

A Kielce Memoir

By

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Edited by Manny Bekier

Preface

Moshe Mayer Baum began to faithfully record his experiences and observations under the German occupation of Poland, in Yiddish and in Polish, while in hiding in the Kielce region of Poland in the years 1943 through the summer of 1944. This memoir, Moszek Baum, WE DON'T KNOW WHAT THE NEXT HOUR WILL BRING US – Journal written in hiding in the years 1943-1944 has been translated into Polish, edited by Professor Barbara Engelking, and has been published in Warsaw by The Center for Research on The Holocaust in 2020.

In the 1970's, Moshe Mayer Baum, with his wife, Surcha, left their home in Paris and spent their final years in Israel. In Israel, he wrote and self-published Mein Leben (My Life) in Yiddish and part in Hebrew. In the 1980's, I, (the eldest son of Yiedel Bekierman), obtained a copy, and with the assistance of Philip Ravski, a Holocaust survivor from Lodz, translated and edited Baum's writings into English. This translated account titled Mein Leben – Reflections of a Jew from Kielce was never published.

In the years shortly before Moshe Mayer Baum passed away, he painstakingly recalled and recorded all his experiences in Yiddish. This testament served as a legacy and was given to his son, Charles, who lives in France. Charles had his father's memoir translated from the Yiddish into French. Professor Engelking, who contacted me regarding finalization of her research on Baum, in September 2020, was able to put me in contact with Charles. It was through this connection that I received LES Cahiers bleus DE l'été 44 UN GRENIER EN POLOGNE the pdf document (in French) of the Baum memoir, from Charles.

It is this document that was literally translated into English, via Google Translate, that served as the basis for this memoir. In this memoir, I worked on this English translation to ensure that the content was contextually accurate, made sense, and faithfully reflected the meaning and sentiments

expressed by Moshe Meyer Baum. Some historical errors have been noted, yet this reflected what Baum perceived at that point in time.

As this memoir does not reflect the experience of “liberation” and the immediate post-war experience, as well as his reflections, I have included the final chapter “Liberation” from his memoir Mein Leben – Reflections of a Jew from Kielce, at the end of this manuscript. I have also added photographs related to this memoir.

AN ATTIC IN POLAND, Summer '44

The opening pages of this story were written in the Summer of 1944

The hot summer days have arrived. The sun is burning. In the fields, the wheat is already ripe. The harvest will begin soon. Activity, work, life, this is what men think of in summer. But we, all the men in our family, are hiding in an attic and in a barn. The strong smell of beasts permeates our air. A cow, a calf, a horse, several rabbits, but also swarming rats. Fine rays of sunlight pierce the roof as we lie pressed against each other. We contemplate the green fields where, every day the ears gain in size and beauty. We admire the nature of all things that quietly follow the order of the universe, without wanting to know anything about what is going on in the world. Meanwhile, almost all the Jewish people have been ripped from their homes and destroyed with an absolutely inconceivable brutality and cruelty. There are five of us: me, Moyshe Meyer, my brother Yudl Baum, my two brothers-in-law Yiedl and Dovid Bekierman, and a cousin of ours, Moyshe Pozitsky. Five men who all had families, wives, children, brothers and sisters, parents, but also homes, a factory, a store. Five men who lost everything as we watched everything disappear. All that's left is us, half-alive, unable to know what will happen to us in a day, not even in an hour. God, who we called "Merciful God", how can you stand by, watching what they did to Israel, your supposedly chosen people? How can you let us become the scapegoats for the entire Earth? Have we failed you so badly? Haven't you seen that in all the Jewish villages, both young and old Jews show such devotion and respect to Judaism? Didn't you have sufficient scholars immersed in Torah study day and night? Even those who did not devote all their energies to Torah, did they not read the Book of Psalms? And it is on these very people that you have poured out all these plagues! How could you remain insensitive to the cries of your people? Who could explain? To tell the truth, we are already resigned to our fate, as we have already lost everything. There is only one hope that helps us stay alive, that of being among the few who must bear witness to the cruelty and bloodthirsty savagery that ravaged our people. Also, to witness barbaric Hitlerism defeated and take our

revenge on the German people and all those who shed the blood of our wives and our children. I decided to write our story, because we will probably not survive and then only this memoir can relate what I wanted to say. I am not a writer, but I will try to tell the entire truth, all that we have experienced and all that we have seen with our own eyes. So here I am sitting down, pencil in hand, trying to collect my thoughts. I'm looking for the word that the Germans used for "deportation". Together we decided that the title of my memoir should be named "Treblinka". Treblinka, the death camp, was the cemetery for most of our community, including our entire families. Treblinka, where the blood of our families is mixed with the earth. Their souls will not have rest until we avenge those whom the Germans and their collaborators massacred.

Almost all of my brothers and sisters have started families in Kielce or Bialogon, a small town 5 kilometers on the road between Kielce and Krakow. This was where Mendel Bekierman lived; his house was almost hidden by the tall trees that separated him from his nearest neighbor, also a fellow Jew. Mendel had been appointed administrator of the synagogue by the hundreds of Jewish families who lived in the city and he managed it very well. 200 meters from his home, he had a tannery which he had managed for years. All the rooms in his house were hung with fabric, and the windows were almost always open so that those who wished could come and listen to his radio, the only one in the village.

He had ten children, 7 daughters (Praza, Rukhtshe, Elka, Frania, Haviohat, Czesia, Branka) and 3 sons (Yiedl, Dovid, Binyamin) whom he sent to the European school in Kielce, where almost all of them had received excellence in their studies. Only one had left Poland, their eldest daughter (Praza). (note: Benjamin, along with his wife, Sarah, left for Brazil). Unfortunately, she had never developed normally. Even the greatest doctors did not understand why (It wasn't until later that we learned that the maid had one day dropped a window shutter on the baby without ever mentioning this accident). Nevertheless, her physical handicap had not prevented her from succeeding in her studies and getting married. Her in-laws weren't quite okay with this, but Mendel helped smooth things by setting up an apartment for the couple in Kielce. A child was born, Rozia, and everyone was very happy until her husband spent all his family's money within a few months. They then were forced to return to his parents and he left for Palestine as his family head decided for them, although against their will. (Note: Praza, appears in the top row on the right and is holding her daughter, Rozia.

Standing next to her, wearing a hat, is her husband, Moshe Rodal. Praza was the oldest daughter in the Bekierman family. She lived in Palestine for a period of time and she had a British visa for Palestine while living in Kielce. Praza, along with her daughter, Rozia, were deported from the Kielce ghetto to Treblinka in August 1942, where they were murdered. Moshe Rodal survived by going to Palestine. He started a new life under a new name, Yehuda Safra (learned this from Pages of Testimony he submitted to Yad Vashem). He died in Israel).

Our Family

At home, there were two pairs of twins: my brother and I, born in 1908, and also Yankl and Pintshe, two years younger. When I was 14, my brother and I had to work all day long. One of us had to stay home in case a woman came with a problem that required fixing. I had to take problems to my father. Entrails were pierced by a duck, in order that we can establish whether the poultry in question was pure or not. We decided to go and work in Bezdin, in a knitting factory. We were making a good living there, but in 1927 we received a letter from our older brother, Abraham Mordechai. He lived in Bialogon where he enjoyed life there. He was one of the town's notables and invited us to spend the two days of Passover at his home. Obviously, we accepted. Every night my brother would go with a neighbor, Moshe Kirsital, 60 years, along with his son, to play chess and have a good time visiting with the Bekiermans. That's how at such a gathering, I met Mendel Bekierman's children, including his second oldest daughter Rukhtshe (Rachel). She was a very young and beautiful brunette with black eyes. She was born in 1910 and had just finished Gymnasium in Kielce. We liked each other, and I was not happy to have to leave Bialogon in order to go back to work. Mendel was aware of my father's reputation. He would have liked to have had him in his family and therefore he viewed my relationship with Rukhtshe positively. One evening, he invited me to his home and told me that if I wanted to stay in Bialogon, he would offer me a job working for him. I later found out that it was Rukhtshe who insisted. I couldn't be more delighted. Mendel asked me to replace one of his salespeople in Kielce, at a cured leather depot, to which he immediately handed over the keys to me. From then on, I traveled to Kielce in the morning and return in the evening by train. I was good at this job. I put so much energy into my work that the store quickly flourished. Mendel saw he was right to have such confidence in me. It wasn't long before I got married to Rukhtshe.

