

One story and Another

To my children, Hayuta and Ofer, to my grandchildren, Eyal, Gilli, Daniel, Tal and Ehud, to my great grandchildren: Eshel, Rotem and Shikma, to my dearest Tamar, Zali and Marva, and to all my relatives.

In memory of those whose life was taken in the Holocaust; for the strong roots they have given us in death, commanding us to live. It is to the memory of those whose lives were abruptly cut off, as well as those who managed to survive through hell and reach the shores of safety that I have written this story.

This story is one of shrugging off the burden of living as a minority. It is one of an immigrant newcomer who leaves behind her past, her language and her former customs and who strives to assimilate into a new society as an equal among equals.

In this memoir I speak mainly of the family from my mother's side, whose origins are the Polish town of Tomaszow Lubelski. It is my hope that you will find interest in this period so utterly different from that, in which you are now living. Somehow, memory is capable of bridging between then and now as things from the past may be spoken of freely. Somehow, the memories that were buried deep, in spite of their heavy weight, are floating easily to the surface with meaning and clarity so deeply personal and special.

In the writing circle that I attended we were asked to write a story of the most difficult period of our lives. One of the participants wrote about her base training in the Israel Defence Forces. I told her, "I wish I could include such a story in my autobiography."

Many thanks to those who encouraged me to write and who led me through the wilderness of computer techniques. Many thanks as well to my husband Yitzchak who always helped me to find the right word in a mother tongue, Hebrew, I learned only late in my life.



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Though the origin of my family is Poland, my children are natives of Israel - Sabras. They live in two cities, Jersusalem, in Yehoshua Ben-Nun Street and Herzalia in Mordei Ha'Getaot Street. I have documents in my hand that bear witness to ten generations, reaching all the way back to Rabbi Yishaiahu Ben-Avraham Horowitz who was born in 1565 and died in Tiberias in 1630. He was one of the most prominent rebbes and leaders of his generation, preeminent in forging a code of Jewish ethics and morality for the beginning of the modern era. His principal commentary, *The Two Slabs of the Commandments* combined *Halachah* (Jewish Law) with commentaries on Torah and Kabbalah. Among the same generation was another great Rebbe, Rabbi Moshe Iserlish who lived from 1525 to 1572 in Cracow, and who is considered one of the greatest legislators of Judaism as well as being one of last to fulfill this role in a significant way.

I was born in Poland in the town of Tomaszow Lubelski in 1930 to my parents Miriam from the Gorzyczański family and Shmuel Friedman, an accomplished student from the Yeshiva of Lublin.

The town of Tomaszow Lubelski has its origins in the village of Rugozna; there are documents showing that the village already existed in 1422. In 1590 Jan Zamoyski, from a family of Polish Nobility founded the settlement of Yeletova which, four years later, changed its name to Tomaszów, after Zamoyski's son, Tomash, who was born on April 10 1594. The town is part of the region of Belzic, part of the province of Lublin. Already in the Seventeenth Century, Jews were living in the town. Prior to World War II, the town had a population of 20,000, the majority of whom were Jews. The town was largely undeveloped and quite neglected and run down in parts. Since there was almost no economic infrastructure, the population subsisted in a markedly impoverished state. Nevertheless, the town was extremely rich in its Jewish life, having had synagogues and *schtiblach* (venues for learned discussion of Talmud and Mishnah).

Life was conducted according to traditional patterns and livelihoods were passed down from generation to generation. Whole chains of generations were given similar first names. The few who enjoyed higher status-mainly grocers and dealers in lumber, were involved in various facets of community life. Moshe Gordon, my grandfather's brother, recalled in his memoirs that, during the period of World War II, *"The battalion of Doneskeya Cossacks which numbered more than a thousand soldiers and officers, camped outside the town. From time to time, they passed through the main street of the town on their horses, accompanied by a military band. The wealthy Jewish people of the town, among them my brother Fischel (my grandfather), were the suppliers to the battalion"*.

In 1938, my great-grandfather, Israel HaCohen Gorzycznski, died. I can still recall vividly his room full of books of Torah. It was said of his death that "when he felt that his end was drawing near, he raised his head from the pillow and saw that there was a Minyan around his bed. Then he closed his eyes. My great-grandfather was known to be a man of high manners and a delicate soul; someone who contributed much to the progress of the Jewish community in his town.



Great grandfather Israel Gorzyczanski and my great grandmother Dreisel Rogenfish, who bore seven children

Moshe Gordon wrote of his parents' (my great grandfather and great grandmother's) house as follows:

"On Erev Shabbat, the house resembled a palace; the majesty and illumination of the Shabbat Bride filled every corner of the house. The challot (shabbat bread) was laid out on a beautiful snowy white table cloth. The candlesticks were made of shiny silver and candles' illumination was like a golden magic. The entire scene was a communication of tranquility, and an atmosphere of holiness pervaded the entire house. My parents were clothed in satin and their collars snowy white; beauty and grace shone from their delicate faces. My father, his beard white silvery-white was as long as he was tall and his wide forehead brimmed with a mysterious beauty. His angular nose was a sign of his esteem." Furthermore, Moshe Gordon wrote, *"At about the age of one hundred years, my father Israel Gorzyczanski passed away. He was a man whom everyone admired and respected. Over more than fifty years, he was the president of a foundation in Tomaszów that raised money for Eretz Ysrael. At this time, he was also the president of the Talmud Torah (or yeshivah) and in every letter he wrote to his sons, he would include a treatise containing fresh revelations from the Torah."*

At the beginning of 1939, in the same town, Israel Ha Cohen's son, Fischel Ephriam Gorzyczanski (my grandfather), died. It was said of my great grandfather and grandfather that they were *Tzaddikim* (sages) and were both lucky to die in their sleep.

In all, ten children, five daughters, and five sons, were born to my Grandfather Fischel Gorzyczanski and my grandmother Mindel from the Stern family, of the city of Konska-Vola.



My Grandfather with the children (approximately 1916)

My grandfather's house was a fine example of those Jewish families who made their living from commerce, though the real occupation of the menfolk was the learning of Torah, participating in the religious life of the town and being active for the benefit of people in the community. Fischel and Mindel Gorzyczanski made a good living and were a highly-respected family in the shtetl (little town in Eastern Europe). Unfortunately, suitable bridegrooms for their daughters were in short supply. So Fischel matched his daughters with Jewish men from other localities, some of whom had money and some of whom had education, being *yeshivabochers*. The boys were matched to daughters of other respected and well-to-do families. The meeting of my mother, Mirale, and my father Shmuel, a yeshivabocher from Lublin, took place in Chelm, half-way between Tomashow and Lublin, in the house of relatives who lived in the town. Chelm, fabled for its "foolish wise men," is an actual place that still exists to this day. It is said of Chelm that it was, in truth, a city of wise men only, since all the foolish ones were expelled. When those who had been expelled were asked as to their origins, and they replied "from Chelm", those who had enquired concluded that Chelm must be a city of very stupid people! Alas, today there are no Jews in Chelm -stupid, wise, or otherwise.

Zeyung - how should this unique word be translated? Introduction? Interview? Eye contact? It was, in any event, my aunt Henahle who escorted my mother that day to the *Zeyung*-the meeting with the prospective groom. It happened that Henahle was the youngest of the siblings and it is said that she had black hair and mirthful eyes. The story went that when my father Shmuel initiated the conversation of a wise yeshivabocher with his prospective bride, my mother's youngest sister pulled her dress and whispered to her "Mirale, *Zag Ya!* (say yes!)"



My parents' engagement picture, Miriam (nee Gorzyczanski) and Shmuel Freidman

In the period in which we were growing up, the Zionist movements in our shtetl were extremely active, the most prominent of which being the Poalei Zion (Workers of Zion). Many youngsters, for whom the Zionist ideal was combined with an inner need to gather wings and leave behind the environment in which they had grown up, migrated to Eretz Israel. The Zionist ideal captured the hearts of the *yeshivabocher* Shmuel and the merchant's daughter Mirale. From the time of their marriage up to their voyage to Israel, details of my parents are extremely few. Their immigration to Israel was part of the so-called "Petit Bourgeois Aliyah" and was funded out of the Nedunya (dowry).



My parents Mirale and Shmuel en route to Israel

Taking an apartment in Tel Aviv, Shmuel and the now-pregnant Mirale began immediately to search for a means to support themselves. Shmuel and a partner purchased a bus in a transportation firm called Ha'Maavir.

From their stories of those days, I learned of what could be bought with a piaster, what the taste of Jaffa oranges was like and what the price was of a piece of land in the dunes of Tel Aviv. I learned also about the heat in the *Hamsinim* (hot winds), and of the friends who didn't make it in Palestine and returned to Europe. Unfortunately, the marriage of the sister Perla (Penina) to the fifth generation son of a Jerusalem family, the Varshavskys, excepted, I did not hear stories of any kind of success.

It was not long before rumors of the young couple's harsh times reached the ears of Mirale's parents. Mirale's parents learned that their wise yeshivahbocher son-in-law had become a *balagulah*-holder of a low-class job-something unacceptable to a family of Mirale's station. The parents begged the couple to return "home" to their "overflowing bowl" and to join the family business. With the birth of their blonde-haired, blue-eyed son, Shloymele, the couple's lives in Eretz Israel became even harder. Life was especially difficult for Mirale whose pale skin burned easily in the rays of Palestine's fierce sun. As for Shmuel, he worked hard every day, sometimes on shifts late at night, in dangerous areas in which Arabs were living.

The inevitable *Yeridah* (descent) from Israel, back to Europe, was not long coming. Their departure is documented in a photo showing friends of the couple who escorted them to the ship. In the arms of Mirale is baby Shloymele and at her feet is Mirale's youngest brother Ishayahu, who chose to stay on in Israel and who started a family of his own with his wife Gutta, and who later changed his family name to Goren.



**Mirale, Shumel, Shloymele, and brother Ishayahu and friends
prior to their departure from Israel**

The photos showing my parents' Aliyah and Yeridah reflect the truth of the couple's sojourn in Eretz Israel. From joy and hope to sorrow and worry, it is sufficient to look at the photos and to understand their state of mind. It was thus that, with most of the dowry having been spent in Israel, the couple returned to Poland. Shmuel went immediately to work in his in-law's business and very soon found himself dependent upon his in-laws for his family's survival. For Shmuel, the lack of a profession and lack of understanding of commerce, was a source of great bitterness, and his frustration made him increasingly critical of others. Shmuel easily found fault with others for being less successful and less educated than himself; ironically, it was the others who managed to support their families while Shmuel was condemned to struggle for the same.

A year after their return from Eretz Israel Mirale gave birth to a daughter-me. In the meantime, my brother Shlomo, a native of Israel, had become gravely ill with diphtheria. As there was no cure for diphtheria in those days, Shlomo simply passed away. He was about eight years old; a very handsome boy with golden curls and wise eyes, who excelled in the learning of *Torah*.

