the living with crosses on their heads, and run off to get stretchers. After taking one to the ambulance, the soldier often returned for the next person, only to find that she had died in the brief interval. The British gave us food – mostly fatty, canned meat. What they didn't know at the time was that we had been deprived

of sustenance for so long that our bodies couldn't handle such heavy food. Many people died from eating that meat. I was lucky, because I was so weak that I couldn't eat.

The British brought us to Celle, in Germany, and put us up in horse stables. They gave us medical attention; helping us recuperate from malnutrition. We were given soap and sugar. I didn't need the soap or sugar, so I went around with other prisoners in search of food. We went to the homes of the Germans in the town and traded our soap and sugar for food.

Once, I knocked on the door of a German home. The lady that answered took one look at me and began to cry. She told me that I looked like her daughter, who had recently passed away. I was invited in. The lady gave me food, and some of her deceased daughter's clothing. The German families in the town were nervous, because they had heard that the Russians were coming west. I confirmed the rumors; the British were sending us on transports, and were leaving that part of Germany.

I was sent to Prague, because at this point I had been recognized as a Czechoslovakian citizen. The Czech people were waiting for the Jews in the train station. They brought us food and baked goods, which was very generous of them, given that they were all very poor as a result of the war. We told them not to touch us because we were ill. A Czech man replied "After all you've gone through, your hands should be kissed". The Czech people were very kind and good-hearted. They hated what the Germans had done to Europe. I felt welcome in a country for the first time since 1938.

From Prague I went to Bratislava and then to Budapest. In Budapest I met a cousin from Beregszasz. I hadn't seen any members of my family in over a year. He took me to my uncle's apartment, and they were very happy and surprised to see that I was alive, because they had heard that I was in hospital in Auschwitz, and doubted that I had survived. I was reunited with my other uncle, aunts, and cousins. What had once been an extended family became a nuclear one. Our family was together once again, although different, and with many members missing.

We moved around Europe from Hungary to Romania, and then to Prague. When traveling, we would go through Red Cross lists, looking for names of family members. We discovered that my parents, brother and sister had all been killed that first day in Auschwitz. In Prague, one of my cousins discovered Eva's name on the Swedish Red Cross list. I sent her a letter.

Eva had been living with a family in Sweden for two years after the war. She had learned to speak fluent Swedish. She was taking care of their young child, and had become part of their family. When Eva received my letter she was ecstatic – her sister had survived! She decided to apply for a visa to live in Prague along with me and our relatives. It took time, but Eva got her visa. The Swedish woman who had taken her into her home had developed a close relationship with Eva and told her before she left "If you go home, and are not pleased with what you find; if your life is too rough over there, you should know that you have a home here." Eva loved the Swedish family; but she had to return to her own remaining family.

It has taken me many decades to be able to tell my story. For many years I was haunted by my memories. I constantly thought about, and dreamt about, the death camps. I can't forget the images of my parents and siblings; my mother's sweet voice and long blonde braids; my father's warm heart; the blazing red hair of my sister; and my brother's deep blue eyes.

Their images and the memory of the days leading up to their deaths will be with me forever.

ILONA SPITZER



Ilona (Rivka Perel) Spitzer, née Spitzer as well (she married a cousin), was born in 1924 in Ofenherto, Hungary.

She immigrated to the U.S. in 1951, having had to wait several years in Germany for her visa.

Mrs. Spitzer has devoted her entire life to *chesed*, and to “making people smile.” She lives in Boro Park.

ILONA SPITZER

Memories

I was born in Ofeherto, in Hungary. I was the second of six children – four boys and two girls. My parents were very distinguished, *chashuve* people. All through my childhood, our home was open to everyone.

I was very skinny and spoiled. My mother, *aleha hashalom*, wanted me to eat, but I would take the food and throw it in the garbage when she didn't see. When she caught me throwing out the food, she said, "This is a sin. People are hungry – and you see that they are so hungry when they come here – and now you throw this in the garbage?"

Still, I didn't understand. Then I came to Auschwitz, and I understood. I was so hungry that I was very weak, and I felt that I had no strength to walk. I begged Hashem, "I want to be alive and come home – please help me!" I made a resolve to Hashem, that if He would help me come home, I would never throw away any food again; and I kept my promise to Hashem.

When I was younger, I read a book about slavery. I read it a few months before the Germans invaded, and I couldn't digest what I was reading – how could anyone treat human beings in such a way! In my eyes it was unbearable even to read about it; how could people possibly survive under such conditions? A few months later, the puzzle was solved – in Auschwitz. The horrifying scene that greeted my young, innocent eyes, of four skeletons with bare heads,



The author as a newly married young woman. She is wearing a knitted sweater which was her own handiwork.

hitched like horses to a wagon of bricks. From afar, black clouds of smoke swirled heavenward, and the stench of burning bodies tickled my nostrils. It wasn't long before I, too, became the bare-headed, skeletal slave of the Nazi rulers.

One night, I dreamt about my mother, a"h. I told the other girls that I had dreamed about my mother, and that something good was going to happen. That day they sent me to get the bread – it was the only time I was sent. I was very hungry. I wanted so much to take a little bite from the bread, but I was worried that if they would find out, they would kill me. So I just licked the bread a few times, to soothe my hunger.

It was Yom Kippur and I didn't want to be *mechallel* the Yom Tov. When we went to work, everyone would take their shovels. I took mine also, but then I went to hide in the bunker where the latrine was – on the floor, in the dark, with that smell! I

asked Hashem to save me. When the girls came back for lunch, I climbed out. When they went back to work, I went back to my bunker. I lay on the floor, worrying that they would find me. Then the girls came back for the night and I climbed out and mingled with the other girls again. I thanked Hashem for saving me, and helping me accomplish my desire to serve Him.

These experiences are just a small token of all the horrors I lived through in Auschwitz. “Even if the Heavens were parchment, and the forest quills, if all oceans were ink, as well as every gathered water...*” – it would still be insufficient for writing down everything that happened there.

Hashem has His good *sh'lichim*, who saved me from danger every minute and helped me to rebuild my life again.