In 1932, I had my first daughter, Sara. We were very happy. Business was going well and life was good. Every summer we went all together, as a family, to my wife's parents. In winter, we all came to Kielce, joined by my sisters-in-law, my brothers-in-law and my brothers. In 1937 we had our second daughter Yentl (Yallei). The children were growing so nicely and it was happiness.

My wife's sister, Elke, was born in 1911. Like all the children in this family, she had a brilliant education at the Gymnasium. Nonetheless, her parents weren't happy with her behavior. She rode a bicycle and she swam in the river. For her father, a devout Jew, it was inappropriate behavior. But there was no need to try to forbid her to do anything. She was very beautiful, a brunette with dark eyes and taller than average height. Young men would even come from Kielce just to see her and spend time with her. This even caused jealousy from some boys in Bialogon. At home, when she wanted to listen to the radio, it caused endless arguments. Her brother Yiedl, two years her junior, protected her. Yiedl's father, who wanted him to study to be a rabbi, sent him to a yeshiva. But at 18, he sided with his sister and they won the battle.

In Bialogon there were several factories, two tanneries, a metallurgical factory and a sawmill. After high school, Elke had found a job at the sawmill. Elke and the new principal who arrived in 1933, liked each other. One evening, he was invited to Mendel's house for Shabbat and as the rabbi was leading the sabbath prayers, the police came. They searched the house and found nothing that they were looking for, but they took Elke away (we then learned that other friends from Kielce had also been arrested). It's easy to imagine the fear of my in-laws. As only love letters were found in Elke's house, she was released. But her friend, accused of being a communist, had to flee to Paris. When the sawmill closed, Elke found herself unemployed. She went to Warsaw to live with an uncle. This uncle had a son, Beynish, a dentist. Like many of their friends, they shared Communist ideals and they quickly fell in love with each other. When they decided to live together without getting married, her parents were very upset and had a falling out with her. The question arose, what would our friends say if we did not have a religious wedding? This issue remained unsettled until Yiedl decided to reconcile matters by going to Warsaw to try to get some sort of marriage certificate from the rabbinate. But this proved impossible, as the couple did not appear by themselves. So Yiedl went to one of our uncles, who was an

unaffiliated rabbi, and on behalf of our family, agreed to sanctify Elke's union with a marriage certificate.

In 1936, we accompanied the eldest daughter (Praza) to Warsaw who was leaving, reluctantly, with her husband (Moshe Rodal) and their child for Palestine. They were moving to Tel Aviv to live with an uncle, Mordechai Rosenform, who lived in the Montefiori neighborhood. While in Warsaw, we went to the theater, to shows, to museums and all those distractions that did not exist in Kielce.

The Bekierman parents who wanted to see all of their children married early and well situated, were worried about Yiedl. He was very intelligent and studied Talmud, but he did not want to hear about all the marriages offered to him. He was attracted to a girl in the village, Friedl Goldberg, a very beautiful girl who did not come from a wealthy family. He spent much of his free time with her. As Technical manager in the family factory, he got along well with all the workers. He had created the leather union section within the professional PPS unions of Kielce. The workers were all grateful to him for this. I can even say that it is because of this, that we were able to survive, because this was not forgotten when we needed help, as we will see in the chapters to come.

A few months before the war, Yiedl had given a position to his younger brother, Dovid. Dovid, born in 1920, was a handsome young man, an accomplished athlete and an excellent swimmer. Of all the children, he was the one who was the most assimilated into Polish society. He was the one who spent the most time with Polish friends. This was something that did not please his parents. The two middle girls, Friedl (Francia) and Haviohat, had finished high school and were preparing to continue their studies. The two youngest, Tsirel (Czesia) and Brogne (Branka), were still attending school, where they were considered good students. Really, in this family all the children were viewed as intelligent.

In April 1939, Praza left Tel Aviv with her daughter and returned to Bialogon to vacation with her parents. Elke also came from Warsaw with her son (Note: no information was found regarding her son). My wife and two daughters also came. So it was that all the children were together for a pleasant summer, until war broke out. Praza, who wanted to return to Palestine, was never able to.

The War

On September 1, 1939 at 5 a.m., we were all still asleep, except my father in-law (Mendel), who was already up. Suddenly a thunderclap! The house shook. We almost fell out of bed. An earthquake? I rushed into the street where a few Poles were already running alongside the pipe that supplied Kielce with water. There, near the water tower, a bomb had fallen. A few minutes later, the Polish police officers who had gone to check, came back saying that it was a Polish bomb that had exploded. We were told that Polish pilots had practiced maneuvers. A few hours later, the radio announced that our neighbor Germany, without declaring war, had attacked our borders. We were all worried. Six days earlier Poland had carried out a secret mobilization, and three days later some troops had also been mobilized. So, listening to the radio, our blood froze and our anxiety mounted. Today, technology made it possible to destroy cities and their inhabitants. We hoped the world would not let a war break out. A few days before, I had accompanied my older brother Abraham Mordechai to the train station. He had been called during the secret mobilization, and was sent to Skarjimeck 48 hours later. This first scene of war tore my heart. Just a few days ago, these men were going about their daily business, at home with their wives and children. Now they were marching in the streets at a military pace, in uniform, wearing guns, helmets and gas masks hanging on their backpacks. Women, children, fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters were running by the sides of the road to say goodbye, wave to them and cry. Some wives, in defiance of military discipline, with their eyes full of tears, rushed with their children to kiss their husbands one last time. I accompanied them to the station, I said goodbye to my brother and I kissed him but I was unable to talk to him much. My heart was heavy and I was exhausted. I remembered my parting words, "Why are you crying Abraham Mordechai? I don't believe there will be war. God willing, you will be back home soon. And if there is war anyway, the front will be everywhere. Even for the women and children." We didn't have any money with us. The day before at the station, I had prepaid for a wagon of leather and just had the receipts. So, I had to go to Kielce to get my payment. When I was told that in Bialogon, a bomb had fallen near our water pipe, I just laughed at this and told them not to talk nonsense. The radio had just announced that the Germans had attacked our borders, but that the Polish army was fighting heroically. That the Germans were already bombarding Kielce seemed impossible. When the sirens stopped, I went out into the street and then I realized it wasn't a laughing matter. The medics ran into the streets carrying the wounded and those

killed. I immediately rushed to my apartment in Kielce. I was there for only a short time, determined to return to Bialogon. I went to the cab station. The road was already crowded as everyone wanted to go home. I grabbed a cab, but several times along the way we had to get out. We heard sirens and the sky was full planes that were flying over us. As soon as I got home, I saw lots of Poles and Jews gathered around the radio. Everyone eagerly wanted to hear the news. I also sat down to listen. The children kept coming in and screaming that there are still planes. We spent the day indoors, waiting by the radio. I never returned to Kielce because my wife forbade me. I later realized that it was good that I did not to return to the station to get the rest of the money that I was owed, as everything was closed. On the radio, there was talk of the heroic fight of the Polish army near the west coast, near Danzig and at the same time every minute the transmission was interrupted and the position of the German planes were given. We stayed there until late at night. Suddenly a Polish neighbor arrived shouting, "Bekierman family, the police are on the run, the men are running out and carrying what they can. They say the Germans are already in Czestochowa. Wherever they arrive, they burn everything down. Do we also need to cross the Vistula?" He didn't even wait for the answer and started running again. We were all trembling with fear. My mother-in-law (Esther Bekierman) was nervously fidgeting, wringing her hands in anguish and moaning, "What are we going to do?" I went out with my brother in-law, Yiedl. It was half past midnight and we were looking for a horse and carriage, but no one wanted to travel with strangers. The one who already had a horse left with his family. Others fled on foot carrying their luggage. We asked them where they were heading. All answered us that they were heading beyond the Vistula. When we got home, we held a family meeting to decide what we should do. We recounted what we had seen and I told everyone that I had decided not to run. First, because it was impossible with young children and secondly because I did not understand how one could hope to go faster than the German motorcycles, tanks or their planes. I felt that it just didn't make sense. Better to wait and see what the future holds. It was my opinion, but of course I was not pushing it. Now was not the time to give advice when no one knew what tomorrow would bring. But with us, as well as our neighbors, we had decided to stay and not try to run.