I have the faintest memory of many people filling our house after my brother died. I am sitting in a corner of the room on a large bed, ignored by everyone, and yet observing closely everything that is unfolding. My parents, who are weeping, do not seem aware of my presence at all. In the eyes of my father, the death of his son was a punishment for leaving the holy land. Since leaving Eretz Israel was a great sin, the punishment of a future filled with failure was expected as a matter of course. "Next year in Jerusalem" my father would say, with a deep sigh and tears in his eyes.

Sad to say, my parents used their sense of guilt to justify every failure that happened in their lives and each time success eluded them, my parents' feelings of shame were compounded. This sense of guilt stood in the way of my parents' will and weakened their every effort. The guilt that accompanied them was *a priori*-one perpetually determining the course of future events. In every fiber of their being, they lived in the shadow of their sin and their loss: their sabra son died with the return to the diaspora. Their past as well as their future was deemed lost from that point. My mother was full of sadness, my father full of anger. "Only the good die" was a saying heard often from my parents' mouths, and the punishment gave them no respite.

Most of my childhood days were enfolded in the great events of the Second World War. The Holocaust dictated the entire course of my life up until this day.

It cut off my childhood, erased my youth, and banished me to a world full of suffering and cruel events. Also the fate of my parents, previous to the Holocaust, deeply influenced my life, wounding me and clinging in the darkest recesses of my memory.



Eventually, my father decided to leave his in-law's business and move to Lublin. My mother fell ill; it was this illness that was given as the reason as to why I was forced to remain behind in the house of my grandparents. It was agreed that once my parents were able to stand on their own feet and had overcome the loss of their beloved son, I would be able to join them in Lublin. It was thus that the death of my brother was associated with my separation from my parents.

One significant memory I have of my grandparents' house is of the two domestic servants who were employed there. The first was a Jewish woman in charge of the kitchen; the second, a *goya* (gentile) was in charge of cleaning, along with all other undesirable chores. Once a month my grandparents hired a woman to do their laundry for two to three days. I was particularly friendly with the Polish girl, as she included me in her routine, while the Jewish girl barely acknowledged my presence. In fact, the latter even forbade me playing in the kitchen, knowing full well that there was no other suitable place in the house for me to play. She baked the *challot* for Shabbat but I was never able to get even the tiniest piece of the dough to bake a tiny challah for myself. What galled me the most was that she herself threw a piece from the dough into the

oven and my eyes could not bear how the fire consumed this remnant of the challah that should have been mine. At this time I did not know about the mitzvah of "Hafrashat Challah"- the custom that a small part of the dough be burned to commemorate the burned offerings in the Temple of old. It was a pity that nobody ever bothered to explain to me the significance of this mitzvah. On the other hand I would often join the Polish girl in jumping up and down on cabbages covered in sheets in order to prepare pickled cabbage for the family.

In the town there was no drainage and no tap water. Every two pails of water would be delivered to us by a man whose job was to carry it on a yoke from the well. The man would pour the water into a receptacle in the corridor, from which the water would flow via a thin hose the tap which was in the kitchen, as if it was actually real tap water. But of course there was no real plumbing and underneath the sink stood a bucket used water that the Polish girl emptied from time to time.

During the weekdays and Shabbat we would all of us dine around a big table in the dining room. On major Jewish holidays the food was served in the living room. The main entrance to the house leading straight to the living room was for guests only. In the wintertime, double-glazed windows were installed with pelts of cotton embedded in them with red glass ornamental apples that could be seen inside and outside- a typical winter decoration of the time. In this same room was a glass-doored cabinet in which gold-leafed wine glasses were displayed, along with the silverware: trays, candlesticks and crystals along with a channukiah that I own to this day. The rear of the channukiah was decorated with motifs of lions which faded with time. Also on the channukiah was a hallmark showing the origin of the silverware, along with the year of manufacture-1878. It seems that my grandmother and my grandfather had received the channukiah as a wedding present (in due course this channukiah will be passed on to my son).

To my grandparents' Seder table came aunts and uncles with their children from many other cities across Poland. My grandfather would sit at the head of the table, reclining luxuriantly, asking the grandchildren all the questions of the Haggadah and urging us to find the afikoman. A large bowl and pitcher of water for the washing of hands would be handed to my grandfather by one of the grandchildren. When the door was opened for Eliahu the prophet, I would raise myself from the floor, because the gust of the wind that swept across the room would startle me. Perhaps some invisible being really had entered the room! So I used to check if the quantity of wine in.



**My grandfather Fiszel
Gorzyczanski**

My role at the end of Shabbat was to hold the Havdalah candle for my grandfather. His fingers were translucent through the candle light, a little bit pink but always well-manicured. I remember also that my grandparents' children inherited his beautiful hands. My grandfather would fill the wine goblet to the brim whilst saying the blessing, peering at his nails and then dousing the candle with the wine from the goblet. The Havdallah process always started with my grandfather opening a small silver box filled with aromatic spices from which he would sniff. Every time I hear the blessing of Havdallah now, I am transported back to my grandfather's table.

There are other memories of grandfather. I remember that he would send his shirts to be laundered in the principal town in the province and they would be sent back in cardboard cartons, covered with a thin, rustling paper and I would always have the privilege of opening them. My grandfather's ties were always dark; his white beard was combed with meticulous thoroughness and always exuded a pleasing smell. His perfumed handkerchief was always in the pocket of his kapotah (long black Hasidic coat). I always recognized the smell even though I couldn't come too close to him-I could kiss only his hand and he would stroke my head.

I remember the Wisotzki tea that used to arrive in a big metal box always a colorful illustration on it and the golden t-spoon attached to the box, a goad to the buyer, which was packed in grease paper. Whenever the new box was opened, I would be allowed to look for the

teaspoon. The smell of the tea and its dark color in the thin glasses, the sugar cubes on the silver plate, are still vivid in my memory.

On Friday night my grandmother would cover her face with her hands and sing over the Shabbat candles. She always oversaw my morning prayers and she would pick me up with her hands to kiss the mezuzah, asking me to recite the prayer of Modeh Anee. I remember this prayer well as it was always in the Ashkenazic version. With my bare feet I could feel the bunch of keys that lay always in my grandmother's right dress pocket. The rattle of the keys always intrigued me, piquing my curiosity as to the doors each key would unlock. In the corner of the dining room, on a small shelf was an instrument that performed miracles. Through it, I could hear the voices of people talking to me. Of course, it was a black telephone; an extension of a telephone from my grandfather's store. I remember that my grandfather's telephone number was 28.

On Thursdays the Polish maid would take from a cupboard in one of the rooms a bath of white enamel with black and contoured legs and a hole in the bottom for emptying the water. The water was heated in a large pot on the stove fuelled with coal and wood. My grandmother would bathe for a long time; afterwards, in the same water, they would wash me. My grandfather, on the other hand, would go always to bathe at the Mikveh.

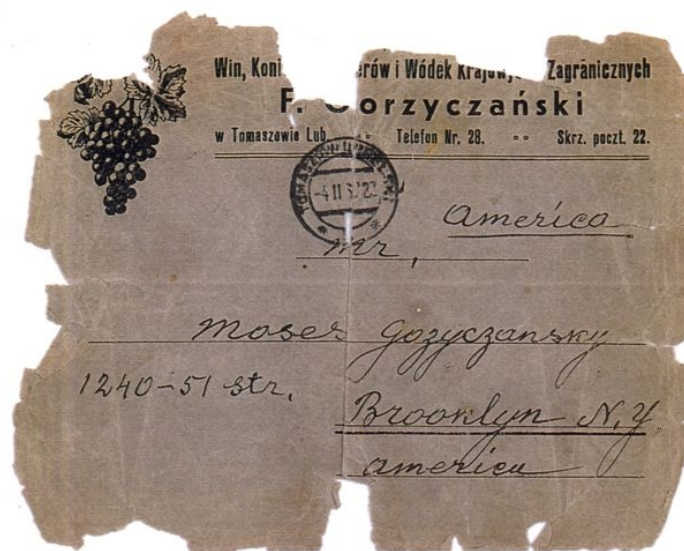


Hanale, Yossele, Mirale, Shayke, Chance, Myself Surale, Lusie, Dysia

Often, my young uncle Yossele and my aunt Hanale took care of me and pampered me. Whenever they left the house they promised a surprise under the pillow the next morning-most of

the time it was chocolate. The *cholent* used to be taken on Friday to the nearest bakery. Every Shabbat before noon we stood and waited for grandpa and when he appeared returning from the Synagogue, we would run to the bakery to bring the ceramic pot of *cholent* covered in paper and a little cloth tied with string. My grandmother always worried whether we would be able to identify our pot in the bakery. Once the cover of was taken off the smell would pervade the entire house. We used to listen to my grandfather's *kiddush* while standing in silence, not a single word uttered, until he distributed a piece of *challah* to everyone for the *hamotzee*. Sometimes my grandfather would come back from the synagogue with a guest as was the custom in the Jewish community; a poor man or a stranger in town invited to the Shabbat meal.

A special and distinctive turf was the backyard of my grandfather's house. A permanent sukkah stood there with a roof which could be raised a twill. In the holiday of Sukkot, we would prepare decorations from colored crepe paper for the sukkah and also paint empty eggshells. Holes were pricked in either end of the egg and one would blow strongly to expel the contents of the egg. A string would then be threaded through the two holes, and the egg shell would then be painted, decorated and hung from the ceiling of the sukkah. In front of the sukkah was a shed for coal and wood and a separate shed for potatoes, onions and beets. In the middle of the back yard was a large pile of wood chippings. Underneath the pile was ice for domestic requirements. The neighbors also received ice in large blocks, reminding me of the frugal times in the early years following the creation of the State of Israel.



A copy an envelope with the logo of my grandfather's business, containing a letter from my grandfather to his son Moshe - 1923.



In the entrance to the store from left to right my grandma Mindel, my mothers's brothers Ishaayahu and Yosef, my Grandfather Fischel, my Grandmother's sister Henia.

The family business consisted of a store retailing and the wholesaling of beverages: wines, vodka, liquors and beer. My grandmother's job was to sit at the till. Every time the till opened or closed it made a loud metallic sound. Beneath the store, which was shaped like the letter chet, was a wine cellar. Adjacent to the walls were low shelves with wooden barrels clamped tight with metal strips, each with a tap in front. Next to each barrel was a glass for tasting, and a machine to fill glass bottles with beer. The empty bottles stood in a swirling machine operated by a foot pedal. One motion of the pedal would fill the bottles; another would seal them with a cap. It was dark and cool in the cellar and an acrid smell lingered in the air; I recall that, when I was six years old, I once had a chance to taste a wine called Tokai Aesbrook.

I remember particularly the cellar as my young uncle Yossele, may he rest in peace, would smoke illicitly on Shabbat and holidays in the outhouse close to it. It would be my job to stand on lookout for him! There is a story of my uncle arriving at the recruitment centre for the Polish Army and being asked for his personal details; among which being his religion. Naturally, my uncle replied that he was Jewish. The interviewer then remarked that in the army anti-Semitic sentiment had no place. As it happened, my uncle's Aryan appearance: his blue eyes, blond hair and athletic physique, along with his strong Polish accent, could easily have helped him to disguise the fact that he was Jewish. On the other hand, the Germans readily winkled out his

Jewish origin, and the circumstances of his death in the Holocaust are unknown to me.