* From the liturgy of Shavuot (Feast of Weeks)

SHEINDEL SUSSMAN



Sheindel Sussman, née Trebitsch, was born in 1930 in Subotica, Yugoslavia.

In 1950 she came to the U.S, where she was a rebbetzin for many years. Reading and writing are her particular interests, and she loves sports and animals.

Mrs. Sussman has five children, twenty-eight grandchildren, and — *keynahora* — “many” great-grandchildren. She lives with her husband in Boro Park.

SHEINDEL SUSSMAN

My Cinderella Story

In the Ashes

I grew up as the only daughter in our family. I had two older brothers who were much older than I. They never let me tag along with them and their friends. I was the only Jewish girl in our small town in Yugoslavia. I had no friends, because I didn't want to play with our gentile neighbors. Therefore, I was alone most of the time. A lot of my time was spent doing sports and exercising. I was a healthy girl, and because of this I was later able to survive Hitler, at the young age of fourteen.

In 1944, the Germans invaded Hungary and we were put into ghettos. Although I was not happy to be in the ghetto, it was a slight solace to be together with other Jewish brothers and sisters. I tried to be as helpful as I could. I brought the mail into the ghetto. In those times, whoever received a letter knew that it was from a relative letting them know that they were alive. Therefore, I ran to bring the letters to the people to whom they belonged. I was also the messenger for the president of the ghetto.

Although my mother was too weak to walk, the cruel Germans forced her into a concentration camp, by arranging for a horse and wagon to take her to the train station. As they sat my mother down into the wagon, I sat down next to her. The S.S. men ordered me to get off. My mother pleaded with them to let me stay on since I was her only daughter and she needed me. The S.S. man told her that if she didn't stop talking, he would slap her so hard that she would fall out of the wagon. When I heard this terrible threat being made to my dear mother, I quickly jumped out of the wagon and was left alone. I was full of sorrow. The only thought going through my head was how I was going to find my mother. I was determined to find her. My friends tried to comfort me by telling me not to worry, but this did nothing to console me.

When we arrived at the train station, I began to look for my mother. I went from one wagon to another, tearfully calling out my mother's name. A voice, that till today I do not know where it came from, called out that my mother was in wagon number 33. When I finally reached the right wagon, the S.S. men were about to lock it. By what must have been an unusual miracle, the S.S. men allowed me to get in. I began calling my mother's name. I found her and we fell into each other's arms.

The wagon was a thing of hell. It was terrible. It was filled with old people. One blind woman was crying "Daughter, please bring me the couch, I want to lie down!" There was not enough room even to stand. The Germans had selected one man to "take care" of the people in our cart. He was a hideous person. When the old, weak people were thirsty and hungry, he started to hit them instead of helping them. He then went to report them to the S.S. I was so scared that they would take out the old people and shoot them. Instead, the S.S. men told the guard to do whatever he wanted to them. He took a frying pan and began hitting them over their heads. He then bound their hands behind their backs. My mother couldn't stand to watch this torture, and I got afraid that my mother would be hit also. I stood up and blocked her view and begged her to please be quiet. Finally, after four days and nights of this horrible journey of torture, we arrived at Auschwitz. The poor, old people arrived there half dead.

When we arrived at Auschwitz, the Nazis tore my mother out of my arms. It was a good thing that I had grown up to be independent, because now I was left all alone in the concentration camp. I was in Auschwitz for five months. My newly-made friends and I were then taken from Auschwitz to Germany, where we worked in an ammunition factory making weapons for the Germans. The conditions there were "better" than in Auschwitz. A short while before we were freed, I became sick and almost died. My friends helped me. They each took the one potato from the "soup" that they had, and this was what kept me alive.

April 14, 1945 was a very special day that I will never forget. We were freed by the Americans! In September, I went back home to Yugoslavia, where I hoped to find my father and my brothers. Boruch Hashem I found one of my brothers at home. He had been a partisan, a soldier under Tito, the president of Yugoslavia. We were very happy to see each other. He couldn't believe that I had survived the concentration camp. Except for the joy of finding my brother, I was still filled with grief. Every street that I walked upon reminded me of the walks my mother and I used to take together. I wanted to leave Yugoslavia.

One night, we escaped over the border to Hungary, on foot. From there the Haganah, a group of Jewish freedom fighters from Israel, took us to Austria. They were fearless and brave. They hid us in trucks among some other people. At the border, when the guard asked what the contents of the trucks were, they replied that they were just transferring some stuff. There were women there with babies and children. They were trying to stifle their babies from crying aloud for fear of being discovered, and causing unthinkable punishment for everyone.

We made it safely over the border to Austria. I remained there for a year and a half. From there, we illegally crossed the borders to Italy. My friend and I were there in a camp together with my brother and his wife. In the year 1948, during the liberation of Israel, they were looking for girls to join the Israeli army. My brother didn't want me to join the army, so we went to Rome where there was an Agudah kibbutz with a B'nos section – girls from the B'nos were not taken to the army.

How I Met My Jewish Prince

No, we did not meet on a dance floor. We met right there, in the B'nos kibbutz near Rome. My husband-to-be, my prince, was the president of that B'nos. Also, he was the biggest Talmid Chacham of the kibbutz, the Rabbi, a Dayan, and the best speaker. To top it all off, he was also very good-looking! His name was Rabbi Yitzchak Scharf, and he was from Tarnopol, in Poland.

I was in this B'nos together with twenty-five other girls; I was next to the youngest, and not very popular. But he, my prince, approached the *shadchante*, and told her that of all the girls, he was only interested in me. When the *shadchante* came to me and suggested the *shidduch*, I was thrilled. I couldn't believe that out of all the girls he only wanted me! Of course I told her yes, and very soon after, we got engaged.

My engagement party was beautiful. It was in August and the weather was gorgeous. The women stayed up all night before, baking all kinds of goodies. The tables were set up outside under the trees. Everybody was very happy, especially me. The only thing that saddened me was that my dear parents weren't there.

My wedding took place three months later, in November. Everyone said I was a beautiful kallah. My wedding gown was borrowed from a place in Rome, and I rode to the hall in a horse-drawn carriage. It was very special, and I felt like a real princess. The wedding was very nice. It took place in the Kibbutz dining room. My Mesader Kedushin was Rabbi Stein, the Foldiczaner Rav. I was so happy, yet at the same time sad that my dear parents, who were *nebech* killed by the Nazis, were not there.