Sunday September 3, 1939

Early in the morning, I went with my wife, my two children, my brother-in-law (Yiedl) and his wife, to Kielce where we decided to stay. Yiedl's wife

was due to give birth and she didn't want to stay in Bialogon because there was no birth attendant (midwife). In the morning, on the road where people tried to flee to the other side of the Vistula, we could see corpses. The victims had been machine-gunned from up above by German planes. In Kielce, panicked people were running in all directions. In our building, half of the inhabitants had fled but many had quickly returned. The doctor who examined Yiedl's wife said she would probably give birth within a few days. He advised us not to move away, as he didn't know if he could go out at night in an emergency. So, we spent the day at my house with all the neighbors, listening to the radio. Our great joy was learning that England and France had declared war on Germany. The day appeared not too dangerous and the city not too damaged.

Monday September 4

Terrible bombardment. No one in the streets anymore. From time to time, cabs were seen arriving from the station, loaded with wounded and dead. The station had indeed been bombed and strafed. The men living in the building gathered at my apartment, as it was only natural during a difficult situation to voice our shared concerns.

Tuesday September 5

The bombardment finally stopped. A few people even ventured out. We even saw the return of the Polish army, in disarray, without any discipline, mixing among the civilians. By midday, the shooting started. The artillery would fire on Kielce, but it did not last long. People were afraid to move. Those who wanted to visit each other did so with great caution. Everyone was waiting to see what would happen next. At 6 o'clock in the evening, we heard a motorcycle pass with a German. In our building, someone ran to the door of the apartment building to look and quickly returned cursing, that he saw Germans. He was told that his actions could cost them their lives. There were German scouts crossing the city. If they noticed anyone watching them, they would kill them and throw a bomb into their house. This is indeed what happened in some buildings. Later that evening when we saw rockets light up the night, we understood that the Germans had arrived in town. We all went to bed, but I couldn't sleep because I kept wondering what was happening in Bialogon. In the morning, I saw civilians in the street and I told my brother-in-law (Yiedl) that I wanted to go back. The Town Hall Square was full of German soldiers with tanks and near the Town Hall gate a guard

kept everyone from approaching. There were high-ranking soldiers, but they did nothing to civilians. The Germans ordered all building doors and even shops to be opened. I walked to the cathedral. It didn't sound dangerous, but traveling on the road to Bialogon, I understood with anguish that I had made a huge mistake. The road was congested with soldiers and tanks.

Motorcycles rode in both directions. It was as if I was in the middle of a battle, but I was afraid to back up or change lanes. Civilians were only on the sidewalk. So, I put my hands up. Soldiers were watching me and it was a miracle that I was able to cover the 5 km to Bialogon. When I got home, I came to myself a little. I began to suddenly feel lighter when I realized everything seemed normal here. Everyone was amazed to see me arrive. I didn't say anything about what I had just experienced. My father-in-law (Mendel) told me about the arrival of the Germans there. Very early Tuesday, they had heard gunfire in Bialogon. Elke and the children took refuge in the cellar. My mother-in-law (Esther), along with the other children, hid in the pit that we had dug in the yard for a neighbor. Sitting in this trench, they waited until everything was quiet. So, someone looked down the street and said the Germans were already there. A soldier entered the yard, saw them lying in the pit and laughed. He told them to return and not to be afraid. Other soldiers told those in the basement to come out and go home. They went to all the houses where there were Jews and they took all the men to the metal factory. The parish priest and the rabbi had already been there for a few hours. A high-ranking officer arrived and said that if they found any weapons in any house, they would burn the town and shoot all the men. Then he released them. A soldier came into our house. He found me sitting near the table. He looked at the radio and examined the room, then walked away without saying anything. My father-in-law (Mendel), although worried, expressed his hope "May God keep us and maybe everything will happen calmly, without too much danger". We went to our factory. All the Jewish workers were already there and we were able to work normally. The next day, on my way back to Kielce, I saw posters signed by General Feld Marshall Brorstisch on all the walls. He ordered the population to hand over their arms and radios and to behave loyally towards the German occupiers. My brother-in-law (Yiedl) had already carried my radio to the town hall. He told me it had been a difficult day. The Germans had attacked and looted Jewish stores. When they saw Jewish women or children standing in line for some bread, they would force them to leave, preventing them from buying anything to eat.

MISSING PAGES

They captured the Jewish doctors and they took the rabbi. They shaved his beard, told him to sweep the streets and photographed him. They also committed acts of barbarism. In the evening I heard from our friend in Pincherf. There, they burned down all the Jewish houses and shot people. At Radl's, in the cellar, they had burned 50 Jews. Most of the time, the arrival of the Germans was peaceful, but in many towns claimed many Jewish lives were claimed. They named people of German descent (Volkdeutch) as auxiliary police with red swastikas on their arms. They went into the homes of Jews and took whatever they wanted. They imposed arbitrary rules that were very harmful. They put 24 Jewish hostages in jail and said they would shoot them, because they held them responsible for every act of terror. They also demanded 100,000 zlotys from the Jewish population in 24 hours. They also created a council (Judenrat) of senior Jews, headed by Doctor Peltz and Doctor Zach, who would serve as the intermediaries between the Jewish population and the Germans. This was followed by the removal of all the Jewish files from the Town Hall and given to the Jewish Council.

One day the Gestapo informed the Jewish community that they had found a dead Jew in the quarry and that the community had to get the body and bury it in the Jewish cemetery. From the third day, the captain of the city of Kielce installed overseers in all the factories and all the department stores. It was a certain Stéphane Von Mitsevski, a German with a Polish name, who took charge of the tanneries. We were immediately ordered to take an inventory of all our leather and other materials within three days and hand it over to the office at 19 Chenkevitse Street in Kielce. We did, not very precisely, and then each received a pass that said that we were working at the tannery so we couldn't be posted elsewhere. We were thus able to continue to work at our workshop. Obviously, as soon as possible, we tried to manage to save as much inventory as possible. So, I went to Warsaw to buy a truckload of hides, in a factory, half-ruined by the German bombings. The bosses were happy to be able to sell some more merchandise. But I had to be very careful not to get arrested because my pass didn't really protect me. I took the opportunity to take my brother-in-law Beynish, the dentist (Elca's husband), back to Bialogon in our truck. As a Jew, he was not allowed to take the train. The merchandise that I brought back, we did not declare it to the overseers. We worked, and we sold it. Then we bought back what was needed of the rawhide, so that the quantities were the same as we had declared. During the war, leather was a scarce commodity and we made money. We bought and hid gold and valuables.

In Kielce I also had a shoe factory with a partner, Beinischevits. My younger brother Pintshe was the manager. When the war broke out, we liquidated the factory and divided the goods between us. I took all the soft leather scrolls, hid them under the floor of my house, and buried the gold in the cellar. One day, the General Government was proclaimed in Poland with General Pranka at its head, and was shared between 4 districts: Krakow, the capital, Warsaw, Radom and Lublin. Lodz and its basin were annexed to the Reich. The Soviet Union, for its part, took the regions of Lemberg and Bialistok. The Bug River and the San have become the border. Forced labor was decided for all Jews between the ages of 14 and 60, and the Jewish Committee of Elders (Judenrat) was to provide the number of men requested. The Germans demanded a further tax of one million zlotys from the Jewish population. The Elders Committee had to pay for those who had no money and were jailed. Women had to take off their rings. Dr Peltz, the President, had great difficulty in raising this sum and providing men for work because every day men were disappearing. Under the slightest pretext, the SS would shoot or let loose their dogs. Everyone was afraid to go to work and there was always someone not returning. The folkdeutch (Poles of German descent) would catch Jews in the streets, beat them and sometimes kill them. One day, they stabbed two Viennese Jews with bayonets. Then they ordered that they be hastily buried. When the very authoritarian Dr Vendler left Kielce, he was replaced by Captain Roter. With him, it got even worse. He was a young SS man of about 25 who personally attacked Jews on the streets. Thanks to Dr. Peltz, he calmed down a bit. Of course, it was also thanks to the only means capable of saving us: money, money, money. When the Germans needed a few Jews to be forced to work, they would pick them up from the synagogue during prayer. So, the Jews avoided going to the synagogue and set up places of prayer in their homes. This is what we did at my house. But one day, the Germans ended up coming for us, in order to put all the Jews to work. I was there, but I didn't show my pass because not all Germans considered it valid. In front of me, a man who had one similar to mine handed it to a German. But the German kicked him and tore up the document. So, I hid mine. We were taken to the Polski Hotel, the city's old theater, and locked into a large room. We waited. Suddenly a door opened and a German in a white coat entered. He held in his hand a large knife like that of ritual butchers (shochet) and asked who wanted to be first. We were all hiding in a corner of the room, frozen with fear, unable to say a word. He shouted again, "Who wants to be first? " No one answering, he stepped forward, pulled one of us by the arm, led him into the other room, and closed the door.