Joselle Gorzyczanski

In time, I was brought back to my parents' house in Lublin, whose lifestyle could not extend to any luxuries. We lived in a small rented fiat, a place I disliked very much. I also greatly disliked the grocery stall my parents managed in the entrance to the court where the market was. The usual journey to and from our flat, located in the Jewish quarter, was through a narrow street, which often was the route for Christian religious marches. I was afraid of any contact with the marchers and whenever they passed through I would cling to the wall and try to disappear. However, sometimes, mysteriously, I felt that I wanted to join in with them!

Every Shabbat my father prayed at the large synagogue where the best cantors, Kosowski, Serota and others, sung. It was I who would accompany my father, in place of the beloved son who had passed away. A teenage choir with their young, clear voices would accompany the singing of the Cantor. During the *Cohanim* blessings, my father would cover me with his *tallit* and I would try and peek out to see what was going on. The services and the atmosphere inspired in me an aura of mystery which somewhat thrills me to this day.

My father explained to me how people who were called to the *Torah* to donate money to the Synagogue. On shabbat and holidays we were not permitted even to utter the word "money", though Jewish people in the shtetl would circumvent this by producing pieces of card with numerals written on edges that people would fold in the desired place, indicating their pledges. Later, the caretaker of the Synagogue would collect the money. Once home, my father would reprise the singing of the famous cantors. In contrast to his lanky physique, his voice was deep and resonant. He would explain to me the contents of the prayers and the importance of repeating some of the words twice or three times in order to stress words of key significance.

At the end of Shabbat my mother and I would go to visit her relatives, the wealthy family of her father's brother, Yosef and Fageh Gorzyczanski. The way to their house passed through a church, a path we would avoid, since we were easily identifiable by the Christian children as Jewish. The house of our relatives, located in the Polish quarter, was both beautiful and spacious. In the dining room stood a large clock while upon the mahogany sideboard sat a gramophone operated by a crank. Records made of metal conveyed melodies through a tuba-like loud speaker.

I cherished the visits to my relative's house. The maid would take me to the children's room and serve us dinner, while the adults supped in the large dining room. It was a house of ten rooms and each had a name according to the color of its walls. On the two other levels of this house lived the two married sons with their respective families. At the end of each visit, I would have to kiss the hand of my grandfather's brother.

It was always rather sad to have to return from this lovely home to our small flat. My father never accompanied us on these visits. He did not much care for this wealthy family on my mother's side, for their prosperity only served to remind him of his failure in business. Along the route to my relative's house, at the corner, were peddlers who sold sour apples. The taste of these apples was unfamiliar to me, being a local recipe, is associated with a painful memory for me. My mother is buying an apple; I eat it and she asks me if it is tasty. All week long I had waited for this taste of apples more than for the visit to my relatives. When I am finished eating, I hear my mother saying, "the little girl eats the whole apple without even offering the tiniest piece to her mother." So the apple harks back to its original role in the bible: the fruit of temptation I could never resist because of which I had been cast out.

Another memory from those visits is of a clear and cold winter evening with ice covering the roads. We are on the way home from our relatives. My mother is holding my hand so I won't slip on the ice, but all of a sudden she herself slips and falls. I am standing over her and laughing. The expression of my mother and the taste of the apple run deep in my memory and abruptly leap out of me.

In the delicatessen of Lubartowska Street sausages were sold. By far my favorite was the *oifshnit* (*corndbeef*) of breast meat dipped in marinate. Thin slices of the *oifshnit* be placed into a fresh bun with mustard. Nowhere in the world have I ever tasted anything that is remotely like it. In front of the delicatessen in the corner of the street an old woman was selling *bubelach* made from buckwheat flour and yeast and baked in small ceramic bowls. I attempted many times to bake the same, but with no success. At the beginning of 1939, not yet nine years old, I spent the summer at my maternal grandmother's house, which stood empty after my grandfather's death.

My father remained in Lublin to manage business. At the end of August there was a great deal of unrest and much of war. Rumors were in the air and each had his own version of the events about to unfold. Meanwhile, instructions from the Defense Ministry were relayed by megaphones in the streets by messengers who went from door to door. The instructions that fires caused by falling bombs could be extinguished with the sand kept in containers on street corners. All men were drafted and the Polish army prepared itself for a fight “to the last drop of blood”.

One beautiful day my mother and I went to see her sister who owned a large villa close to the forest on the other side of town. The house consisted of two stories with many rooms; the upper level was rented to a gentile Polish school master. At the front of the house was a garden of flowers and at the back a vegetable garden supplying all that was needed for a Jewish-Polish cuisine. Along the fence-line were numerous fruit trees, childhood fruits the likes of which I have never since experienced. In the forest nearby we would collect *puzumake*-berries, the size of peas, along with *yagodib*blackberries, which made your face and clothes turn black and purple. I never managed to find the translation of the names of these fruits in any dictionary. As we reached the main street, there was a din of aircraft overhead. I raised my head to look, exclaiming to my mother that these were most likely German airplanes. My mother placated me, saying that if that were the case, we would have already heard a siren. As it turned out, the sirens, were heard only after first bombs fell on the city.

Quickly, we ran to the basement of the nearest house where many others were already gathered. I found myself trapped between legs of strangers, choking with fear. At one point I was pushed toward the open door, with my mother behind me. We ran to bomb shelters that had been dug a few days before adjacent to the local school. Only a few seconds passed and we heard a large explosion realizing that the house that was hit was the one from which we had fled. The house collapsed completely. We were witnessing the beginning of the German invasion of Poland and of an inexorable to-ing and fro-ing of fate. One moment events would impel us in one direction; in the next we would be driven in another. We tried to get as far as we could from the bombing, stealing through fields at the outskirts of the city. Finally, we reached the backyard of my Aunt Chanche.

From the direction of the old city, where the houses were made of wood , we saw a huge fire. This was the part of the city where my great-grandfather and uncles and cousins were living. The city, whose origins were the period of the Council of Four Lands (autonomous rulers of the Jewish People in Poland from the middle of the 16th Century), was all ablaze. In the first air raid the old city was completely destroyed including the ancient Jewish community of Tomashow Lubelski, and hundreds of people perished.

For three days, the air raids continued. We fled to the nearest village to house of a gentile who owned a flour mill and who was a friend of the family. In one air raid the blast hurled me into the canal that powered the mill and I soon found myself splashing up against the great stone mill-wheel. My mother grabbed me by the braids and pulled me towards her. I remember pulling myself from water once the raid had ended and drying myself on a haystack. The smell of the effluent from the canal combined with the smell of the fresh hay is still a strong memory for me from that time. It is a smell that I still recall from time to time; one that I can easily identify.

At the mill, I helped the wife of the gentile friend to make butter. After a few days, the cream that piled on top of the milk was poured into a bottle and sealed with a lid. We would shake the bottle from side to side using both hands until pieces of butter floated up to the surface of the greeny water. We would then take out the water and the butter from the bottle, distilling the butter from the liquid and consolidating the butter into a single mass. I remember that there was also a use for the greeny water that was left. In one of my first visits to the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, I saw a receptacle for preparing butter utilizing the same technique. I thought to myself "things of my past are already in museums!"

When the air raids were finally over, German soldiers stormed the . We had not seen even a single sign of the Polish Army. While the women to their homes, the menfolk hid themselves; we all assumed the men were in great danger if caught by the Germans. We also heard rumors suggesting that the war was at an end and Germans had prevailed over the city. We felt the strong arm and wrath of the Germans. I Remember my grandmother, my mother and I sitting in the house of my grandmother on the sofa. From the angle at which I was sitting, I could see the kitchen door, the back entrance to the house. There was a loud knocking on the door. None of us went to open it, paralyzed with fear. All of a sudden I saw the flash of a lance attempting to break the wood of the white door into two. The second attempt was successful and the next thing I knew German soldiers were in the kitchen. The sound of German reverberated throughout the house and the order *Schlissel* be heard loudly. The word was well-known to us in Yiddish-it meant surrender the keys for the business, the store and the wine cellar.

In a state of panic, I jumped from the window of the dining room into the back yard. I ran and climbed over the high fence and into the yard of the neighbor, a cobbler. There I hid myself underneath his work table until I was discovered some hours later.

It was in this way-full of terror and foreboding-that the fateful days of September 1939 began: It was explained to me that these German soldiers were from the front line and that after them would come the administrators and logistics people who would be less aggressive and who

would restore order to the lives of the Polish citizens. But all around us dreadful stories were heard of Jews being sized in the street and their beards savagely cut. As we all now know, two years later the Germans built gas chambers near the neighboring town Belzec into which tens of thousands of Jews vanished. But at the time we had no notion of what even the night might hold, much less the morning or the months to come.

Following the German raid, we all shifted into the house of my Aunt. One day we heard a rumor concerning negotiations between the Germans and Russians who were trying to straighten out their common frontier. The next thing we knew was Germans evacuating our town replaced by soldiers of the Soviet Union. Immediately we felt as if a great load had been lifted from our shoulders. A long silence followed, but every day brought with it fresh rumors. I remember one day we were eating lunch and suddenly we heard from outside a sound of messages being broadcast from a megaphone mounted on a large vehicle declaring that the Soviet Army was about to retreat from the city. Whoever desired to follow them out was free to do so-but they would have to drop everything and organize themselves immediately for the flight.

Without hesitation, the older people decided to accept this offer. My uncle and aunt went down to the cellar and, following after them, I observed them concealing silverware and currency in a cavity they made in the wall and then sealed with a brick. It seems to me that I could easily identify this hiding place today, even though we left the house right away, never to return.

My uncle rented a horse and cart and loaded onto it the items necessary for our flight. My grandmother was seated on the cart along with my two female cousins and me, and we began to follow the retreating Russian army. The Polish maid promised to guard the house of my grandparents in their absence. Just before evening we reached the Ukranian city of Ravaroska. My Aunt, with her family and my grandmother were put into one room in the house of a local Jew in return for a fair sum of money. There was no sufficient room for my mother and I. So together with the other refugees, we searched, through the empty streets of the town for a place to sleep. Only in the morning when the stores opened did my mother find a place in return for working in a shoe store.

My mother's energy and strength was a great boon to us in these hard times. We lived in the attic of a laundry room and we thanked God for our great fortune, since many others were still milling around the town, unable to find any place to live or to sleep. Awful rumors about things occurring in the territories occupied by the Germans continued to be taken with a grain of salt. We simply refused to believe that the horrors were true. It was only much later that we realized that it was all too real.

In the meantime, my father remained in Lublin trying to find a way to join us in the Ukraine. My young uncle was also in the territory still occupied by the Germans. One day, they managed to smuggle themselves through the border to the Soviet side with the help of professional smugglers who charged them an exorbitant amount of money for their services.