Now I became a princess, and very popular. If a wedding took place, they would ask me to be the *unterfirerin*. Ten months later Hashem Yisborach *bentched* us with the most precious gift, the most beautiful baby boy with blue eyes and curly, golden hair. We named him Usher Enzel, after my father-in-law, a"h.

In the “Goldene Medineh”

We refugees called America the “Goldene Medineh.” We arrived to the shores of the United States at midnight on January 7, 1950, traveling on an Italian ship. We had traveled for ten days in third class, through rough waters.

Statue of Liberty – oh, how we would like to see you! You are the symbol of freedom for all people, and especially for immigrants. You are stretching out your arms to welcome us – you are so beautiful!

And so were the people who waited for us by the quay when we arrived to America the Beautiful. They were volunteers from the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society. They put us into taxi cabs and took us to Manhattan, to the building of the HIAS. There they welcomed us with delicious cakes, coffee and juice. This was a nice welcome, and we thanked them from our hearts.

When my husband got a position in the shul of Chevra Torah Anshei Chesed as a Rabbi, we got a nice apartment rent free, and for that we were very thankful. Even though I was so young I suddenly became the rebbetzin – it was an honor, because people look up to the rebbetzin and ask her advice, and she gets the first seat in shul. It is very nice to be the rebbetzin, but not that easy, and I didn’t feel that I was prepared for it. As a rebbetzin you have to be very patient and friendly; know how to dress nicely, but modestly; how to speak well and put on a nice party; and you have to be a little knowledgeable about the *dinim* and the *sedra* of the week. And you have to go to shul every Shabbos. Well, I had to learn how to do it.

Later, my husband became a Maggid Shiur in the Bobover Yeshiva, where he taught hundreds of Talmidim. Hashem Yisborach *bentched* us with five more lovely children: now we had three



The author at her engagement, together with her Jewish Prince.

boys and three girls.

My youngest child was a lovely boy, called Noson Yacob Shmaya. He was full of life, and much loved by everyone. At the young age of six, he would gather Jewish boys who weren't *frum* from the neighborhood. He invited them to our Sukkah, put yarmulkes on their heads, treated them to all kinds of goodies, and taught them to say *brochos*. He would also try to collect *tzedoke* for his yeshiva. He was always happy to deliver food to a certain old man who was sick and alone; almost every day he would hop on his bicycle, and bring something to the old man.

The worst day of our lives occurred on May 3, 1977 when Noson Yacob Shmaya was nine years old. My beautiful son was playing outside, when a child molester approached him, and lured him to the roof of a five story building nearby. When my son tried to fight him, the man



Noson Yacob Shmaya

threw him off the roof, to his death. When I saw my darling son's body lying there on the ground, I was so shocked, I couldn't even cry. It couldn't be true! My mind refused to believe it, and it took years for my mind to register the truth. We got a lot of letters from people expressing their sorrow and sympathy. Even non-Jews sent us letters. But our pain is still there, and for a mother it is the worst possible pain. But Hashem Yisborach is a healer, and we have to go on with life.

A few weeks later my husband, my prince, got sick. He fought cancer, but cancer won, and he was *niftar* in February 1979. Now I was a princess no more. I became a widow, and went to work in a lingerie boutique as a sales lady.

After two and a half years of being a widow, I met my second prince! His name is Dovid Sussman, and B"H he is a wonderful, intelligent, good-hearted man, a learner with good midos. We got married a few months after we met, and now we are married, BE"H, twenty-six years. Hashem Yisborach should give us good and healthy years together until one hundred and twenty— Amen!

TRUDY TAUBER



Trudy (Yehudis) Tauber, née Feigelstock, was born in 1931, in Vienna, Austria. After having lived in South America for a few years after the war, she arrived in the U.S. in 1950.

Mrs. Tauber used to work as a Kindergarten teacher, and these days she volunteers as a one-on-one counselor for children with special needs.

Mrs. Tauber has two children, eighteen grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren. She lives in Boro Park.

TRUDY TAUBER

A Very Unique Story

This story reveals to us, to the world, to all sufferers, searchers, non-believers, etcetera, the existence of a higher power, which most Jews believe in – our almighty *Hakodosh baruch Hu*.

One of my father's brothers, who lived in Yugoslavia, had a textile business in the city of Sagred, he was still living there after the Anschluss, which took place in March 1938. The Anschluss means Hitler and his army marching into Austria; the process in which Austria became incorporated into Germany, Hitler's birthplace. To Hitler, the Anschluss was his pride and joy. I don't have to tell you what that meant to the Führer – we were living in Vienna, the capital of Austria. One of my uncles (I had three uncles living with their families in Vienna), decided to escape to the brother in Yugoslavia with his wife and six children. The escape was a success.

They were hiding illegally in the city of Sagred. One beautiful spring day Klari, their oldest daughter (fifteen years old at that time), decided that "enough is enough!" Her young five year-old twin brothers desperately needed some fresh air. She took them to a beautiful park. In the park she discovered a big, inviting sandbox, where children were happily playing in their new spring outfits.

Without thinking of the consequences, she dropped them in to play. She watched at a little distance, constantly keeping an eye on them. With fear in their eyes, the identical twin brothers were nonetheless happy to be among other children, and started to build sand castles. A well-dressed lady, dark, of a Latin type, caught sight of them. The twin boys had sensational black eyes, dark hair, and dark complexion, which made her believe that they were Latin as well, since most people in this Northern European country were blond and light-skinned. She approached them, but could not understand them. She spoke to them softly and lovingly, so as not to scare them. They pointed to their sister, who came running to rescue them. The lady stopped her, and in a very soft voice she asked the girl: "Who are these children?" She wanted to know the relationship. My cousin kept saying that she only spoke German.

The lady told her lady-in-waiting to immediately get an interpreter. A few minutes later, the servant came back with a translator. With tears in her eyes, and trembling, the young teenager somehow felt confidence in this good woman, and told her their sad story – telling her they had no place to live, and that no country wanted them. They were desperately frightened of being caught and sent back to Austria, which would mean being put to death.