On December 15, 1939, I was in Tchenstekhov. It was noon. Jews were gathered. The hotel waiter went from table to table taking orders. All exchanged news and told their misfortunate stories. Suddenly Jews came in with women and children, packages on their backs, suitcases in their hands. Each wore a piece of yellow cloth on their chest. We were petrified. We were just ashamed. They said they had just fled Lodz and we couldn't even imagine what was happening on those frozen roads. The roads were packed with so many people. Some people piled into carts, others on foot, women with very young children in their arms. Women sighed that it was time for the world to stop spinning (for the Messiah needs to come). Those who could afford to stay in this hotel, were of course wealthy. Regarding some of the others, one left running with his knapsack on his back and his children in his hand, to join his family in another town. Some young people rushed to the "Soviet paradise". The last, not knowing what to do, stayed behind to wait for their fate to be played out in the days to come. We listened, motionless. Bitterness filled our hearts. We tried to console each other, even searching for some sort of explanation. Lodz had just been annexed to the 3rd Reich. That was probably why they were doing it. But within the General Government they would certainly not behave in the same way. With that, someone came to say that posters mounted in the streets announced that all Jews were required to wear a white armband with a Star of David on the left arm. This news brought us to despair. It felt like a great shame. Yet we continued to look for some semblance of consolation. In Lodz you had to wear a yellow cloth on your shoulder, while here it was the Star of David on your arm. On my way home to catch the train, I saw young Jewish boys selling armbands in the streets. I bought them. At home were our "guests" from Lodz, my brother Yudl, his wife (Frajda) and child (David) were already there. We hugged and started talking a bit. My youngest daughter (Yallei), who was six, pulled my hand, showed me the yellow bands that were hanging from my brother's possessions. I took the armbands out of my pocket and said that starting on the next day we would all have to wear them in the General Government. My wife (Rachel) thought it would certainly be the same with us in Kielce. Indeed, the next day posters appeared and we had to wear the armbands. There were many times when those who forgot to put them on before going out on the streets, had to spend six months in prison or simply disappeared without a trace. But we got used to that too and only thought about one thing, staying alive. My brother, who came from Lodz, wanted to go to Russia and told me that everyone he worked with had made their escape to the Soviet border. But among us, we had another opinion. Our brother Pintshe returned and was telling about how it was in

Bialystok and Lemberg. People slept in the streets, unable to wash themselves, in the unbelievably cold weather. Russians caught them and sent them to forced labor in Donbass, within Russia. Yudl still said that we had to flee to Russia. He had already seen what Hitlerism was. If Hitler had signed a non-aggression pact with Russia, it was surely not so that Jews could come and go freely across the border. We wanted to believe that Russia was not being fooled by Hitler's intentions of giving up on his eastward expansion. We felt that sooner or later he would attack. For the moment, Germany was a great power. Perhaps the greatest power in the world, with its industry and its ambitions. For us Jews, there would be very hard times to come because no one could possibly know what their intentions were and what they wanted. My brother was urging me to make a decision. But I could not bring myself to flee for several reasons. For one, our business was in my name and that of my brother-in-law (Yiedl). If the owners were no longer there, the commissioner of the factory would make sure that the factory was confiscated. What would our family live on? Besides, how can one flee with small children in such cold weather? Finally, my mother-in-law (Esther) was ill, and Beynish, my brother in-law, was also ill. I felt that Yiedl did not want to take all this into account. He wanted to flee, but I wouldn't let him. That's how it came about that we all stayed put, waiting for our fate. In the streets, the situation was getting worse. We were marked with the blue star of David. Polish children would see our armbands and would shout, "Jews! On your way". As we were easily recognized, our misfortunes increased.

In January 1940, the German authorities decided to suppress our freedom to trade. From that point on, it was impossible to sell or buy goods without a "right to trade". The German police visited all Jewish stores, from the largest to the smallest, to affix a "closed by the police" stamp. Businesses that were already under the control of a commissioner, were reopened a few days later. But the original owners no longer had any rights. The Germans installed Polish Christian workers, who only sold to those who had their "right to trade." Before reopening these stores, they got all the owners together and told them to do a very precise inventory, as they now would only allow half the stores to reopen and only those with the most merchandise. Of course, it was up to whoever had the largest inventory to see his shop reopened. As a result, almost everyone then came out, noted their hidden goods. However, those who were wise, did not do so and were content to live on what little they had. The products became more expensive day by day. Those who had something to sell, still had enough to get by, while those who had nothing would eventually starve. On January 15, the Jewish workers were fired and

the Germans ordered the President of the Jewish Community Council, Dr. Peltz, to provide whatever the Gestapo asked of him. New misfortunes then befell the Council, along with the entire Jewish population. The Gestapo demanded something every day and the Council was obliged to obey. The Council was allowed to demand from the Jews as much money as was needed. For those who did not have enough to pay the tax, they were visited by Jewish "collectors" who came to their homes, accompanied by the Polish police. They would seize their furniture, their clothes and put them on the list for forced work details. The Council was ordered to provide men every day for the work details demanded by the Gestapo. The rich were able to escape this by offering money. This left the poor, who were forced to work in their place. There were queues of poor people waiting in front of the Council. For a few pennies offered, they would go to work for someone who had been summoned. Of course, whatever the Gestapo demanded, the Council had to carry out, but those who had "protectors" always got away with it while the poor worked for them.

Misery has befallen the community. The Council was forced to set up a soup kitchen for the poorest Jews. Every day they were given a little soup, which barely helped them from starving to death. But the Council had no other solution because the German authorities had no interest in helping the Jewish population and there were fewer people left to ask for assistance every day. People would go to the Council, cry and beg, but the Council was obliged to continue its required mission because otherwise the situation would be even worse. The Jewish shops where some Jews still worked were closely watched, especially by the Poles. At the slightest incident, they could denounce the Jews, have them thrown out and thus, take over their shop. Back home, at the tannery, we could still get by, thanks to our administrator, who was a good man, who was beginning to empathize with us. We sold large quantities of leather. We sold worked leather and raw leather. That way we had some money, but as will be seen later, it was not to last. At the same time, the Germans confiscated Jewish homes and placed Poles or FolkDeutch (Poles of German descent) to collect our rent. Initially, the owners did not have to pay rent, but a little later they had to pay also. They consoled themselves by sadly telling themselves that the Germans could take our money and our goods, but they could not take our houses with them back to Berlin. It was not enough for them to have the Community Council standing guard over us and carrying out all the orders of the Gestapo. They also personally took much advantage themselves.

One fine morning, on February 1940, the Gestapo broke into a Jewish building and ordered the Jews to leave the area in less than 15 minutes. Imagine the great confusion and panic. People were throwing their possessions out the windows, as there was no one who could help them. All the inhabitants were forced out, sometimes almost naked and without shoes. Dr Peltz, the Chairman of the Jewish Council tried to intervene by asking for an explanation. He was told that they needed the building for German soldiers and that the Jewish Council needed to install 200 beds, mattresses, pillows and blankets. The expelled Jews were waiting by the Council office for the President to return, in hope that they would be told that they could return home. But on his return, he conveyed the news that they had to prepare this building for German troops. The President and the Council members appealed to the Jewish community to find 200 beds and blankets. It was rumored that those who came to bring what was required to the Council themselves and not wait for someone to come to their home and seize their furniture, would not be expelled. Consequently, in just one day, all 200 beds were found, blankets. Some gave money, others gave materials. Everyone was thinking, better to give the money for a bed or a blanket and be able to stay in your own house. But it was all for nothing. A few days later, the same occurrence took place in another building, and so on it went. Every 2 or 3 days this demand would be repeated. The Council continued to follow their orders and they also tried to ensure that the evacuees had at least a place to sleep. At the same time, a convoy of Austrian Jews arrived, driven out of Vienna. Since the City Captain was from Vienna, he took special care of them and ordered Dr. Peltz to put them in good housing until they would be sent further east. With each Jewish family, we accommodated two refugees and provided them with first aid, as much as possible. At our home, it was Lévi Rodolphe and his wife. He was the former director of the Imperial Theater in Vienna, until Hitler's rise to power.