Once reunited, we rented a room and started to look for work. My parents made Jam and sold it in the streets. There was a strong smell of jam cooking for many hours in our small room. We filled many a small glass and our product became a great success.

My female cousins and I were enrolled in a local school and we began to memorize the verses of the Ukrainian national poet, Shavchenko "*when I die bury me...*" My young uncle rented a room for himself and my grandmother, mother's sister and her husband and two daughters lived in a nice apartment. The rest of the family: brothers, sisters and children remained in territories occupied by the Germans. Commerce blossomed thanks to the Soviet liberators who gave the impression that they had invented a new world, hitherto unknown to us. They bought everything there was to buy; silk nightgowns were thought to be gowns left over from royal balls. Of course, out of national pride, they would say that in Russia they had factories that produced all manner of things, including oranges! (impossible due to Russian climate). When they were asked by the Jews if they had also *tsores* (misery and trouble) they would declare "plenty!-there is enough left for all of you!"

It happened at this time that my mother's cousin Mania decided to get married and the wedding took place in our modest room. We even hired a fiddler to make the occasion a memorable one. My mother, who was known to be a good cook, prepared the refreshments and it was left to me to escort the bride to the *mikveh*.

It seems that the main activity in our daily routine was standing in queues for groceries. The obsession with queuing was such that if someone leaned against a locked door of a store it would be enough to start a new queue immediately! People would stand in line with amazing patience for hours upon end-without even having the slightest clue as to what product they would be receiving or when they will reach the front of the queue! A very distinctive folklore emerged associated with the long queues and the distribution of food .

Some time passed and we began to feel a little more secure and accustomed to the new circumstances. Then suddenly the Soviets announced their desire to "reward" the Jewish refugees from Poland with Soviet citizenship.

Immediately my father decided against having anything to do with this "offer" and waited quietly for it to pass. He had already gleaned much from the Soviet soldiers about the reality of

life under Soviet dictatorship. Unfortunately, the Soviets persisted in their intentions relative to the Polish refugees., and soon began transferring to labor camps deep inside Soviet Russia anyone who refused to accept the Soviet citizenship.

Days were ordinary and normal but when night fell Soviet soldiers would snatch refugees from their houses and send them to exile to the plains deep inside the Soviet Union. It was thus that the decision of my father not to accept Soviet citizenship made us vulnerable and candidates for exile. We had no control over our destinies but nevertheless hoped that somehow we would manage to survive. But even in the face of these deportations, my father remained adamant that Soviet citizenship was something we had to decline at all costs.

It was clear to us that we didn't have any possibility of influencing the course of events that had been predetermined by Soviet authorities. My father, however, was a strong individualist often chose to go against the grain. Moreover, he resorted to the analytical skills that he had honed over years of painstaking study of complex in the Yeshiva to examine the situation from all angles. It was only in retrospect that we realized that my father's assessment of the pros and cons had been absolutely spot on. And yet in times of uncertainty, how could one know if one was making right decision? How could one relate to a situation over which one had no control and in which whatever decision we made could be an irreversible one? Our zig-zagging progress makes me think that the choices we make are actually not rational but instinctive. In any event, we found comfort in the fact that our ability to influence events was so limited. The course of my life was mainly determined by twists of fate which made me a strong believer in the power of destiny. My good fortune escorted me through the most difficult of moments and it is something for which I am full of gratitude.

The fate of my grandmother and my mother's relatives, who did not receive Soviet citizenship and who contemplated returning to Tomashov Lubelski was to perish in the Holocaust. The brothers and the sisters of my mother who did not manage to flee also perished. My father's parents, his brothers, his sisters and their families remained under the German occupation. They all perished.

My mother 's young sister Hanele along with her husband and her daughter Shoshana were saved thanks to a gentile who hid them in a bunker. Shoshana Artzieli lives today with her husband and her son in Tel Aviv but the memories of the bunker remain a painful obsession that possesses her throughout daily life. My cousin Shlomo Goren (Gorzyczanski), my mother's nephew, remained alive thanks to the sacrifice of a Polish couple who hid him behind a cupboard in Tomoshov-Lubelski. A short time ago, the couple who rescued my mother's nephew were

posthumously named as Righteous Gentiles by Yad VaShem. The sons of the couple, who received the citation showed no sign of pride in the of their parents-it seemed to me that they were not happy for their Polish neighbors to know what their parents had done. My mother's brother Ishayahu (Sheike) who immigrated to Israel in the mid-twenties, returned also to Poland where he married Gutta. Together they had made aliyah and established a family. Their children, Nira and Rina-are my female cousins. As I intimated before, Ishayahu and Gutta changed their surname to Goren.

Appendix One

What follows is a rabbinical certificate of genealogy prepared by Rabbi Moshe, my great-great grandfather. On the frontispiece are the tablets of the Covenant (Shela-Shnei Luchot Ha'Brit).

Below is the handwriting of my father-in-law Rabbi Yossef Chaim Bageleizen, may he rest in peace, who presented me with this document sixty years ago-Moshe HaCohen Gordon 1973.

Appendix Two

The Children of my great-grandparents-Drazel & Israel Gorzyczanski

Fischel (my Grandfather) was married to Mindel (my Grandmother) nee Stern.

Moshe left Tomashov Lubelski in 1914 and immigrated to the United States where he changed his name to Gordon. Following World War II, he and his wife Esther made Aliyah to Israel. Moshe dedicated himself to writing the memoirs of his father's family.

Chaya was married to Kalman Ehrlich. They and some of their children perished in the Holocaust.

Mania, Chaya and Kalmans young daughter and her husband David Katz from Tomashov Lubelski left Poland and immigrated to Israel following the war. David passed away and Mania now lives in Kiryat Motskin, a suburb of Haifa. Among their children were Chaya, who died at a very young age in Israel.

Israel lives in Kiryat Motskin with his family.

Mordechai immigrated before World War II and established a family. He and his wife Shifra died later on. Of their children Neeva became widowed at an early age. David, like Neeva, lives with his family in Kiryat Motskin.

Ishayahu immigrated to the United States. His daughter Belcha and her husband Leon Gordon (they were cousins) in Jerusalem. Their children include Yaffa married to Eli Rom and who died in 1999. Their son Eran, his wife Yali, their children Aviv, Reut, Tomer, Noah and Natan live in Jerusalem.

Yosef and his wife Fageh and two of their children, who lived in Lublin, perished in the Holocaust.

Channa who was married to Schlesinger perished in the Holocaust.

Penina immigrated to Uruguay. For some time after the war contact was maintained with her but this has not continued.

Appendix Three

The Children of Fischel & Mendel Gorzyczansky (my Grandparents)

Mindl nee Stern was the sister of Yechiel Stern, the father of Shlomo Stern. The children of Shlomo Stern and his wife Henia were Yechiel, Dita and Chaya. All live in Israel. My grandmother Mindl perished in the Holocaust.

Moshe lived on in Kozenitz. He, his wife and the four children perished in the Holocaust.

Mendel immigrated to the United States in 1915 and there changed his surname to Gordon. Following World War II, he immigrated to Israel where he died.

Herschel and his wife Sara nee Tandetnik (from Lodz) perished in the Holocaust. Their son Shlomo was saved by a Christian family in Tomashow and he subsequently immigrated to Israel on the famous ship *Exodus*. story of his salvation is one that Shlomo himself should be left to recount! Recently, the children of the family that saved him were granted the title of Righteous Gentiles by Yad Vashem. Of our family, Shlomo was the only one to be hidden by Poles in Tomashow. He is married to Zipporah nee Shechter and today lives in Rishon Letzion. Their daughter Sarit married Ronen Srulko; their children are Tal, Gal, and Shir. Nitzan married Sara nee Friedman. Alon remains single. All live in Israel.

Ishayahu immigrated to Israel in 1926 and established a family. He and his wife Gutta died in the fifties. Their daughter Nira married Chaim Lifshitz and they have two sons, Danny and Yuval.

Rina is the widow of Avner Davidi. Like Nira, Rina lives in Ramat .

Yosef was the youngest of the sons to perish in the Holocaust. His place of death unknown.

Chansha married Moshe Avruch-Musifof. Their daughters Ida and Lusia perished in the Holocaust.

Penina immigrated to Israel in 1928 and married Shaul Varshefsky. Their son Tudrus Varshefsky is a fifth generation Jerusalemite. Their daughter Esther married Yoshua Landner. Their children are Shauli, Mina and Ilana.

Efi (Ephraim Fischel) lives in Canada.

Rachel married Ehud Ben-Dor. Their children Dorit and Uri live in Israel.

Chaya married Elisha Gorzyczanski (cousins). They perished in the Holocaust. Henia, married to Rosenthal, both Holocaust survivors, died in Israel. Their daughter Shoshanna married Elnakam Artzieli and they have a son Yoav. All live in Israel.

Miriam married Shmuel Friedman from Lublin (my own parents). The parents of Shmuel, Ephraim and Mali, his sisters and brothers all perished. The grandson of Shmuel's brother Dov Bar-Shalom, his wife Jacqueline and their children Ayala, Liran and Nurit live in Israel. My mother Miriam died in 1974 and my father Shmuel in 1978. Both are buried in the Holon Cemetery. Their daughter Sara (who is penning this tale) married Yitzchak Barnea (Bernzweig), the son of Haya and Hersch (Zvi) Bernzweig from Shedlitz, The sisters of Yitzchak: Chava, Raisel, Marsha and their mother Haya all perished in the Holocaust. Their father Hersch along with his son Yitzchak escaped to Soviet-held territory. Herseh died in Uzbekistan. At the end of the War Yitzchak returned to Poland. The children of Sara and Yitzchak Barnea are:

1. **Chayuta** who is married to Zali, son of Miriam and Rafi Grevich.

Their sons are Eyal-Michael and Daniel David,

2. Ofer, who is married to Tamar nee Bracha, and Noam Zak. Their children are Gili,

Tal-Sharon and Ehud-Nadav.

The Expulsion

At the end of 1939 I was nine years old. Following the occupation of Poland, the Germans and Soviets divided Poland between them along the lines set out in the Molotov-Ribbentrop Treaty. For several weeks after the border between the Germans and the Soviets shifted continually. My city of birth Tomaszów Lubelski, which lay close to the border with the Ukraine, was occupied by the Germans but was later handed to the Soviets. It then, however, later reverted to German control.

During the time that we were under German occupation, we learned to heed the cruel intentions of the Nazis. My family decided to flee to Rawa-Ruska which was in the territories controlled by the Soviets. The Jewish refugees, Polish Citizens who had fled from the Germans to the Soviet side were defined by the Soviets as untrustworthy elements. The Soviets did not trust the Polish communists whether Jew or Pole; indeed, they trusted no one. According to the rumor that was going about, the Soviet soldiers were taking the refugees out in the middle of the night from their temporary abodes, leading them to freight trains to be expelled to forced labor camps in the depths of the USSR. My father decided that we should pack up everything, saying, "if we are ready, most likely they will let us take everything with us." Our possessions were, in any case, not that much-the little we had been able to carry with us in our flight from the Germans.