My cousin saw disappointment in the lady's face – evidently the dark stranger had believed she was dealing with "her own kind." Nevertheless – and this was the miracle! – she kindly said, "Do not fear my child; I am the wife of the Consul of Uruguay. I will give you and your family visas to my country. Go immediately to your home and tell your parents and siblings to come to the Consulate!" My cousin ran home and told the good news to her parents. A week later they were safely on a big ship to South America.

Four families (including my own), a young couple, and a single young man – all cousins of mine – eventually made their way to this blessed land, which opened its doors to us. From them came generations of Jews who were saved from the biggest Amalek – Hitler, *yemach she-*

mo!

SYLVIA WEISS



Sylvia (Cipora) Weiss, née Aszknazy, was born in 1923 in Reteg, Romania.

In 1948 she came to the U.S. and married a handsome American soldier! She briefly worked on Madison Avenue as an accomplished dress-maker—but family always came first!

Mrs. Weiss has three children, “many” grandchildren, and—*keynahora*—a “dozen plus” great-grandchildren. She lives in Flatbush.

SYLVIA WEISS

Selection from “Above “

(As told to her daughter, Shoshana Kruger)

Autumn 1944. I had just spent five months in Auschwitz with my sister. Until then it had been very hot and humid; but the weather was changing and it was getting closer to *Yom Tov*. I don't remember much about *Rosh Hashanah*; *Sukkos* was approaching and things were getting more challenging. The weather was frigid and we had no warm clothes. The Russians were getting closer. The goal of the Nazis was to empty Auschwitz of its prisoners so that there would be fewer found when the Russians arrived.

It was *Hoshana Rabba* when Mengele decided to make a big selection. This selection was very strict. We passed through two rows of German guards and there was no way of escaping. We had gone through many of these selections. Even when my sister and I had been separated before, we had managed to find each other afterwards. This time it was different.

My sister, Sara Rivka, was older than me. She was smarter and prettier, and I had always looked up to her. While we were in Auschwitz, Sara Rivka became ill. We visited the Jewish doctor and she informed us that it was tuberculosis. Under these circumstances there was really nothing we could do for her. I was told not to eat from the same dish as my sister so that I would not contract the disease. I felt very bad that I could not share food with her and that I couldn't help her. But I knew how to sew, and I sewed for the Kapos. In return for my services I received food; then I exchanged the food for aspirin. I traded my food through the barbed wire and gave the aspirin to my sister.

On *Hoshana Rabba*, throughout the selection, our only concern was to stay together. We knew that LEFT meant the gas chamber and ultimately DEATH, and that RIGHT meant LIFE. My sister and I made up that regardless of where she went, I would follow.

As the line progressed, my sister was told to go LEFT. I simply followed her as we had made up. After a few steps I felt a tap on my shoulder. I turned, and it was Mengele. He asked me in German “Where are you going?” I answered that I was going LEFT. He insisted that I go to the RIGHT. Arguing with him was useless. He kept insisting that I go right. I was only interested in being with my sister even if it meant taking a step toward death. I was in shock. I would never forgive myself if I were to be separated from my sister. I felt guilty. Maybe I wasn't trying hard enough to remain together with her. Hashem's Divine plan, however, was that I should live. Mengele saw that I was determined to go to the left, but he was not the one in charge. Hashem sent me to the RIGHT, where I would survive. When I turned around to look for my sister, she was already gone. And that was the last time I saw her.

Now my thoughts turned to: How will I face the world all alone? My parents had been taken upon our arrival to Auschwitz. My little sister, Chaya, who was only thirteen, was also taken away with my mother and the rest of the family. I had no idea where my brother and uncles were. I was truly alone. I became depressed and lost the will to live.

We remained in Auschwitz for a few more weeks under inhumane conditions. I was ready to

die right there. Information about the war trickled in and we overheard things in the washroom. One day a girl overheard that 500 of us would be transported to a working camp under the supervision of the Red Cross. This was our first flicker of hope. Maybe this gruesome war would soon be over.

Everyone took her meager bundle and started running. I refused to go along. Suddenly I was pulled off my cot. The girls were insistent that I get up and go with them. We were in Block 29 and the exit was at Block 1. It was rainy and muddy. It was a long, difficult trek. We were almost the last ones to be counted in the 500. They walked us to the shower room which was also the gas chamber. We were standing in the washroom, naked, waiting for the water to come. It took a few minutes and we were sure we were going to be gassed. All of a sudden the water streamed down on our bodies. After that we were disinfected and given different clothes. We were only able to keep our shoes. We walked to the railroad where the cattle wagons were waiting for us. We entered the wagon cars and were locked in. We heard the bombs falling around us and were sure we would be bombed by the Russians. After a few hours, the doors miraculously opened. We were given bread and margarine. The Nazis told us that this food had to last until we arrived at the next destination.

After four long, exhausting days we finally arrived at a big station in the city of Nuremberg. The streets were full of people. Ladies were dressed in beautiful clothes and carried fancy pocketbooks. We couldn't believe they were from the same world that we belonged to; we were dressed in rags with ID numbers on our backs. The weather was freezing and we had no coats. After a very long walk through the bombed streets with sirens screaming and alerting us of imminent bombs, we finally arrived at the end of the city. There we saw a cemetery on the left and a small, new camp on the right. There were five or six new barracks and clean streets, surrounded by barbed wire and German guards. This was our new home.

When we entered the camp we were welcomed by German Nazi women who wore black capes as their uniform. They asked us where we came from and why we looked the way we did, with rags and short hair. It seemed as if they had never heard of Auschwitz. They showed us our living quarters and the working area. We were arranged in groups of twenty-five per room. A stove stood in the middle of the room to provide warmth. We were given blankets and shown our mattresses, made of straw. They walked us to the end of the barracks to show us the shower room. The walls were made of green tiles and looked very nice in our eyes. We thanked Hashem for this new step towards our recovery.

Food was distributed, and we rested for a few days before the jobs would be assigned to us. Many of the girls were tested and the majority of them were selected to work for the Simmonds Company – a dye factory turned into an ammunition factory for the war. The work that we did was precision work. Some of the girls worked in the barracks and some were sent to the actual site of the factory. The stronger girls were given heavier work to do. I was not feeling well at that time and did not get tested, nor placed right away.