Then came 130,000 Jews, during what was called the "deportation to Kielce". By 1942, there were only 80,000 Jews remaining. The others gradually died of hunger in the city, unable to bear the bad conditions which they were subjected to. On February 3, 1940, the City Captain declared that no Jews were allowed to roam on Chekevitse Street or in the famous market square "Adolf Hitler Square". For those who didn't live in that street or in the square, that wasn't a big deal because the Jews weren't roaming around outside anyway. But those who lived there, had to leave their homes and move to the already overcrowded Jewish quarter. Despite all these harsh and unbearable decrees, the Jews continued to try to survive and put food on the

table. They did their best to ignore what took place on the street. Realizing that they could be beaten or jailed at any time, they continued to travel from city to city and do business while we still could. One day, a new decree announced that Jews were no longer allowed to take the train, except for very rare permissions given by the District. Consequently, another possibility of earning a living was taken away from us. As we were still allowed to walk on foot, some Jews organized themselves to walk from town to town, with knapsacks on their backs, trying to earn some money. As a result, many Jews just disappeared and perished without a trace. Some Jewish craftsman found a little work among the Poles whom they knew, and also among the Germans, civilians, police officers and even members of the Gestapo. These were the people who dressed well and had the most beautiful and expensive things made for them. Items were made by Jewish dressmakers, shoemakers and watchmakers. It was rare for a German to go to a Pole to get something done, because of the language barrier. Communication was better with the Jews, as German and Yiddish were somewhat similar. The Germans themselves, did not get "trade rights" for whatever they wanted. But with the Jews they were able to arrange and swap from one to another. But most of the Jews stayed in their homes and frugally ate what little food they had and tried to sell everything they owned. Some still had some hidden merchandise, others still had some money. They would often gather together in their building, talking about politics and the news, as reported in the newspaper. They did not accept what was actually written, but interpreted the news according to their wishes. We were convinced that the war would not last long and that we would survive it. Speaking among ourselves, we learned that Poland had been invaded within only a few days, that Germany was very strong, that the war was going very fast and that it could not last for years. This is what Jews said to each other to try to console themselves.

In April 1940, the Germans sent home all Jewish soldiers imprisoned in Germany. We rejoiced. The fact that they didn't want to have Jews remain in Germany, we believed, was a good thing. The Polish prisoners remained in Germany because, we believed that the Germans were afraid of them. This is what was said during our discussions. But nothing was known about the German plans or why they were fairer with the Jews. My brother, Abraham Mordechai, who was also a prisoner, returned home to our great joy. But a few days later, things turned tragic. We learned that the Jewish prisoners from the region now occupied by the Russians, were not sent home, but to Lublin where they had all been shot by the Germans. This news was a blow,

because until then, there had been no question of this sort of mass murder. Each individual murder committed by the Germans had a cause, an explainable reason. How could one take so many Jewish prisoners like that and shoot them down without any other pretext? It made us think. Maybe for us Jews, times would get tougher. But we were still trying to reassure ourselves. Maybe the Germans didn't want to receive prisoners from the Russians. Maybe they didn't want to feed them either. Maybe they thought no one would know. After each new misfortune, we took refuge with similar illusions, without knowing the German intentions.

In May 1940, a new decree was promulgated. Throughout the General Government, Polish money and German marks could be exchanged for Polish "special-issue" zlotys. All other currencies would become foreign currencies and owning them would be punished. The last deadline was set for June '40. We did not know what to do. Maybe we would be forbidden to have money? Maybe we wouldn't be able to change the money belonging to Jews? If we exchanged money, what were they going to give us in return? And if the Nazis were to disappear, who would recognize these special issue zlotys? Many Jews found a solution. They changed only half of their money. In truth, it was very difficult for the Jews to obey this decree. The time to do so was very short and the lines in the banks were very long. And often, when Jews stood in line for several hours, finally arriving at the door of the bank, the Polish police would hit them and chase them away because they were mingling among Poles. There were always Poles who would notice and wanting to reduce the wait on line, would report any Jew they noticed standing in line to the police. Consequently, Jews gave their money to Poles they knew, that could change money for them. Those who had commissioners (Polish administrators) in their shop, had it changed through them. Eventually, the Jews who had changed all the money they owned had momentarily enough to live on. On the other hand, those who had kept their money pending the return of the exiled Polish government, unfortunately never saw this return. This is how we lived, day after day, week after week, month after month, always in anguish for what might happen next. We Jews did not want to believe that the war would last long. We argued politics, believing that if France, England and America joined in the fight, the war would not last long. I must say that at the beginning, those who suffered the most were the Jews living in the big cities. Those in the smaller towns, if they had a good German commander, they might fare better at first. Provided, of course, that the German troops did not pass through their neighborhood. But that was rare. We were fighting a silent fight against the

Nazis, while they invaded more and more countries and became more powerful every day. They already had almost half of Europe; Poland, Norway, Holland, Belgium and France. The newspapers spoke of the German greatness and their strength at length. On every military truck that passed, it was written "Warsaw-Paris-London". But we didn't understand and couldn't believe what we were reading. "What was so great about the conquest of Poland, a poor, non-motorized country? And there was no comparison in terms of population either. Germany has 80 million inhabitants and was a very great power. Could Holland or Belgium have been stronger than Germany? What is so heroic about conquering these small countries? It's when they're dealing with France that they'll realize it all! When France fell, we continued to argue about the news. France had a very fine fleet, but on land it could not measure itself against the Germans, especially since Italy had stuck a knife in the back of France. But, in London, they weren't there yet, and if they wanted to conquer it, they sure wouldn't come and tell us what insurmountable difficulties they would face. When great powers fought, only then could one measure the Nazi strength. Most Jews were convinced that the war was not going to last long. But many also said it had not yet started and would not start until the trucks no longer carried the "Warsaw-Paris-London" inscription. Even if the Russians and Germans had signed a non-aggression pact, they would be forced to fight. Otherwise, why was Germany sending so many military personnel to Russian borders? Night and day. For us Jews, things were bad then, but if they went to war with the Russians, it would be even worse. Just imagine what the Jews would be referred as. Capitalists, Communists? The Nazis would no longer know what lies to create.

There were streets where Jews were not allowed to walk. Those who lived there were forced to run all the time to the President of the Jewish Council to ask for passes, in order to be able to leave their homes. But the President quickly repeated to them that the official response of the Germans on this matter, was that it was no longer worth giving passes because the streets had to be "cleansed" of Jews. It didn't take long. As early as January 10, 1940, an order was given that Jews had to leave several main streets within two days. This is what it looked like, in all the streets Jews running with luggage and furniture, each wanting to flee as soon as possible because they did not feel confident in the given deadlines. Some have settled with their families, others with acquaintances. Everything went smoothly and long before the deadlines expired, the streets were practically empty of Jews. As a result, each day we became more and more cramped in the Jewish quarter.

On January 12, 1940, at eight o'clock in the morning, we were along with all the tanners and lime manufacturers, to meet with our Commissioner, to take production instructions. It was then that several members of the Gestapo entered, inspected us before kicking us out of the office. They only kept the tanner, Yankl Tenenboim. Not knowing what was going on, we waited in the street and saw through the window that they were inspecting the office. It didn't last long. The Gestapo left taking the Superintendent and Tenenboim with them. After this arrest, we didn't know what to do. We made the factory as tidy as possible and then we waited. The next day, a military car arrived at the factory. An S.S. in high-ranking military uniform, and two members of the Gestapo entered. They walked around the factory, looking around without speaking to us. On leaving, the S.S. said we were all to be in the office the next morning at eight o'clock. We understood that he was going to be our new Commissioner. When we showed up at the office, he immediately told us that he was taking over the factory. He changed our passes so that we could go anywhere without being caught and forced into another work assignment. He soon had enough of the tanneries and a few weeks later he brought one of his friends, also an S.S., named Heyn, who took over the factories. Heyn seemed like a good man at first. He never spoke to us, until the day he started showing his animalistic instincts. One day he ordered all tanners, bosses, workers and employees to be at the factory from 12 noon and not to leave. We obeyed, and everyone ran to their workshop. We thought he had invited the Commissioners to all the factories, and that was why he wanted us all to be at our work. Sitting in the workshop, we waited. We had made sure that the factory was in order and even washed the yard. All the workers were at their posts. We waited like that, for hours, without anyone arriving. In the evening, the workers returned home, but we decided, in vain, to wait a little longer. So, we also went home, asking the watchman to let us know as soon as someone comes. On the way, we met Poles coming from Kielce and they told us that at this very moment, the city was very dangerous. There was a big raid and that all the Jews caught, men and women were gathered in the square, surrounded and guarded by the police. We then understood why he had ordered us all to be at the factory, so that we would not be caught and he would not have to intervene for us. We appreciated what he did, but this was his very last good deed.