So on the fateful night, my parents packed and the three of us slept in our clothes, alert to every noise. Sure enough, in the middle of the night came a loud knocking upon the door. Of course, we were in no doubt as to whose knocking this could be. Even before they entered our dwelling, I could smell the scent of these Russian soldiers: the bitter smell of their sweat wafted from their *shinnels* (coats). It seemed that they never washed those coats! The sense of smell has its own memory and the smell of the Soviet soldiers is tagged to that memory as something very distinctive. Later on, I learned that the uniforms of the people of the NKVD (the Soviet secret police) were kept clean and carefully pressed.

As it happened, two soldiers entered and immediately saw that our belongings were already packed. My father had been absolutely right. The soldiers were amicable-they even joked with us. We went out into the darkness and we saw the parked truck full of Jews who had already been collected. The soldiers assisted us in getting up on the truck.

Following a short ride, we arrived at the train station. The freight coaches were waiting, their doors open to receive the "passengers:" ones who had not selected their own destination. Nor, on the other hand, had they been obliged to purchase the correct ticket! All that we had was one

question in our minds: "where are we going?"

We did not find amongst the expelled any of our relatives. It seemed as if they had managed to remain behind. We climbed a ladder into the coach. Inside was darkness and a very unpleasant smell. Each family huddled together, trying to organize itself. There was no room to sit, nor were there any lights. In one corner was a small curtain, behind which was a bucket for us to relieve ourselves. On the platform were armed soldiers guarding our coaches. I was very frightened of their guns but perhaps they were protecting us from any danger that might be lurking.

Then all at once we heard somebody calling our names-our relatives, who had heard about our impending expulsion and had come to try to convince our parents to remain by paying a bribe. Our relatives offered to give us the money for the bribe but my father would not accede for two reasons. One, was something that we never spoke of-only later did I learn of it. This was that my father was absolutely unprepared to accept any financial aid from my mother's family. The second reason which was not so taboo was that those who remained behind were offered Soviet citizenship. As I've already spoke of, it was my father's opinion we should not under any circumstances accept this offer. My father had already of the dictatorship of the proletariat-the communist regime of the USSR and its lofty ideology which sanctioned expelling innocent people to labor camps and to their deaths.

The conversation between my parents and our relatives was conducted loudly, with everyone speaking at the top of their voices in Yiddish. Of course, other Jews who were being expelled overheard the conversation and in the end the entire carriage was loudly divided between people who supported my father's position and those supporting the position of my relatives! Following a short conversation with Russian officers, we saw some families disembark from the train. My parents, however, decided to stay in the coach. We did not realize that this was the last meeting we would ever have with our relatives who remained on the platform: my grandmother, my mother's brother and sister and their families including my two female cousins who were my best friends. Such was the way in which they vanished forever from my life. Of course at the time we could not have possibly known that we would never see each other again. Nor did we know that we had chosen life. Just so, our relatives could not have known that theirs' was the choice of death.

It must be said that the Russians did not perceive our expulsion as being any kind of humanitarian act. They simply acted in accordance with a well-known Soviet method of uprooting an untrustworthy populace from its environment and transfer it to labor camps in the depths of the Soviet Union; just as they did in the case of many other minorities. From the outside

of the train the door was closed and bolted; through the two small windows of the train we could see nothing outside at all. All we could hear were the voices of our relatives. They were trying to give us words of encouragement and some words of farewell. They were giving us good tidings, full of hope for our next meeting, whenever it would be. I did not disturb or interrupt my parents in these moments and I had no opinion of my own in the matter of whether we should remain or go.

The journey that lay ahead to a still-unknown destination filled me with curiosity and with a sense of adventure. My parents, especially my father, knew better than I what was good for us. Everyone aboard the train praised his wisdom. It seemed that my father's adeptness in the learning of Talmud helped him to assess wisely in a truly analytical fashion the problems of our existence.

Without any warning, the train began to lurch forward. It took a day and a night, but finally we began to adjust to our situation. Then all of a sudden there was a screech of brakes and we came to a halt, not knowing where we were or how long we would remain at a standstill. The doors did not open, meaning that our Russian companions did not know for how long the trains were to remain stationary. Behind the curtain, the bucket was full, waiting to be emptied at the first possible opportunity. Those who were standing nearest to the bucket suffered greatly. The monotonous movement of the train lulled us to sleep but its sudden stop woke us up immediately. I did not think even those driving the train knew what the final destination would be. All we knew was that it was the Soviet powers who were dictating our destiny.

During the day we traveled and at nighttime we stopped-and sometimes vice versa. The soldiers that escorted us did not speak to us at any time. Sometimes we could identify a Jew at a train station and that Jew was always able to guess our identity in turn. In the beginning we conducted conversations by glance alone. But as soon as we were certain that we could converse in Yiddish, we would begin talking to that person, trying to get an angle on what our fate would be. On occasion the Jews would say things to us like "here you'll live and here you'll die" or "such is life" (*Zdieas poziviosh e zdieas omriush*). These refrains reflected our reality without any condemnation of the Soviet regime being implied. Here in Russia, very few would risk jeopardizing themselves by expressing open criticism of the regime. Those who did dare risked long-term expulsion to labor camps leading to almost inevitable death. Hence Soviet citizens would not freely discuss their opinions. Their conversations dealt only with where they are "giving" (a metaphor for selling of one product or another).

In every station, before we disembarked on the platform, we could find a large container of boiling water called a *keyppjatok*. was a free service provided for the citizenry as an expression of caring by the Soviet authorities. When the doors of the coaches opened, people jumped onto the platform and ran immediately to the line for the *keyppjaytuk*. the train started moving again before people could have their turn with the boiling water, so the unfortunates would be forced to run in panic to get aboard again, trying to clasp on with their hands to those strong enough to pull them aboard. Sometimes, in making a dash for the train, you would spill all of your boiling water on the platform rendering all your efforts vain. Sometimes it happened that someone was simply too late and did not manage to climb back aboard the train at all. In these cases, there was nothing to be done. Close relatives would be separated from each other for many years until-and if-an incidental encounter after the War should happen to reunite them.

My father was always amongst the last to rush back to the train with the boiling water. I was always anxious and afraid and sometimes dreamed that my father would be unable to reach the train in time and that it would pull out leaving him behind. The dream was a recurring one and it became all too familiar. I can still vividly recall the phase in which I would awake and yet continue to dream, full of anxiety. Such was our journey upon the train which went on for an entire month until the final stop at a station with no name.

It happened that on our coach was written "The 47th Kilometre." Later on we discovered that this was the distance from the village of Konosha to the city of Archinglask, which lay to the northwest of us. Somewhere halfway, the train made an unscheduled stop at a small camp. It was announced to us that we had reached our destination and that this was the final station and that we must now disembark. Having got used to being ensconced in the coach, we were unable to imagine what lay ahead for us.

We collected our belongings and disembarked. Carrying our luggage in both hands was another sign of our refugee life. We gathered in the centre of the camp; the Russian being spoken all around us an unfamiliar tongue to us who spoke only Yiddish and Polish. And the regulations that were about to be imposed upon us were completely unfamiliar. The translator explained that the work in the labor camp was compulsory and that we were not permitted to live on the perimeter of the camp without official approval.

Then the manager of the camp was introduced to us. His name was Balkov. Also introduced to us was a man called Bikov, who was in charge of the administration of the camp. Finally we were introduced to the overseer of the laborers. All adults who were not too old or too young were to work chopping wood. Since the Soviet law mandated compulsory education of children,

mothers were forced to work while their small children stayed all day long in the nursery. There were several types of work available, including carpentry, cooking, and helping in the kindergarten. My mother was the first to offer herself as a professional cook. She had a grasp of Russian from the time of World War I and nobody needed to teach her cooking-she was, after all, a Jewish mother! My mother was given work in the kindergarten kitchen and we soon understood that this was an extremely good position. Thanks to my mother, I managed to receive special food from time to time-the kind usually given to babies only, including butter. "Taking" some food to your daughter was not considered by anyone to be tantamount to theft but as a perk of the job.

Nevertheless, the matter of the extra food was one we kept to ourselves. My mother saw herself as very fortunate that she was not sent to work in the forest. The kindergarten was housed in a large heated shed and the children were given food that was not to be found in any other place in the camp. In the meantime, my father worked cutting wood in the forest. The trees were very tall and all cutting was done manually. Sawing the tree to the point where it could finally be felled was an extremely onerous task-as well as being a very dangerous one. There were about thirty sheds in all in the labor camp, all surrounded by forest. In our shed-number 28-were four rooms, each being inhabited by a different family. The number of people in each room was of no concern to the authorities. In each room there were wooden boards to sleep on, a table, chairs and a wood stove for cooking. There was a single window through which could be seen the other sheds. All the rooms shared a bucket for water, a broom and a saw. It was always dark in the sheds and it was only by opening the external door that some light was able to get in. The only sound to be heard was that of the passing trains. In the centre of the camp was a well surrounded by buildings, including a hall in which people would gather for communal and political meetings. There was also a restaurant and a grocery where unlimited vodka could be bought! On seldom occasions, sweets could be purchased, along with newspapers-though these were always at least a week out of date! There was even a movie theatre. What more could we have asked for.

We began to grow accustomed to the conditions in the place and there was no need to be concerned for our daily needs-these were all taken care of by the authorities in the camp. I was among those children who were obliged to attend school in the camp. The school was in the village of the *kulaks*- who had, in the past, been Ukranian landowners and who had been expelled to these villages at the time of the collectivization of farms by the Bolsheviks. At our first meeting with the kulaks, it was explained to us that "here, you live and die." In other words, there was no way out from this place. The kulaks had had much experience already of life in this region and we believed what they said.



Each day we made the journey on foot to school which was several kilometers away from the camp. I learned a new language and noticed that sometimes a word in Polish would have a completely different meaning in Russian. When I asked the teacher in my Polish accent how "writing" was said in Russian, it sounded as if I asking about urination! While the local children giggled, she took me out and showed me the toilet! This levity possesses me until this day and ever since then I have asked no more questions! Even so, I was eager to learn as fast as possible the new language. We were ten Jewish kids in the classroom, very prominent in our distinctive dress and also in the way in which we assimilated the new material.

My classmate was one of my neighbors from the shed. We became a "couple"-a relationship enforced by, amongst other things, the long daily walk to our school. There was no road, no transportation and our Polish clothes were hardly adequate for the environment, there being no possibility of purchasing warmer clothing. On the way to school we would pass through the rail yards. We would place our hands on the rails and feel for the vibrations that would suggest the imminent arrival of a train. In the winter it was quite frightening for snow was everywhere and you never knew if your next step would sink you so deep in snow that you would disappear. We also feared that our boots would get stuck crossing the railway lines and that we would be unable to escape an oncoming train. There was also the risk of slipping on the rails causing serious injury. I always remembered the poem by the Russian poet Niekraivos that described the construction of the railroad by prisoners sentenced to hard labor under the Car and how every section of railroad reputedly had the grave of a prisoner underneath of it.