After a few days the bombing started and we ran to the shelter for protection. One of the barracks was hit and now we were forced to double up in our quarters to make room for the "homeless". When the bombs subsided, the selected girls began to work.

Not feeling well, and with a low-grade fever, I wandered out to the bombed sites to look for items that weren't destroyed. There was nothing to do and I needed to feel busy. My fever was rising and I finally entered the infirmary where a doctor suggested that I stay there to be

checked out. I had no idea that this visit would last for weeks, and that I would be so sick. I was frightened and fearful that maybe I had caught my sister's tuberculosis. The diagnosis finally revealed that instead I had typhoid. There was no medication, and all I remember is the wet towels that were draped around my body to bring the fever down. One of the German Gestapo guards threw in some aspirin through the window and I was given some. I remember very little of my time in the infirmary. My only recollections are what people told me afterwards.

The Germans came in once a day to count us and to inquire how we were feeling. The doctor never informed them that I had typhoid. That would have been my ticket to the crematorium. I soon became unconscious and everyone was waiting for me to die. My shoes and clothes were taken away. Weeks passed and my fever finally started dropping. One morning I just sat up in the bunk to the amazement of all who were there. I had returned from the dead.

One of the infirmary workers offered me food. I declined, saying that my mother had visited me the night before and already fed me. They looked at me as if I had lost my mind. Then one of the nurses started questioning me about my whereabouts and personal information. When I was asked where my parents were, I started crying and told her that they had been killed in Auschwitz. "So how could you say your mother was here with food?" she asked. I couldn't stop crying. She calmed me down by saying that I had had a dream where my mother came to make me feel better. "Now", she continued, "it's your job to take care of yourself and make sure to survive with Hashem's help".

My clothes and shoes were returned to me. I relearned how to walk by holding on to the walls and to people. Someone brought me a stick which I used as a cane. My friend, who worked in the kitchen, brought me extra food. Each day I got stronger and stronger.

While the girls were working I was recuperating in the infirmary. The bombs continued daily. In the morning the Americans bombed and in the afternoon the English. The evenings brought the Russian bombs. They were trying to destroy the hidden ammunition in the cemetery nearby. Our days were occupied by running to the shelter three times a day.

On January 2, 1945, without any warning, bombs started falling all around us. The sky was lit up with "stolin" candles. These candles lit up the ground for the Russians in order to see where to aim their bombs. Their goal was to find the ammunition. Inevitably some of those bombs ended up falling on our camp. The pressure of the broken windows resulting from the bombs threw me off my cot. I grabbed my blanket and pulled myself to the door where I screamed for help. Two girls running to the shelter stopped to help me. They pulled me out of the infirmary, dropped me in the snow, and continued to run toward safety. I do not remember how long I lay there in the snow but finally the bombing stopped and it was quiet again. The Nazi guard came out of the shelter looking for casualties and survivors. There was no one out there except me, covered in snow. He picked me up and carried me to the closest shelter. I overheard him say to another Nazi guard, after finding me alive in the midst of so many bomb holes, "I believe the Jews have a God, because this was truly a miracle".

The daily bombings continued but things started to change. We were no longer as "comfortable" as before. The falling bombs made our lives miserable day after day. My friend who worked in the kitchen continued to bring me extra food which helped me recover and regain my strength. When the bombs fell, it felt like the shelter would collapse, and we all screamed out the *Sh'ma*. As more barracks were destroyed we were forced to live in the shel-

ter. I remember two non-Jewish girls who were with us simply because they had Jewish grandparents. These two girls asked us to say our prayers out loud so that they could repeat them. We were stunned that non-Jews, who kept saying they weren't Jewish, all of a sudden wanted to say the *Sh'ma*. "Why don't you say your own prayers?" we asked.

Every morning we came out of the shelter, washed our hands with snow and ate some of the snow. Our only food was boiled potatoes that were only half cooked, due to lack of adequate time between each bombing. We lived in the shelter for two weeks, and were told that we would soon be moved. The day of relocation came and we marched on the broken streets, trying to avoid the holes caused by the bombs. We were taken to a large bombed building with a huge basement – our new home. The basement had no light and no bathroom facilities. We were on top of each other, constantly screaming and fighting. The odor was unbearable. Some of us found a corner on the upper floor and we set up our quarters there. It was equally unsafe against a bomb but it afforded us some "fresh air". This building was once a chocolate factory and we could still smell the aroma of the chocolate.

I don't remember how long we stayed there. One day we were told that the group would be alphabetically divided into three, and sent off to three different locations. My name was Aszknazy, and all my closest friends were at the end of the alphabet. I couldn't bear the thought of losing my friends after I had lost my entire family. I was crying and very upset. How would I be able to survive if I were all alone?

Months ago when I had been in Auschwitz, someone had smuggled in a *Siddur*. It was a very precious commodity. When I had the chance to use it, I had memorized chapter 20 of the *Tehillim*, which I continued to say all through my difficult times during the war. Until this day, in times of joy and sorrow, I continue to say this chapter of *Tehillim* daily. It was my lucky chapter then and I feel a real connection to *Hashem* through it.

Fearing that I would be separated from my friends, I turned to chapter 20 of *Tehillim*. *Hashem* sent me a great idea, a solution to resolve the problem. I simply put a W in front of my name, remaining with my friends throughout the remainder of the war. (I was even liberated together with my friends, on April 17, 1945.)

But we were still prisoners, loaded back into the cattle wagons again, leaving Nuremberg for an unknown destination. After three days of traveling we arrived at a new place. It was a small town, named Melthauer. We saw a tall chimney that had a lace design. The building had been a lace factory and now it was used for manufacturing bullets for the war. We found 200 Jewish Polish girls there. The building had three stories and we were taken to the third floor. We had running water and bathrooms! The Americans, looking for German places to bomb, started to bomb this area. Luckily, our building did not receive a direct hit. Had we been hit, the residents of the third floor would have been the first ones killed.