What had really happened in Kielce?

The German police had surrounded the whole town. All the Jews, whether or not they had a pass, were taken to Valnachtchi Place. The police also went from house to house, beating and killing Jews, until they gathered several hundred Jews. Men on one side and women on the other side. Several Gestapo members arrived and walked among the men, looking at them very closely, one by one. Those who were chosen, were taken out of the ranks. They gathered and separated around 100 men and sent them to prison. A few hours later the Police Commander arrived. He had been in Kielce for a very short time. His name was Geier. He came with a few Folk-Deutch and they also chose a few men which they took to Vishnovka stone quarries. The rest of the men and women were then beaten and chased, until everyone fled and returned home. That same night, the Gestapo arrested almost all the owners of shops and factories under the control of a Commissioner (administrator). All the Commissioners wanted to get rid of the owners so that they could quietly liquidate the businesses. They took the shop owners away and threw them in prison. They took Chepsl Tovman (a son-in-law of Zagaïnsky) boss of the lime factory, vice-president of the Kielce Community Council, and also Balitsk, one of my neighbors. If any of their families tried to intervene and ask for them, they were also put in prison. The next day, they took them all away, guarded by mounted policemen and S.S. who wouldn't let anyone approach. They were all sent to Buchenwald. Sometime later, the Jewish Council received the death certificates of all these Jews. They were told that if they paid a certain amount of money, they would be sent the boxes with the ashes of the dead. As soon as a person's death certificate arrived, the Gestapo would rush to their home and remove everything. If a store was in the name of the deceased, it was confiscated and the wife and children were thrown out. What had happened in Kielce had taken place in all the cities at the same time and in the same manner. We now knew what our Commissioner's plans were. We had no choice but to go to the factory and obey his orders.

My wife and children remained in Bialogon, as in the countryside everything was much calmer and peaceful, but I had to go to Kielce from time to time and report. On July 17, 1940, I heard of a new roundup in town. They were still catching Jews and sending them to forced labor. But no one knew any details. When I got back to my apartment in Kielce, my sub-tenant, Rodolphe Lévi, told me that the Commissioner of Jewish Homes demanded that I be at home the next day because his administrator was coming to see me. I was being asked to take him to everyone in the building and tell him, very precisely, how much everyone was paying in rent. I stood there

thinking, not knowing what to do. I didn't know if it was better to go back to Bialogon and come back the next day or to stay and spend the night here. Mr. Levi advised me to stay the night because it was already late and it was not very safe to go back and forth on the road. The next morning, it was rumored that many German police had arrived and that they were in all the streets. At ten o'clock, the administrator finally arrived to my apartment and I went with him to see all the tenants. In the courtyard, we could already hear people saying that they had started to catch Jews in the streets in order to send them to forced labor, but only young people were being taken. A German police officer shouted at me to come over. I went over to him and the administrator followed me. The administrator told him that he needed me right now, but the policeman didn't care to listen. I then took out my pass and showed it to him. The policeman read it and said it was in order, but that he had no right to release me. Only the Captain himself could release me. He took me out of the yard and handed me over to a second policeman. The second policeman would not allow me to speak to him. He took me to the great synagogue, which was well guarded by the German police. There were already hundreds of Jews there. A sort of selection was made, releasing a few, but keeping the young people. In the streets, during this time, they continued to catch Jews. Every hour, the synagogue was opened and a few more Jews were thrown in. Everyone already knew that we were going to be sent to Lublin, to forced labor, but we had to go through a medical commission first. It was mostly made up of Jewish doctors, however only the German doctor had the right to release someone. The ones released were those who appeared to look almost dead. I wanted to avoid this exam because I had no chance of being released. I also didn't want to be signed up because I was hoping to find a way to escape the synagogue. At home, they hadn't paid much attention to my arrest, because they thought that by showing my pass I could leave. But since I was not back in the evening, Mr. Lévi thought to himself that perhaps I had been detained. He immediately informed my family in Bialogon. The next day at eight o'clock in the morning we were to be deported. Time was ticking, it was night, and no one intervened. The Jewish Council was able to send some bread and people were shoving each other trying to grab a bite to eat. I didn't understand how they could eat anything, even though I hadn't eaten anything all day. The synagogue was packed. Captain Geier arrived with his two dogs, which he let loose on people, tearing them apart. In addition, he started to beat all those unfortunate Jews who were within his reach with his whip. (I omitted a lengthy description of Moshe Mayer Baum's experience in this synagogue and how he was able to get accepted into a small group of Jews who were

listed as exempt by the German doctors, who already left). Geier then turned to us. It was explained that the eight of us had been released by the German doctor. The Captain walked up to the first of the group and asked him why he didn't want to work. The latter replied that he had a fragile heart. Geier replied there was a way to make sure. If he didn't resist the blows, it would mean that his heart was indeed weak. He then proceeded to hit him on the head until blood streamed everywhere, until the "freed" man decided himself to join the able-bodied group. Geier then walked over to the second in our group and asked him what he had. The latter replied that he had a problem with hemorrhoids and that he was bleeding continuously. Geier nodded and said his dogs would take care of it. He ordered him to lower his pants and called out to the dogs. The dogs shredded his flesh. His screams were so loud that our blood froze. Seeing this, we did not wait for our turn. We immediately ran to mingle with the others, while the Captain beat us.

When the Jewish Council members came to bring us some breakfast and bread for the journey, the S.S. who were guarding the entrance, would not let them pass. We were taken directly to the train. The streets were guarded on both sides by police and SS on horseback. Women and children crowded along the sidewalks with small packages in their arms. They were trying to give them to captured family members. But the police wouldn't let them come near and violently beat them with their guns. We were marching in rows of five and those who did not walk properly were beaten with rifle butts. As I walked forward, I looked around, hoping to spot someone from my family. On Chenkevitch Street, I spotted my wife coming out of the police station. An S.S. rushed at her and kicked her, making her fall down to the ground. We were forced to keep walking. I was unable to see if she was able to get up. My heart was breaking and I started to cry. She must have heard that we were being taken to the train station and rushed over to see me. My companions tried to console me. They said that nothing would happen to us if we were just being taken to forced labor. In our miserable state, we walked to the train. All the while, tears were streaming from my eyes. We were over 300 men. We were pushed inside the train. 65 souls piled into each boxcar. Blows reigned down over our heads as we were shoved onto the train. The doors and windows of the wagons were sealed shut and the S.S. from Kielce took us to Lublin. The train left Kielce at 10 am on July 20, 1940. It was a very hot day. In the boxcars there was no air circulating. Barely enough air to breathe. We managed to open a very small window. When the train was moving a little air came in, but when it stopped at a station it was absolutely unbearable. During a stop, the S.S. got out of

their passenger car (the only passenger car in the entire train) and checked that all the windows were closed. Seeing that our boxcar had a window slightly open, they unlocked the door and entered inside with two dogs. They asked who had opened the window. As no one responded, they beat us mercilessly with their guns while their dogs were ripping into our flesh. They then asked who among us was the smartest Jew. Again, no one dared to speak up. They looked at us for a while and ended up choosing a man. They ordered him to close the window and made him responsible for keeping this window shut, or he would be shot. As we continued to travel, the heat became unbearable. We were drenched in sweat. At five o'clock in the evening, the train finally arrived in Lublin. They opened the boxcars, all the while screaming and hitting us to quickly get out. We then quickly resumed our place, in rows of five. A few Folkdeutch were already waiting for us. The S.S. of Kielce surrounded our ranks. They marched us through town and to a camp quite a far distance. On the way to this camp, they ordered us to run and without anyone stepping out of line. We did our best to obey. The Folkdeutch came to a halt abruptly. Those who, like me, were behind, were not able to react quickly enough and we fell on top of each other. They immediately ordered us to resume the run, all the while being beaten by the S.S. with their rifle butts. We crossed the whole city like this, run, stop, run, stop. We finally arrived in front of a large camp surrounded by a fence. As we entered the gate, we were led to a square where all kinds of SS, members of the Gestapo and policemen were waiting. The SS officer from Kielce handed a list with all our names to the camp commandant. The commandant surprisingly responded by saying that we could all return to Kielce. The camp commandant also told us that if anyone among us was seriously ill, we should go to the doctors. But warning us, that if the doctors contested the seriousness of the illness, the liar would be shot immediately. Only three men came forward. They first saw a Jewish doctor, who after examining them, gave them each a piece of paper to present to the German doctor. Then the German doctor handed them over to the Folkdeutch to deal with. They were then beaten and left to the dogs that ripped into their flesh. Finally, they were tortured by having a small pipe, with an electric current running, forced down their throats. The three men were electrocuted. They immediately fell down dead. Jewish workers from Lublin were then called in to remove the bodies. This was a painful lesson for all of us. The camp director was called Glabatchnik, also called Dolfus, an S.S. from Vienna. Everyone in Lublin was shaking before him. As he passed in the street, he would shoot at Jews. A few Jews from Lublin worked in the camp. They came in alone every day and also left alone. We called them volunteers, as