We always kept an eye on each other to ensure that our noses did not turn white-a sign of immanent freezing. If ever this happened, we were to take a clump of snow and rub it vigorously

against the whitened nose. In particular, our feet were extremely cold, so we would wrap newspaper around our socks for a little extra warmth before putting on our boots. A common joke at this time was what newspaper should you use to wrap your feet *Isvestia* (News) or *Pravda* (Truth). Some would quip that in the "News" there was no truth and that in the "Truth" there was no news! Before you entered the shed, you had to remove all snow from your boots, otherwise they would not dry in time for the next day-and there was no substitute pair! It was freezing cold in the labor camp; at times the temperature would reach minus 50 degrees Celsius. Whenever you left the shed you had to cover your entire face, including your mouth, and this made it very difficult to breathe. Your eyelashes would become frozen like tiny stalagmites. You could not wear glasses and sometimes a frozen bird would fall upon you like a rock. It seemed that our thoughts also became frozen and everything was frozen over in silent white. The only advantage of this extreme weather was the absence of illness.

The rainy season was the scariest time of year. Never in my life did I hear such deafening thunder as I did then, nor lightning which would light up the sky with a single bolt. In many ways, it looked as if the end of the world was drawing near-we were in the middle of nowhere and here we would surely die. In the summer the nights were white because the sun never fully descended; it would fall to the horizon and immediately begin ascending again. Nature with its various phenomena was a vision of beauty at its peak.

Equally mighty a "vision" was the absolute power of the Bolshevik regime over us. My father told his overseer that he was not able to continue sawing trees for he was short of height and far too thin-he simply did not have the strength for this kind of work. He was immediately incarcerated and found guilty of disobedience. He was locked up in one of the sheds that was used as a prison, of which there was one for women and one for men. Inside each prison it was pitch dark and full of rats. I would go to visit my father from time to time and he would cheer me up.

Eventually my father was taken under guard to the court of the provincial town of Vologda. My father explained to the judge that according to the Soviet constitution each was required to contribute according to his ability and to receive according to his needs. Since he was not physically capable of performing the heavy wood-cutting, the burden was only compounded for his fellows, which was clearly unfair according to the express intention of the Soviet system. I don't know if there was any other instance in the Soviet justice system in which the judge accepted a defense along the line of my fathers! In the Soviet Union, if you came before a judge, you were always guilty. A very common joke about the Soviet courts concerned a man who was sentenced to 25 years in prison and who appealed his sentence to the Supreme Court. When the

judge asked him what he was guilty of, the man answered "I haven't done anything!" The Judge's reaction was "In our country, for doing nothing you receive only *five* in prison-but since you received twenty-five years, you obviously did *something*."

On the recommendation of the Judge my father was given work in the camp more congenial to his physical abilities-placing boards down on the ground between sheds so that people would not have to step in the mud. The manager of the labor camp was a man without a nose-just two flat nostrils in the centre of his face. The adults would whisper so that the kids would not hear that this deformity was due to syphilis. As children a favorite pastime was to count up the number of coaches in the passing trains. Some would have as many as 150 coaches. As children we were somewhat aloof from the hardship of the camp and we even enjoyed our childhood there. In every class the portrait of Stalin gazed down from the wall and we all knew that it was he who was taking care of us. At home, no one would talk of the hardships of life in the camp. The adults only spoke quietly about the efforts one should make in order to overcome the difficulties. The daily routine was getting up for work very early, returning at night deeply exhausted, eating, and-since there was no electricity-going directly to bed. We did not suffer from hunger as you could easily buy several portions of soup from the local restaurant. The flavor of the soup was good but I learned how to make the soup even thicker and tastier by frying a little flour and then adding it to the broth. We would eat the soup with a slice of black bread and there was nothing better on those cold evenings. We children would go to the forest to collect wood for heating the sheds. We would cut the wood with a saw and it was much like a game to us-it was also a good way of staying warm. My mother was forced to exchange our silver cutlery at the neighboring kulaks' village for onions, garlic and a few vegetables. My parents also had a diamond ring-but this was kept in case very bad times should befall us. The lack of balanced diet caused me to become covered in pimples which disappeared immediately when I ate the onion, garlic and vegetables. Later on, when I went to Israel I managed to pass on to my children and grandchildren a love of garlic and onions without ever letting on the reason for why they were so important to me! I hope that after reading this my loved ones will understand just how important they are and will pass this down, generation to generation.

I was fortunate in the camp to receive a rooster. My parents decided not to slaughter the rooster, in anticipation of the eggs she might lay. Every day I would feed the rooster until one day the chirping of new chicks was to be heard. I raised the chicks firstly in our shed and afterwards outside. The chicks were accustomed only to me: they would climb over my head and shoulders and would eat only from my hands. The chicks would run after me and from this I gained many precious extra moments of childhood happiness. Everyone else noted my success in raising the

chicks and all the other children were jealous of me. I found it very hard to fall asleep because of the fear that these chicks would one day grow up and would have to be slaughtered. How would I ever be able to eat the meat from these chicks?

Some time later my father was transferred to work in a brick "factory". I would go to the factory to bring him food from home. On my way to the factory I would see drunken Russians arguing loudly whose shirt would be sold today and whose would be sold tomorrow so that vodka might be purchased. The drinking of vodka was the habitual refuge of the locals. The vodka was much cheaper than what would have been required of the government to improve the standard of living of the citizenry and the drinking of vodka greatly reduced the urgency of the citizens to question the regime. On the other hand, the raspberries, blueberries and all kinds of berries and mushrooms that grew with abandon in the forest were Nature's generous contribution to mankind. But the darkened forest with its tempting fruits could easily turn into a trap. One day, when my friends and I were gathering berries in the forest we lost our way and this scared us half to death.

After a while, we began to receive postcards from our relatives which were still in the part of Poland controlled by the Germans. We were extremely surprised to discover that our address was some place real-somewhere to which people were actually able to track us! It surprised us to think that we were still on the map. The postcards were stamped with the Nazi Swastika. Our relatives asked for us for help; for boxes of food. Between the lines we could sense their despair but there was nothing we could do. Within a short time, this tenuous connection with our relatives disappeared altogether. Only later on did we discover what their fate had been.



A postcard from our relatives

In 1941, despite the agreement between the Soviets and the Germans, the Germans declared war on the Soviet Union. The exiled Polish Government that sat in London became an ally of the USSR. According to the agreement between the two governments, the Soviets were committed to freeing the Polish citizens who had been exiled to the labor camps. Some of those Poles were recruited into the Polish army that had been formed on Soviet soil under the command of General Andres. News concerning this agreement eventually reached our ears and it was in this way that we were released from the labor camp. Upon release we were permitted to choose where we would like to live in the USSR-we could live anywhere at all, so long as it was not too close to the border. It seems that we Jews were still considered a disloyal element-the classification that had been the initial reason for our expulsion from Poland to the labor camps. My father chose the southern part of the USSR, a big city named Akmolinsk in the republic of Kazakhstan. Many others tended to agree with the choice of my father because there was always a logical reason behind everything that he did. The warm climate, so that we would not suffer from cold any more; the population being well-established and not transient, meant that our lives would be much easier than before and we would probably have little difficulty in establishing ourselves there. At least this was the way the adults thought. We will see, later on, that it was not quite as they had hoped it would be.

We farwelled the locals, the exiled Ukranian kulaks, who had once told us "here you live and here you will die." It seems that they were the ones who were destined to remain there to fulfill their own proverb and it was with some jealousy that they bid us farewell. As the trains were leaving, we could hear the terrifying noises of the air battles between the Russians and the Germans. The journey from the north of the USSR to the southern part lasted several days with almost no breaks. From the cold north we were traveling to the warm south in the hope of a much brighter future.

Exile to Kazakhstan

Follow a year and seven months in the freezing north with temperatures of up to minus 50°degrees, we moved at last to a warmer climate-the city of Akamolinsk in the Soviet Republic of Kazakhstan. Amamolinsk was a "city" only in the most figurative sense of the word and conditions were extremely primitive. Houses were typically made from tin and mud, the roads were not paved and the market bereft of all goods apart from most basic necessities of bread and salt and tea, along with poor clothing. My father found work in a cooperative repairing clocks and watches. As a test, he spent an entire night disassembling and then reassembling a large cuckoo clock. In the centre square of the city there was a Tanz Plushchatka (area set aside for dancing on Sundays) where the locals celebrated May Day and the anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution.

When we arrived we heard on the radio news of the retreat of the Soviet Army and of the German Army getting perilously close to Moscow. However we also heard people recalling the success of General Kotozov, who had defeated the Army of Napoleon in the harsh Russian winter and many expected that history would repeat itself and that the advancing German Army would be beaten back in the ensuing cold. We heard also of the bitter struggle for Stalingrad and of the total destruction of the city. All of this news came to us via *Tass*, Soviet telegraphic news agency but we knew the bulletins were not necessarily reliable. Applying the analytical mind of a Yeshivabocher, my father taught me how to read between the lines of the news bulletins, and to surmise how the real course of events could in fact be the exact opposite to what was being reported! After the war I was told a good joke about this. A teacher recounts to a class the story of how the authorities were able to rebuild Stalingrad from the rubble. However, a student stands up and says "I have just returned from Stalingrad and all I saw was rubble!" Enraged, the teacher yells at the pupil "instead of reading the news properly, you're just roaming around the streets!"

Everyone was recruited to the war effort. My mother found a job knitting gloves and socks for the army on the front. The women often placed notes of encouragement to the soldiers in the gloves and socks-occasionally this practice led to the burgeoning of unexpected long-distance romances! The Soviet army was incurring heavy losses and many soldiers would return from the front with legs and arms missing-a devastating sight. Meanwhile, the refugees from Poland buried their dead in the rueful knowledge that they would never be able to return to visit the graves once the war was over and they were repatriated. Though the air was warm, the river remained frozen for long periods and we were unable to draw fresh water from it. Our living conditions were not wonderful-four of us occupied one very cold and damp room: myself, my

parents and a relative of my fathers. This relative had lost her husband at one of the train stations on the journey from Poland. He had disembarked to fetch hot water but the train had pulled out without him. The last she had seen of him was him running for the train and falling, and the scalding water splashing over him.

Owing to the bad weather we were forced eventually to move to the other side of the city. We rented a room in the house of a Russian couple whose son was fighting on the front. There was much suffering and misery in the city. Living conditions were intolerable-and it was the intelligentsia who suffered the most as they were not able to pursue their vocations and many had a look of being entirely lost. In the labor camp I had learned to make a superb soup with water, cubed potatoes, salt and fried onions. For us, a portion of this soup with black bread was akin to a banquet. The bread ration that was distributed by the authorities was the most coveted commodity of all. The children, elderly and infirm would receive a bread ration of 250 grams per day while workers would receive 500. Inevitably, the bread became an object of resentment on the part of those who received a lesser ration. One night we heard the sounds of fighting and screaming coming from a neighbor's house. I was told later that son of the household had discovered that his mother had stolen a portion of his bread. Never, ever will I forget this moment-it required a tremendous mental strength on the part of the mother to go on living after this humiliating lapse of hers.