One day they took us by train to a city called Plauen. We had to work on the railroad tracks to clean away the debris of the bombs. During the day, we had to run from the American bombs to a forest for protection. We hoped the trees would camouflage us. When the bombings were over we met English soldiers who informed us that the war was indeed coming to an end.

One day a Nazi woman came up with a basket of torn gloves from the war front. She was looking for someone to mend the holes. I was the only one who knew how to knit, and so I volunteered for the task. This became my job for the next few weeks. I was rewarded with extra

food and I was able to sit near a sunny window as I fixed the gloves. Months passed and the Americans began bombing again. There were no shelters and we were very frightened. But not one bomb fell on the building, only around us. We were indeed very lucky to still be alive after those ordeals.

It was Friday night when we heard trucks driving by. Saturday morning was the “Zählenappell” the daily roll call. We were counted every morning and that day we waited patiently. Time passed by and no one showed up. One girl walked toward the iron fence that kept us locked in. The door opened and we realized everyone was gone. The Germans were gone and so was all the food. One old German Gestapo remained who had been with us in Nuremberg. He informed us that the orders had been to kill us all. But since there wasn’t enough time for that, the Germans just fled for their lives. This old German had been the one who had thrown in the aspirin when I was in the infirmary and now once again he was helpful.

Sunday morning came and we still did not see any American soldiers. We were really starving for hunger. On Monday morning we started walking toward the town. We found a bakery. Hot bread came out of the oven and was thrown to the crowd. Everyone grabbed what they could. Some girls became sick from overeating. I was walking slowly behind the crowd and I noticed a young German couple with a baby in their arms. I walked toward them and asked if they could give me some food. They took me into their house and fed me. To this day whenever I eat potato salad I think of them. After I ate and was ready to leave, the woman saw that my shoes were tied with a string. She brought me a pair of sandals. I felt great to have a “new” pair of shoes. I thanked the couple for the food and shoes as I continued following the crowd toward the market place and found the girls there.

That was when I saw the first American tank arrive. More US trucks and soldiers followed. We were liberated at last! An American Jewish army captain approached us and asked us who we were. He told us that the answer to this question should be “prisoners of war” whenever we were asked. He promised that he would soon return to help us. Meanwhile, they left us with cigarettes, chocolate, tuna and crackers. They reminded us not to overeat. The next day they came back with new clean clothes that they had found in warehouses; uniforms from a German youth group – blouses, slacks, sweaters, shoes, and socks. After washing up and putting on clean clothes, we felt reborn. We remained there in Melthauer for two weeks.

On May 1st, the Americans took us to a hotel in the mountains, in a town called Ranchmule. The Germans were cooking and cleaning for us. It was such a beautiful place, especially since it was springtime. The American Jewish soldiers were extremely helpful. They brought us sewing machines and fabric so that we could sew new clothes. The warehouses were locked but the Americans opened them for us and we were free to take whatever we needed.

The assistant chaplain of the American army was Victor Geller. Since he spoke Hungarian, he was assigned to this hotel of 200 Hungarian girls. He organized a *minyan* on the first Friday night. Ten Jewish soldiers came to *daven* for us so that we could hear *Kaddish*. We had never had an opportunity to grieve or to sit *shiva*. That Friday night 200 young orphans finally said goodbye to their loved ones who had perished at the hands of the Nazis, *yemach shemam*. The reality set in that we would never see our parents again, and we felt unprepared for the future. Years later, when I met Victor Geller in America, he told me that the sound of the crying during the *Kel Molei Rachamim* was imbedded in his memory forever. Those bitter cries that night, without any doubt, had surely penetrated the *Shomayim*. It was truly an unforgettable experience.

Victor Geller's job was to make a list of our names, where we had come from, and who we were looking for. We also listed the places where we would like to relocate to. After a few weeks, some of the American soldiers were sent back to the States. The remaining soldiers recruited new Jewish soldiers to help us after they would leave. One of the girls found a soldier from her hometown who had left Europe before the war. Compiling these lists gave us an opportunity, and rising hopes, of finding relatives who might have survived the war. The lists were circulated among other camps and many of us were able to locate some of our relatives.

We remained in the hotel for three months. We continued to look for surviving relatives. Germany was then divided into three parts between the Americans, British, and Russians. Our territory fell into the hands of the Russians. The Americans transferred us to an American zone, Frankfurt-am-Main. We really hated to leave this beautiful place, which had helped us get back towards a normal life; but we had no choice. It was way too dangerous to be under Russian supervision. The day came when the American trucks arrived to transport us to our new destination. While packing my things, I couldn't help but think about my family, and how alone I was.

I had seen my parents and my sisters taken away but I didn't know where my brother Lipi was. He had always been a sickly child and I assumed that he had not survived. Lipi was a year younger than me. As a child he had been very sick with a kidney infection. He had been operated on in a big hospital. My father had sought a *brocho* from a big Rabbi for a *refuah sheleimah*. The Rabbi was reluctant to give the *brocho* but my father had persisted until he received it. At the time, my mother was in the hospital with Lipi, and it was only after the *brocho* was given that Lipi started to recover. I was eight years old at the time and had been very jealous of all the attention my brother was receiving. Now that I was alone in the world, my thoughts turned to my brother, and I wondered if he had survived at all.

The night before we were to leave, I had a dream that my brother Lipi was alive in our hometown! When I woke the next morning, I told my friends about the dream. I felt I had been given a sign from *Hashem* to go back to my hometown to look for my brother and other possible surviving relatives. I found six people from the neighboring cities who were eager to return to their hometowns, as well. The seven of us were ready to leave to Beclean, and the American soldiers agreed to help us make this trip. They provided us with food, cigarettes, chocolate, and anything else that could be traded for money.

The American soldiers arrived with two jeeps and took us to a nearby city called Auerbach. They found an abandoned hotel, broke the lock and set us up in three rooms on the second floor. We waited for the Russians to arrive to occupy the territory and restore train service. Once the trains started running, we would head out to Romania. We said our goodbyes to the Americans and thanked them for everything they had done for us. The next morning we heard noises; the Russian army was marching toward us dressed in Cossack uniforms. It looked awfully frightening. I suspected that the six girls accompanying me would now regret their decision and turn back.