they brought us some water. I wanted to speak to one of them, but he motioned to me, not to speak to him because we would both be punished. I noticed that next to the toilets there was a Jewish "canteen" that the Jewish council in Lublin had set up. This was a place for Jewish workers. Those who wanted to go to the bathroom had to get up and have a Folksdeutch take them, ten at a time. I asked to go to the bathroom. I walked over and asked those near the "canteen", what kind of work we were going to do in the camp. It was explained to me that we were not working there, that it was just the meeting point for Jewish workers. That trains arrived daily from all Jewish towns, and that workers were sent from here to other destinations. The workers from Lublin were there to clean up and take care of the camp. I then understood that the camp was the beginning of Maidanek. In the canteen, I was given a piece of bread with some coffee. It had been two days since I had eaten anything, but even that I couldn't swallow. They also told me that tonight they couldn't prepare anything for the Kielce group, but that the next morning everyone would have some bread and coffee for breakfast. The Folksdeutschen led us to a secluded barracks ordering us to sleep. As I entered, I tried to find the young man from Warsaw who had said that in Lublin he could make arrangements for me. But I couldn't because entering the barracks had to be in accordance with German discipline. I went to bed like the others, but could not sleep. I thought all the time about what would be the best way to manage. I was the only one in the group whose name was not on the lists. If I could escape this camp, it would be great, as they wouldn't know who to look for. But how was I going to manage without any money? I had maybe ten zlotys on me. At five in the morning, we all got off our plank beds. Everyone wanted to go to the bathroom, but the Folksdeutch who guarded the barracks, only allowed those who gave them a few zlotys. I gave and I went to the toilet because I wanted to see again the Jews from Lublin who worked in the canteen. But the canteen was still closed. At eight o'clock we were all taken there. There was a crate with coffee and sliced bread. All rushed to receive some food. This was not surprising since we had not had food for two days. After breakfast, I didn't line up. I wanted to speak to one of the Jewish canteen workers. I called him aside and asked for advice, assuring him that I would reward him if he managed to get me out of the camp. He then told me not to return with the group to Kielce, but to take care of the canteen while waiting for the return of the head of the volunteer workers from Lublin. He would talk to him and maybe he could help me. That's what I decided. The Folksdeutch paid no attention to me because I had given him my last zlotys. It was not long before the leader of the workers' group arrived and the young man to whom I had entrusted my fate

came over to speak to him. He came back to tell me that the chief was going to help me. He didn't want money but he ordered me to join his team immediately. I had to camouflage my face a bit and get my clothes dirty. At three o'clock, when the workers returned, I should try to join the group. But he warned me that at the entrance the S.S. were stationed with their dogs and he was required to give them the list of everyone who had returned. Sometimes they counted those who came out, sometimes not. If they did, he would then have to say that I was not part of the group and the dogs would kill me or I would be shot. If that happened, I absolutely had to refrain from saying that he was the one who had allowed me to join them, because then we would both be dead. I agreed to everything. The Jewish workers took good care of me and fed me. The young man I spoke to first was also taking care of me. He was motivated by the promised reward. He also had to go out in the same group as me. As I was there working, my heart was pounding very hard. I wanted to survive and make it to the other side of the fence. There was another group of volunteer workers. Among them I recognized the young man from Warsaw, whom I had searched in vain the day before. I couldn't approach him but I realized he was doing the exact same thing as me. Those from Kielce were taken to the gate. They were going to be returned shortly. For me, it was better if they left before I went out with the group of volunteers, because as they were seated at the entrance, they might notice me. One of them instinctively might called out, "Hey Moshe Meyer Baum." It was ten o'clock. I was counting the hours. Each hour seemed to last a year. The Kielce group still did not leave. But from time to time a few men were taken to the toilets. Two of them, one of my neighbors, had me work in the canteen. He immediately understood my plans and hid in the toilet until the moment of departure. At three o'clock, the leader of our group gathered us and lined up in pairs and we made our way to the entrance. We were stopped by an S.S. who asked our boss how many men he had with him. He responded by saying 85. The S.S. took him to the office and we stood outside the door. Those from Kielce, sitting in front of the gate noticed me also, but no one said a word. It didn't last long. Our boss came out with a pass in his hand. He handed it over to the Folksdeutch at the entrance as they opened the gate and we were able to exit. On the other side of the entrance, I was finally able to catch my breath and pull myself together a bit. The group leader called me aside and told me to reward the young man who had helped me, because he really needed a few zlotys. I had to explain to the young man that at the moment that I didn't have any money, but it was still necessary to put me up until I got some money from Kielce. He even gave me some coins so that I could phone home and he took me to his place. A Jew could only

phone through the Jewish Council. Upon entering the Council building, I saw that, as in Kielce, everything was functioning with German precision, as directed by the Germans. I called my wife. I told her that I was free and that she needed to send me some money. I gave her my address and the next day a man came with the money and a pass for me to go home. I asked him if he had any news to share. He told me that after the workers were deported, Kielce was calm but depressed. The mayor had created a committee to collect money and clothes to send to the poor. My wife told me that when she learned that I was arrested, she went to Kielce. But she had arrived late at night and there was nothing she could do at that time. Not knowing that we would be deported in the morning, she went very early to the commissioner to ask him to release me. He replied that he had nothing to do with this case. He could only take care of matters regarding the factory if her husband had to go to forced labor. When I called to say that I had been released, she had to run to ask for a travel permit for the man that she was sending to me.

In Bialogon there was another tannery, much bigger and much richer than ours, that of Rosila Tenenbaum. There was also a lot more hidden merchandise there. Thus, she had more worries than we did, because it was very likely that Commissioner Heyn would decide to confiscate her merchandise. In addition, she lived in the tannery, and if she was kicked out of there, she would lose not only the factory and all of her merchandise, but also her home and all her personal valuables. First, she decided to take the money, gold, jewelry and all the valuable things that she owned, and put them all in a big box, to be buried at the other end of her courtyard. That way, even if driven out of her home, she could access her hiding place.

Each commissioner installed many of their own men in the factories and shops to observe and report everything that happened inside. Madame Tenenbaum and her children did not have good relations with their workers who hated them. We, on the other hand, were on very good terms with our own employees. We were all good friends. We treated our employees well and they also earned good wages. Even the worker imposed on us by the commissioner, had integrated well into our factory. This worker did not report to the commissioner what was going on in our factory. He even did us the favor of telling us what was being said at the commissioner's office. As much as possible, all of our Polish workers tried to save us from the Nazi thugs.