Our own situation was somewhat better. It happened that we had received a certificate permitting us to purchase foodstuffs from stores usually reserved for the elite. We obtained this certificate after I had knitted a woolen scarf for the wife of the manager of the railway! It became known all about town that I was one of the best knitters in the city! The best payment that could be received for my efforts was extra food-money being of no use or relevance, since there was nothing to be bought with it. I had stolen the wool for the scarf from a nearby cooperative; stealing, unfortunately, played a necessary role in our survival. My father's relative who worked in the abattoir was caught trying to smuggle a piece of meat that she had concealed in her bra. She was sentenced to a year in a prison hundreds of miles away. A year after, she returned to us, a starved skeleton. Stealing from the Government was not considered a shameful act but to steal someone's private property was deemed immoral.

I attended a local school and my classmates were Jewish, Polish and Russian. I befriended the daughter of a high official of the local Communist Party and was invited to a party at their house-only I was asked to change my name from Sara to something Russian! Under the guidance of a wonderful teacher called Valentina Alexandrovna, I began to read and fall in love with Russian literature. My teacher used to cough constantly; we were unaware that this was a symptom of

malnutrition. We learned the allegories of Krilov; we familiarized ourselves with the works of Pushkin and Lermontov. Most of our studies were oral but I also wrote essays on the writings of Gogol. We were also taught the Soviet Constitution and we were obliged to learn this by heart.

Using an oil lamp, I would read late into the night and my parents became concerned for my eyesight. Rebecca, the proud Jewish girl from *Ivanhoe*, novel by Walter Scott, inflamed my imagination and I excelled at my studies, becoming one of the best students in our school. Unfortunately, this did not work in my favor as high-achieving students were obliged to join the Soviet Scouts, the Consomol. However my father, with his acute analytical skills, came to my rescue. He told me to approach the school *Politrud*, the local party representative, and explain that I could not take an oath of loyalty to the Consomol as I would eventually be repatriated to Poland and would then have to work against the principles of the very movement to which I had sworn allegiance!

At school we learned a poem praising Stalin: "*Who lights the way in the coal mines? Stalin! answers the miner. Who directs your airplane to its target? Stalin! answers the pilot*" father recommended that I read the essay by Ilya Ehrenburg about the personality of Hitler: "*He doesn't drink wine but he loves blood; he doesn't eat meat but requires human sacrifice; he doesn't smoke but he loves the smoke that comes out of the chimney's from the crematoria.*"

The war continued and the refugees from Poland began to organize their communal existence. My father made the suggestion that I transfer to a Polish school that had been newly set up, bearing in mind that this would make easier my re-integration into Polish society once the war had finally ended. So I made the transition from Russian back into the familiar Polish tongue and became active in our Polish communal organization. I found myself torn between the truth that I heard at home and the official version of events that was broadcast through megaphones from the local radio station.

Other minorities began to enter the city, brought there by the authorities, among them Chechians. The Chechians had been transferred to our region, as they had been cooperating with the Germans, wherever the Germans had been successful in occupying Chechian territory, and were thus deemed a security risk. There was widespread panic in the town owing to a fear of rape and murder from the Chechians and the police were powerless to overcome the problem. Hence we took to moving within the town only in groups. The Jews were accustomed to observing the Sabbath and Jewish Festivals, activities looked upon with suspicion by the agents of the NKVD, Stalin's secret police who considered these activities tantamount to conspiring against the state. My father became the cantor for the local Jewish community, conducting all religious services

and as a result much honor was bestowed upon our family. My father's beautiful voice seemed to reach up to heaven, especially in the prayers on Yom Kippur, when the sound of his voice would move the congregants to tears.

Once again, my father's expansive knowledge gained in Yeshivah stood him in good stead. According to my father, salvation would come to us eventually. To my father, this period of interned suffering was a goad to the spiritual fortitude of the Jewish people. For the Passover meal, we invited a number of other refugees, though we had little food and what we did have was mainly fishheads! Immediately following the festival, the NKVD conducted a thorough search of our house. While the search was in progress, my father discreetly signaled to me to begin playing the mandolin, for it was inside the mandolin that our precious diamond ring was hidden! So I sat down on the floor and began to play, hoping the agents would not ask to examine the instrument. The agents were stabbing the blankets looking for contraband and came across some chocolate-in those days a luxury of extreme rarity! As I was so nervous, I began to reach into the white sack where our unauthorized matzo bread was concealed and began eating the matzo so fast that I almost choked.

Following the search, my parents were taken to the local police station for questioning. My father pretended to be mentally ill and he started to tell the agents stories about the Jewish festival that we were celebrating! My mother pleaded for understanding from the agents. Following many hours of interrogation, my parents were finally released-a very rare event in the USSR in those days!

On May 9 1945, while I was walking through the main square of town towards my school I heard a very important broadcast being relayed through the megaphones. The broadcast began with the words "Moscow is speaking. Listen to the latest! Thanks to Comrade Stalin, and thanks to the stubborn tenacity and bravery of the soldiers and citizens of the Soviet Union, we have succeeded in crushing the armed forces of Germany!" It was in this way that we heard of the surrounding and capitulation of the German forces. At school we asked to write a spontaneous essay describing our feelings at hearing this news. I wrote about the essay of Ilya Ehrenburg and my essay was chosen as being the most outstanding.

From this moment, we started to feel that the end of our sojourn in Kazakhstan was drawing near. Summer came and there were many rumors going about. Eventually, the Soviet authorities permitted the Polish refugees to return home. Once again we packed, this time with joy in our hearts, and boarded the train for the return journey. On the way back through Poland, we passed major concentration camps surrounded with high barbed wire but we still had no notion of the

significance of these places. And since we had encountered no survivors, we remained ignorant of the terrible events that had occurred in our absence on Polish soil.

The train took us to Shtetin, a German town that had been liberated and that was now part of Poland. The Polish authorities had decided to settle this town with refugees who had returned from the USSR. Shtetin was a harbor town that had been destroyed by the Russian and Allied bombardment. We arrived in the town to see German families being turned out of their homes, forced to leave almost everything behind. They were being paraded through the centre of the town with their hands high above their heads. In the humiliation of defeat, the Germans walked slowly without uttering so much as a word. For me this was a good thing as the sound of German being spoken caused me nothing but panic; the first German words I had ever heard having "*Juden- raus!*" - out! Nonetheless, the spectacle of people being expelled from their homes was an extremely sad one to behold. And yet the actions of the Germans had made us immune from feeling sorry for them. At last, we were home!

Slowly but surely we began to sense the horrors of the Holocaust and to grasp their terrible significance. From my large, extended family there were very few survivors. My cousin Shlomo had remained alive thanks to the kindness of a Polish policeman who had known my grandfather. To this day, I can not understand how a man could have taken the risk of hiding a Jewish child in his own house, when the slightest word out of turn by a neighbor would have been enough to place him and his family in mortal peril. My cousin Henia, her husband Alter and their daughter Shoshanna had also survived thanks to a Pole who had hidden them in a bunker. In the meantime, aid was beginning to pour in from the United States, including clothing and food. Displayed on the walls of private houses and public buildings were lists of missing relatives and appeals to anyone who might know anything of their fate. On the other hand, the survivors themselves displayed their names on similar lists so that no one could be in doubt as to the fact that they figured amongst the living. We were able to witness a number of reunions, all of which took place amid great excitement.

Again, we began to organize our new lives in a new place amid a new reality. The Polish Communist Party had come to power and the Zionist movement began to organize the local Jews, trying to convince them to make Aliyah to Israel. Many young Jews who had lost entire families organized themselves into groups or cells. Some joined the Communist Party; others joined the various Zionist organizations. Many searched for ways to emigrate to the United States. Every survivor drew his own conclusions from his experience. The religious lost their faith; secular Jews became reborn as religious Jews. All were searching for answers that might explain the dreadful events to which they had borne witness and to the miracle of their own survival of the

fires of the Holocaust. The Zionist movement organized escape routes and many Jews managed to leave Poland on their way to Israel.

Eventually, my family's turn had arrived to make Aliyah to Israel; I having been very active in the Zionist Movement Gordonia. Emissaries from the Zionist movement arrived from Israel to instruct us in Israeli culture and folklore. At this time, I was studying at the Polish Gymnasium and this was the first time I had come across classical music, and opera especially. I was consumed and entranced by this new discovery. And here came to an end the chapter of my life in the USSR and in Europe and this was the end of all that was familiar to us and that does not exist anymore.

From the Darkness

Poland 1947



It was atop a mountain of bricks-all that remained of the Warsaw Ghetto-that I saw him for the first time.

From throughout the country, all the streams that made up the Zionist movement had converged on Warsaw for the ceremony to mark the consecration of the monument commemorating those who had fought and died in the famous and tragic uprising of the Warsaw Ghetto against the Nazis.

We paraded in regimented lines and I remember that he stood apart, a *Madrach* (leader) and organizer while I, a beautiful girl with romantic dreams, stood in line with all the others. As it turned out, this was a man with solid dreams and ideals to fulfill, including the dream of *Aliyah* Israel, while I, a girl with the thirst of youth for guidance, became drawn to this man, in whose high ideals I found the answers to questions I didn't even know to ask. Both he and I had had the long experience of being fugitives from the same enemy. For the time being, we spoke to each

other only in Polish, though his Hebrew was fluent. For my part, I knew only those Hebrew words that were in common usage in Yiddish.

Yitzchak husband-to-be came from a background of teachers versed in Judaism and Hebrew. He was the only survivor from his family whilst I, along with my parents, was the only survivor of my own once enormous family. While I was full of Stones of my mother's family, Yitzchak had only a painful silence owing to the loss of his entire family including his mother, father and three sisters. It was clear to us that the soil of Europe, soaked as it was with the blood of our loved ones, could not be the foundation on which to build our lives anew. The aspiration that we shared was to build a new life in Israel. Yitzchak fell in love with me and I found myself deeply in love with him also. Meanwhile, my parents were debating whether they should accept the offer of relatives to sponsor their emigration to the United States where a new life bade secure circumstances. But Yitzchak had no doubts whatsoever. The place to be was Eretz Yisrael. It was not just a new country to which to immigrate-Eretz Yisrael was the vision that encompassed everything.

Yitzchak was the secretary of the Gordonia Zionist movement and he drew me into the movement in place of those members who had already left Poland to join the fighting at the advent of the Israeli State and its struggle for independence. He began giving me Hebrew lessons and it was in the midst of those lessons that he gained my deepest admiration for his knowledge while he, in turn, acknowledged my talent for rapidly assimilating all that he taught. Yitzchak took up lessons in dancing the tango and ballroom dancing which I adored and I learned to dance the Israeli *hora*. We agreed that once our children were born we would speak only Ivrit and that once we succeeded in reaching Israel we would immediately join a kibbutz. At this time, I still dreamed and counted in Polish and Russian. Ironically, these decisions were taken in the Polish tongue that we still shared!