We didn't know when the trains would begin to run, and without transportation we felt trapped. In the morning we went to the City Hall for food tickets. We met some Jewish Russian soldiers who told us that although it might be safe during the day, we should not go out after dark. We prayed to *Hashem* to watch over us. The next day we were surprised to see a Red Cross truck parked in front of our hotel. We went to see who the occupants of the truck were. To my great excitement, I found my mother's cousin aboard the vehicle. We asked the person in charge for

a ride to Prague, which was where they were headed. But the truck was so full; there was no room for us. He promised us that in two days, on his return trip, he would make sure that there would be room for us. He kept his promise and returned to pick us up. We were finally on our way out of Germany, B"H. In return for transportation we gave him some of our provisions.

We finally arrived in Prague, after many hours of travel. We were taken to a basement to register our names on a survivors' list. There were no beds to accommodate us; only some straw on the floor. I became very upset that this was all they had prepared for us – we who had spent a year in Auschwitz and other camps. People who lived in Prague visited daily, looking for family members who might have survived. They asked us all kinds of questions. No one offered us a place to stay or any food to eat. Finally one couple offered accommodations for two of us, and promised to try to find others who would take in survivors as well. By the end of that day all of us were settled by different neighbors. We were so grateful for some normalcy.

After one day in Prague, we were informed that the trains were finally running. We headed toward the train station and found it swarming with Russian soldiers and civilians. We boarded a train that was heavily congested. We were afraid of the Russian soldiers and their reputation with women, but we were lucky to find some Jewish boys who had survived the camps. We immediately bonded with them and pretended to be their girlfriends, which did indeed keep the Russians away.

We finally arrived in Budapest. We were taken to a big building sponsored by the Americans. The walls were covered with lists of names of survivors. Since our name started with the letter "A", I found my brother's name easily. He had been liberated in February by the Russians and had returned to our home town, exactly as I had dreamed! We were only in Budapest a few days. Not all trains were traveling across the border to Romania. Finally we succeeded in finding a train that would take us to a city called Arrad. From there we went to Klausenberg. From there we were able to get a bus to take us to my hometown.

Meanwhile, my brother was looking for me. He had gone to a different city. I reached home before he did, but by the next day we were finally reunited. The reunion was bittersweet. He asked about my sister, and I felt very bad, having to report that she was gone. Lipi had already settled in town and had a lumber business in the same place where my father had had his lumber shop. He was doing well and did not want to leave; I did not want to stay.

One day I received a telegram from New York, from the mother of the chaplain that I had met in camp. Mrs. Geller advised us to go to Germany, to a Displaced Persons camp, where we could get papers in order to travel to America. We really yearned to go to Israel – not to America. My father's last words when we had been separated in Auschwitz were "whoever survives must go to Israel".

Then, one Friday morning there was a knock on the door. Two Russian soldiers were looking for my brother. They had orders to take him into the Russian army, now that he was nineteen years old. I did not know what to say. *Hashem* put the words into my mouth as I said "he has already left to America". They marked the information on their papers and left. I went to my brother's business to inform him of what had just happened. I stressed that if the Russians drafted him into their army, he would never be able to leave.

Before Shabbos, my brother arrived home with five one hundred dollar bills that he had secured from selling whatever he could. He told me to pack up, and be ready to leave right after *Havda-*

lah. We said goodbye to my cousin, and immediately after Shabbos we were on our way. We headed to the highway where we hid in a ravine. We waited until morning when the bus arrived. Once we got on the bus we traveled to the nearest town, Reteg, knowing that we would never return to Beclean, and that an unknown future awaited us.

Having arrived safely in America, for years I relived the terror of Auschwitz. How did I survive the past? And more importantly, how do I survive the present without my precious family? How I miss them, especially on holidays and Simchos!

And so, forty eight years after having survived Auschwitz, I needed to return to those railroad tracks, where I had last seen my parents. The sun was going down behind the remaining barracks. There were no tombstones and no graves; only white soot on the ground, like sand. As I took one last look through my tear-drenched eyes, my bleakest memory was transferred into a serene, comforting vision. This was the place where I had last seen my family and where their *neshamos* had ascended straight to Gan Eden. I was at the cemetery that I had never been able to visit before; at the graves that I could not cry over, all those years. I had hoped that this visit would bring me some closure. With gratitude to Hashem for having come so far into the past, I was now ready to return to the future.

AFTERWORD

Club Nissim—Those Who Desire Life

“Who is the man—or woman—that desires life, and loves many days, that he may see good?” This verse from Tehillim very aptly describes the members of Club Nissim; few people have desired life more, and few have made a stronger determination to love their days, and see good. The volume you have just read deals with death, despair and unspeakable horror; yet it would be a mistake to think that its authors are a collection of tragic figures. To be sure, they have suffered beyond comprehension; they also have had to cope with all the trials and tribulations of life that everyone must suffer; indeed, their painful memories are close to the surface—and yet, the pervasive atmosphere in the Club is one of life—an indomitable desire for life!

Their positive attitude is evident everywhere, as the members share each others’ joys and pains, past and present. Hope and faith are strongly grounded in these folks, who are ever conscious of the miraculous nature of life. And the small miracles continue in our midst: Two women who have been socializing for a few years, suddenly realize that they last saw each other over sixty years ago—in an infirmary in Nürnberg, where each thought the other was dying. A certain Mrs. Z who, according to her family, used to be despondent “like a wilting plant without water” becomes an active member who is soon transformed into “a blossoming flower turning towards the sunshine.” And in the bus on the way to the zoo, Mr. L and Mrs. B strike up a conversation and discover that, more than seventy years ago, they were neighbors in the same apartment building in Budapest. It gives us all the shivers—in a good way!

Looking back at the years of working with Club Nissim, I am awestruck by our members’ resilience, and their ability to constantly embrace life. But perhaps one shouldn’t be surprised—they have absorbed one of the most profound messages of the Torah: “**to live** by [the commandments],” and having been so close to death, these women and men have decided to savor every breath of life that has been given to them.

Ultimately, that is what our Miracle Club is all about—restoring some of the *joie de vivre* that was stolen from them; adding days to their lives—and life to their days. Happily, the members are eager team players, and throw themselves into our activities with gusto. To paraphrase the Gemora: “Whoever has not seen the joy of Club Nissim dancing the Hula has not seen joy in his life!”

Yes, these Survivors are capable of exuberant joy, and to spend time in their company is a lesson and an inspiration. It is beyond heart-warming to see the smiling faces and to be somewhat instrumental in recreating the joy of being alive. It is a true privilege to be a part of this unique little universe. For this I am eternally grateful.

Simonne Hirschhorn
Program Director, Club Nissim

GLOSSARY

- A”h** “Alav/Aleha Hasholom” – see below
- Achtung** Attention; warning
- Agudah** Short for Agudath Yisroel, an international umbrella organization serving and advocating for the Orthodox community
- Aktion** Round-up of Jews
- Alav hasholom** May he rest in peace
- Aleha hasholom** May she rest in peace
- Amalek** A nation notorious for its cruelty to the Jews during their wandering in the desert
- Am Yisroel chai** “The People of Israel Lives”
- Appell** Roll call
- Aufseherin** Supervisor (female)
- B’nos** The girls’ division of Agudah institutions
- B”H** “Baruch Hashem” – see below
- Baruch Hashem** (or Boruch Hashem) Praised/Blessed be G-d
- Be’ezras Hashem** With G-d’s help
- BE”H** “Be’ezras Hashem” – see above
- Bentched** Blessed
- Bitachon** Trust [in G-d]
- Blockelteste** “Elder of the Block” Supervisory title of the camp prisoner in charge of order and discipline in her barrack
- Brocho** Blessing
- Chashuv** Important, distinguished
- Daven, davening** Pray, praying
- Dayan** Judge (in a rabbinic court)
- Dinim** Laws
- Eibishter** “The Eternal One”; G-d
- Emunah** Faith
- Eretz Yisroel** The Land of Israel
- Frum** Pious; strictly Torah observant
- Gan Eden** The Garden of Eden; Paradise
- Goldene Medineh** “Golden State”; America
- Goyish** Non-Jewish
- Goyte** Gentile woman
- Hakodosh baruch Hu** “The Holy One, blessed be He”; G-d
- Haman** The evil Persian courtier in the Book of Ruth who tried to annihilate the Jewish people
- Hashem** “The Name”; a way of referring to G-d
- Hashem Yisborach** “The Blessed Name”; G-d
- Hashgacha Pratis** G-d’s supervision of even the smallest circumstance in a person’s life
- Havdalah** “Separation”; the ceremony that separates between Shabbos and the ensuing work week
- 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
- Iyar** 2nd month of the Jewish year, corresponding to April/May
- Joie de vivre** Joy of living
- Judenrein** Purified of Jews
- Kaddish** Prayer in honor of the dead

Kallah Bride
Kapos Camp prisoners who worked for the SS as supervisors (over fellow prisoners), often known for their brutality and ruthlessness
Kel Molei Rachamim “G-d, Full of Mercy”; prayer for the souls of the dead
Kinderheim Children’s home
Magen David “Shield of David”; the hexagram
Maggid Shiur Teacher of advanced Torah studies for older students
Malachim Angels
Matzevoh Tombstone
Mazel Luck
Me’avdus lecherus “From Bondage to Freedom”; from the liturgy of the Passover Seder
Mechallel Desecrate
Mechaye Revived; something that revives you
Mesader Kedushin Wedding officiator
Meshiach The Messiah
Midos Character traits
Minyan Prayer quorum of ten adult Jewish males
Nachas Spiritual joy (particularly the joy derived from one’s children’s [spiritual] achievements)
Nebech Poor; unfortunate
Neshama, neshamos Soul, souls
Niftar Released [from religious duties]; deceased
Nissim Miracles
Pachad Fear
Rav Rabbi
Reb Mister; Sir – special honorific, used with first name
Rebbe Rabbinic leader of a Chasidic sect; also a rabbinical teacher
Rebbetzin Wife of a rabbi or a rebbe
Refuah sheleimah Complete recovery (from illness)
Rosh Chodesh New Month – semi-holiday
Rosh Hashana New Year – holiday when the world is judged
Sedra Weekly portion of the Torah
Sefer Book, particularly on a sacred topic
Sh’ma “Hear” – the beginning of the Jewish “declaration of faith” (“Hear Israel, the Lord our G-d; the Lord is One”); said when there is knowledge, or fear, of imminent death
Shabbos (plur: Shabbosim) Sabbath; day of rest
Shadchante Matchmaker (female)
Shalom Peace
Shecht Slaughter [according to Jewish law]
Sheiget Gentile male
Shidduch Match, [suggestion for a] marriage
Shikse (or Shiksa) Gentile woman, particularly a young one
Shiva “Seven”; seven days of mourning immediately following the funeral, when mourners sit on low stools (hence: “sitting shiva”)
Shiva Assar b’Tammuz Fast day in memory of the Romans’ siege of Jerusalem (usually occurs in July)
Shlep Carry, drag
Sh’lichim Messengers, agents
Shoah Destruction; the Holocaust
Shomayim Heaven

Shul Synagogue
Siddur Prayer book
Simchos Joyful occasions (particularly family life cycle events)
Sukkos Feast of Booths – harvest holiday, commemorating the Jews’ wandering in the wilderness (from Egypt to the Promised Land)
Talmid chacham “Wise disciple” – person who is advanced in Torah study
Talmidim Students, disciples
Tehillim The Book of Psalms
Tzadekes Righteous woman (feminine of **tzadik**)
Tzedoke Charity
Unterfirerin The woman who escorts a bride to the wedding canopy
Wehrmacht The German defense force; army
Yad Hashem The Hand of G-d
Yahrzeit “Yearly time” The anniversary of a person’s death
Yarmulke Skullcap worn by pious males
Yemach shemo/shemam “May his/their name(s) be extinct” – said about particularly heinous enemies
Yeshiva Talmudic school for males
Yevorechecha “May [G-d] bless you” The first word of the Priestly Blessing
Yid, yiden Jew, Jews
Yiras Shomayim Fear of Heaven
Yom Tov Holiday
Zählenappell Roll call, when prisoners were painstakingly counted