In the meantime, the Polish authorities had closed the border, prohibiting Jews from emigrating. At the beginning of 1949 we were married at my parents' apartment in the city of Vroclav. We had begun our search for escape routes from Poland across the border into Czechoslovakia when all of a sudden, at the end of 1949, the authorities reopened the border. We closed the door of our offices for good and with a group of friends we left for Israel and for life on kibbutz. At this time, I was already carrying our first child. No sooner had we arrived than Yitzchak was already feeling at home on the kibbutz while I struggled somewhat to learn the language and to adjust to the new reality of our lives.

In February 1950 there was a heavy snowfall in Jerusalem and its surrounding environs. It was well-known in our Kibbutz that if Shaike the driver took a pregnant woman to hospital, it was a sign that the baby would be a boy! As it turned out, Shaike drove me to the old Hadassah hospital but it was to a little daughter that I gave birth. According to Shaike, since I was a newcomer, my case didn't count! While I was in labor, Ytzchak and my mother remained outside building a snowman! We didn't have much time to select a name for our girl but my parents had already decided. She would be named for my grandmother who had perished in the Holocaust and we didn't feel that we could resist this name even with its connotations of the diaspora.

As it turned out, I found myself unable to cope and unable to adjust to our new life on kibbutz. Though it was a wonderful model of communal life according to the ideology of A.D. Gordon, I had difficulty finding self- fulfillment amid this ideal. I could not cope with the idea of giving my newly-born child over to be raised in the kibbutz nursery and of me being like a cow, dispensing milk to my child morning and evening and returning to our own quarters to spend the night apart from the little girl to whom I'd given birth.

In the summer of 1950 we decided to leave the kibbutz with our baby girl with no notion of where we would go to. Our relatives and parents helped us in the first stages of our new life in the city. Our first apartment was in a block for new immigrants. There were eight apartments and each housed a family from a different country. The apartments consisted of one room, a kitchenette, shower and toilet. I learned quickly from my neighbor, who was from Tripoli, Libya how to prepare kus-kus, while I taught her how to prepare borsht! We became friends with neighbors from, amongst others, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Canada. Our neighborhood was the fulfillment of a dream of a giant melting pot with Jews of every conceivable country of origin converging on the same place, our ancestral homeland.

No one complained about the very modest circumstances of our lives wherein there were very few commodities or luxuries. All the neighbors collaborated to construct a chicken house so that we could enjoy a constant supply of fresh eggs. We all held Government ration cards and even though things were very difficult it was luxury compared to what we had been accustomed to during our time of exile in the USSR. Since he already spoke Hebrew, Yitzchak found work without difficulty whilst I remained all day long in the apartment block with the other new immigrants. From time to time I would take the bus to the Polish library in Mugrabi Square in Tel Aviv. During these times our neighbor from Tripoli would look after the children and whenever the situation required, I would look after hers. I learned to prepare chopped liver from eggplant. One day I put some chopped liver on my husband's plate and when I asked him why he refused to touch it after I had put my whole heart into preparing it, he replied "into the chopped liver you

should put meat, not your heart." From my baby girl I learned Hebrew. When together, Yitzchak and I tried our best to speak Hebrew and of course we spoke only Hebrew with our neighbors. As his income from his job was not satisfactory, Yitzchak began supplementing his income by teaching Hebrew in the ulpan. He also managed the local library.

In 1952 I gave birth to a baby boy. This time, we were determined to give our child an Israeli name without any connotations of the diaspora. I had a strong desire to continue steeping myself in Hebrew but I remained for several more years at home raising our children. I read to the children from books in Hebrew and this became my ulpan.

In 1956 we moved to a new and larger apartment with balcony and brightly-colored tiles on the floor. At this time I felt the strong urge to supplement the family income while providing myself with mental stimulation, so I found work in a government office. Yitzchak was promoted in his job and given a car. It was now possible for the family to take small trips and to drink club soda in Petach Tikvah. On Saturdays we would go to the Tel Baruch beach in Tel Aviv. More than these modest treats we could not afford. Even so, it was a very joyful time for us.

At the end of the summer of 1959 my daughter was already nine years old and my son seven. The family was sent to Poland as emissaries and my children attended the English school for foreigners in Warsaw. There, for the first time, our children encountered anti-Semitism. One of the children of our Polish neighbors called our son "*Jid*." When our son asked us the meaning of the word we replied that it meant Jew but that the intention of the child had been to insult him. From our own point of view our mission in Poland did not constitute a return *per se*, but a revisiting of a former home in the guise of proud citizens of our own country, representing a new flag. Rather than forging ties with Polish families, our children befriended the children of other foreign families. Both excelled at their studies. In the meantime our financial situation had improved significantly and we could afford to take vacations in the snowy mountains of Poland. In our absence from Israel, a friend assisted us in selling our old apartment and finding a new one for our return.

Finally in 1962, we returned to Israel and we moved into our new three-bedroom apartment in Ramat Aviv. From our balcony, we looked out over the Mediterranean and it was wonderful to be able to see the sun setting every day over the sea. We resumed our former jobs and our children continued their education at the Alliance Francais and Max Fine School, followed by Army service and studies at Tel Aviv University and the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and later on in the United States. In the meantime was sent for a period of service at an Immigrant station in Vienna for Jews leaving the Soviet Union on their way to Israel. The stream of Jews leaving the

Soviet Union was motivated not by Zionist ideology but a desire to flee growing persecution by the Soviet authorities. I identified strongly with the situation of the new immigrants as they, like I, had had to leave behind their past and create a new future for their children. Upon my return to Israel from Vienna I did my best to assist in the absorption of these new immigrants into Israeli society. Both Yitzchak and I volunteered, Yitzchak by teaching Hebrew and I by acting as an advocate with the authorities for the newcomers' needs. With many of the new families we developed strong and lasting ties.

My daughter commenced her studies at Hebrew University in Jerusalem where she later married and made her home and it was in Jerusalem that our first grandchild was born. Our son completed his army service and commenced studies at Tel Aviv University. Again, Yitzchak and I became emissaries in Europe though this time without our children being with us. When we returned to Israel we moved once again to what would perhaps be the last residence of our lives. From the now former USSR a new wave of immigration was taking place and once again we volunteered to assist in the absorption of these new citizens. Our son got married and departed for the USA to take up doctorate studies. He remained in the States for six years and I became anxious that they would never return to Israel. Fortunately, this turned out not to be the case. In the States, my daughter-in-law gave birth to two daughters and as soon as my sons studies were completed they returned to Israel. A third child, a boy, was born in Israel.

Yitzchak and I reached the age of retirement and each of us began to search for ways in which to occupy ourselves, taking up things for which we had had no leisure in the past. But things were not always easy. Sickness sometimes interceded. We saw as much as we could of our grandchildren but in the absence of our children it was our contemporaries who became our extended family. We would dine together and discuss low calorie diets; we would share in each others' joys and sorrows and attend the weddings and barmitzvahs of each others' grandchildren. And yet as time went on we noticed that our circle was steadily diminishing in number.

There came a time when those who had the number of a death camp tattooed on their arms began to open up and speak for the first time, sometimes following a silence lasting fifty years, of their wartime experiences. With the activity of our working lives having fallen away, all at once there was an urgency to express that which, before this time, had never been spoken of. It was thanks to our exile in the Soviet Union that we had survived the horrors of the Holocaust and evaded the Nazis. The feeling on the part of our close friends that they had had their youth cut away from them remained an enduring source of unhappiness. All the while, Yitzchak retained his silence concerning the past while I had the urge to simply touch and comfort him. The good memories were drifting away while somehow the bad memories remained to make the burden of

our later lives heavier.

It was thus that I sat down in front of the computer to begin writing the story of my life. On many occasions I had been asked when I had come to Israel but no one had ever thought to ask me of the life that I had had before I came here. It was as if my life had begun only with my Aliyah to Israel and that all the days preceding my Aliyah counted for nothing. For many years the past had remained silent and I had not wanted, or simply could not bring myself, to touch it. Perhaps this had been owing to the great effort that was required to speak openly with my children in Hebrew, having been obliged to forget my old identity and to build an entirely new one. The expectation of those around me was that I would simply erase my past and that I would become like the natives of my new country, disguising or leaving behind altogether the distinctive aspects of my diaspora origins. Where the necessity comes from, after fifty years, to continue struggling with my failure to disavow my past and to assimilate into the new sphere of life in Israel, I cannot imagine.

“Yesterday, a year was four seasons. There was autumn with its golden leaves of the trees. There was winter with its glistening snow. Especially, there was spring, when the ice would melt and all of nature wakened to welcome the summer. There were the smells of cooked potatoes and cabbage soup. There were the cherries of all different colors from yellow to burgundy to near-black. There were raspberries. There was Chopin, there were Mazurkas; there was a piano playing in the cafe on the colonnade, where the golden leaves fell with the melodies. There was also cold and there was no home for us, for in one bright day it had been destroyed. There was a family, aunts, uncles and cousins, grandfathers and grandmothers and the smell of stuffed fish and cholent and chopped liver and Shabbat. In one moment, all of these had disappeared. There was a little girl who, in one single night, had matured and become a woman, her childhood having, in a moment, been cut away from her. Hence, in place of youth came early adulthood. The past was banished into memory. For a time, all mention of the past became irrelevant—the effort required in constructing a new tomorrow made it seem as if the past had evaporated altogether. Every channel that led to the past was drowned in the life of today and tomorrow, with no space left for yesterday. In the life of today, under the glare of the sun; the roofs of the houses are flat, the blinds are closed and the survivors are hiding behind them from the hamsin. In vain, the survivors search for the language in which to express the things of yesterday. In spite of having left completely behind the provinces of my past, the past itself refuses to desert me. Rapid associations float up in the moment and it becomes obligatory for me to give the events of the past my attention. At my time of life, life is conducted in the here and now. Even so, a major part of my life is based upon the need for recollection. The psychological necessity to speak of

my past has ever burgeoned, my life in Israel up to this point having left me no spaces to dwell upon or to speak of these things”.

Now, the past invades the present without warning, like an animal that must regurgitate its food in order to digest it completely. It is the inevitable meeting between me and myself. And in examining the impact of my Polish dimension on my identity and the continual schooling towards becoming an Israeli since I made Aliyah in 1949, I often ask myself if it was truly necessary to deny my Polish past. Could it really have been possible that I built an entirely new identity and left the past behind?"

It is an issue I must continue examining-taking the phrase Oleh Chadash (new Israeli) and confronting it with the word "immigrant". The Documentary artefacts of "that" period of my past are not enough. It seems to me that I have the obligation to tell my story and to add this to the dry language of historians in order that the picture might be completed. Like the telling of the Exodus from Egypt, it is my obligation to tell the story of the journey I have had and from where it is that I have come.

And it seemed that after I had written two pages the writing seemed to flow from itself, line after line, without need of any effort of remembering on my part. Everything seems so close now, as if it had happened only a moment ago. It is still fresh and untouched... And reaching the end of the writing, one fact astonishes me more than anything else: how could one possibly sum up, in a few pages, so many years full of things being turned upside down over and over?

Israel, December 2000