On September 1, 1940, my brother-in-law, Yiedl , had to report to the Commissioner's office. He was ordered to assemble all the workers at the tannery the following morning. The commissioner intended to visit the factory, as well as to Madame Tenenbaum's factory. Early the next morning the commissioner showed up at our house and proceeded to look around the factory. He then ordered Yiedl to give shovels to all his workers and lead them to the Tenenbaum factory. Upon arriving at the Tenenbaums, the commissioner again told Yiedl to take charge of the operations. The commissioner knew exactly where to look for what he wanted. He pointed out the right spot right away, and the workers had to dig a hole from which they were able to remove the leather and various goods. As soon as the commissioner saw the first bundle of leather emerge, he rushed inside the Madame Tenenbaum's house and started to viciously beat her. He then telephoned the local police. A few minutes later, several German policemen arrived, led by Officer Languer. They began to thoroughly inspect the entire site. The commissioner wanted them to look for the money, as he imagined that she was hiding some money. After they ripped off the wooden slats, broke the walls, they decided to arrest the entire family. Ultimately, they only arrested Madame Tenenbaum and one of her sons. The other children were able to flee. The commissioner, speaking to Languer, pointed to Yiedl and told him that the Bekiermans were the owners of the second tannery. They walked over to Yiedl and said, "Tell him Bekierman, what does your yard look like? Tell us right away where you have hidden your merchandise! Yiedl replied that he had no hidden goods. The commissioner and Languer then decided to have all factories monitored by the Polish police, until they were able to carry out an inspection. At home, at our tannery, we immediately saw two Polish policemen who were on strict guard duty and did not let anyone in. When Mrs Tenenbaum's children heard that the whole yard was being demolished, they were very afraid that the police would find the cash register with all the money. They had also hidden foreign currency there, which was punishable by death. They then agreed with Yiedl to try to avoid the place where this was buried. It went on like that all day. The workers were digging and finding hidden things. The commissioner and the German police, meanwhile, emptied all the bottles of liquor and wine found in the house. Then they went out into the yard and beat Yiedl and the workers who were walking past them. But it was getting late, and the work was not done. The police then ordered everyone to go home. They would bring in thirty more Jewish workers from Bialogon the next day. They took Madame Tenenbaum and her son to prison in Kielce while Commissioner Heyn confiscated their house for himself.

Yiedl came home after the day's work, very tired and also very worried. When they were done with the Tenenbaum tannery, they would come to us with all the workers to dig up the yard. They would certainly find everything that was hidden there and we would have worked in vain for so many weeks, day and night, for the Germans to find ready-made goods. On top of that, we would go to jail. As we gathered at home, we tried to find some solution. Elke, my sister-in-law, said she would go to the Polish commander to find out what we needed to do. The captain was a good friend of hers and he got along very well with her. We were sure that if he had any good advice for us, he would offer it to us. On her return, she summarized their discussion. He had told her that at night he would send two policemen that he could trust, to our factory. In exchange for a reward, they would look aside and we could remove some of the hidden merchandise from the factory. That was all he could do for us as the situation was very difficult. Agreeing to this arrangement, during the next four days while Yiedl worked with the Tenenbaums, we were able to collect some merchandise at night. The work was very hard, and we had to fill in and smooth out the holes, so that nothing looked suspicious. Yiedl worked during the day with the Tenenbaums, and at night, with us. On the fourth day, they reached the area where the cash register was buried. Yiedl, finding himself alone in this spot, made sure to avoid digging in just this area. The crate was therefore not discovered. That same day, when the work was completed, the commissioner told Yiedl that they would go to his factory very early the next day. The workers could go home with all their tools, but they had to be ready the next day in the factory. In the early hours of the morning, the commissioner arrived with Languer and some German police officers. We got down to work. We were digging without finding anything. Sometimes the workers would dig up a bit of leather. But this was hardly a comparison to what had been discovered among the Tenenbaums. This was because we had removed the major portion. They transported all the merchandise left in our factory to the Tenenbaum factory. Then they completely liquidated our factory and put Yiedl in jail. We were very agitated and we immediately left for Kielce to speak to Languer, but the papers had already been sent to the special tribunal. Elke met a German national, named Hyosne. He was one of the senior officials of the special court. She was able to tell him what happened. He told her to come back the next day. He would then have had time to read the files and could tell her how to proceed. He also strongly recommended that she be very careful when coming to see him at his home. She must be certain that no one sees her.

The next day, Elke waited for him to come back from court. He told her that the papers were there and that they would be shipped the next day to the Leather Administration Center in Krakow. There they would set a fine to be paid, but she could go and see the members of the center. We knew them, as they came to our house from time to time to pick up worked leather. Doctors Volford and Fraydenberg were among the chief officials of the leather section of the administration center of the entire general government. I immediately went to the Jewish Council and called a person named Malke Goldberg who worked at the Jewish Council in Radom. She was a very young and very pretty woman. A petite blonde who really looked like a pure Aryan. She could travel anywhere without being suspected a Jew. She was a cousin of Yiedl, from his wife's side. I told her about the liquidation of the factory and Yiedl's arrest. I told her that we had to go to Krakow and that we absolutely needed two authorizations in order to travel by train, one for her and one for myself. We had to get them at all costs. The next day, Mrs Goldberg came to Kielce with a train pass for me. She was registered on the same pass. Elke immediately took her to Mr. Hyosne, the senior official of the special tribunal, to get acquainted. Madame Goldberg was to replace Elke on Yiedl's business, because Elke had to get back to Bialogon to find her little child. Mrs. Goldberg did not wear an armband at all, even when she was out on the street. She was not afraid of being arrested. Mr. Hyosne was very happy to receive her at his home. Mr. Hyosne's wife also found her to be very attractive and could not believe she was Jewish.

We went to Krakow, which really struck me as already been transformed into a German city. All posters and signs, in all streets, in stations, on trams were now in German. It was the capital of the general government, home to Drs. Volford and Fraydenberg, but strangely enough, Jews still walked the streets, although in a less conspicuous fashion. They also appeared a lot less worried here than with us in Kielce. They had stopped being ashamed of wearing armbands. They got used to them and wore them like every day clothing. However, when they spoke among each other, they admitted that they would surely soon be expelling all the Jews from Krakow because the capital of the general government had to be "clean" free of all Jews.

Mrs. Goldberg and I immediately headed to the leather section of the administration center. There was a large inscription there, indicating that entry was strictly forbidden to Jews. But we also saw that Jews, wearing their armbands, entered and nobody said anything to them. I didn't want to go in, so Madame Goldberg walked alone up to a small counter to ask to be

received. She was given a card to present to the guard at the door, to let her pass. She didn't stay long because Drs Volford and Fraydenberg weren't there. At the office, she was told that the Bekiermans' papers were not there yet, but those for Madame Tenenbaum had arrived and already left for Kielce. We now had to wait two days to see these two men. After two days elapsed, they could only tell her that the documents had finally arrived, but they could not set a fine. They were forced to send all files back to Kielce because they were only asked for an advisory opinion on how the factory and its managers should be handled. As they were happy with Bekierman business, their opinion was favorable and we therefore hoped that the court would agree to release Yiedl. At one point, Doctor Volford walked over to another room where a woman was sitting, near a typewriter. He had asked her for the Bekierman file and had shown Mrs. Goldberg their notes. She thanked him and left. She told me all about this on the way out, before driving back to Kielce. Upon arriving, Mrs. Goldberg immediately went to Mr. Hyosne and repeated everything to him. She wondered if she should speak to the DA (prosecutor). He advised her against it because he was an ardent Nazi, capable of imprisoning her. He also told her that the judgment in the trial of Madame Tenenbaum and her son would be revoked on the first of October. We were anxious to know what the sentence would be. The presence of Commissioner Heyn at the trial would be of little help to them. The special court sentenced them to two years in prison and also confiscated their house in Kielce. As the words of this sentence traveled, everything darkened for us. So, Mrs. Goldberg returned to see Mr. Hyosne who tried to reassure her, saying that our case had nothing to do with that of Mrs. Tenenbaum. In addition, the authorities in Krakow had given a very favorable opinion to the Bekierman factory. Ms. Goldberg wanted to go back and talk to the DA, but he again dissuaded her, fearing the situation could get even worse. Yet she wouldn't listen to him. She went to the DA, rang the doorbell, and introduced herself, "I'm Mrs. Bekierman" when he opened the door. He asked her what she wanted, but when she started to speak, he slammed the door in her face. She did not tell Mr. Hyosne about her visit to the prosecutor or how she was received. Hyosne also thought she was Madame Bekierman because Elke had introduced her to him under that name and she never clarified it since. Now we were very afraid that she had made matters worse. When Madame Tenenbaum's children learned that their mother and brother had been sentenced to two years in prison, they decided to go to the factory and recover the money they had hidden there, in order to possibly rescue them. With the help of the night guards, they succeeded and

were able to get their mother out of prison. Their brother, unfortunately never saw freedom again.

A few days later, Mr. Hyosne informed us that the Bekierman trial would take place on October 23 and advised us to write a letter to Yiedl in prison before that date. We recommended that he stick to the accusation. Thus, if he were to be sentenced to prison, he might be credited for the time he had already spent there before the trial. Otherwise, he risked that his time already spent in prison would be ignored. Mr. Hyosne also told us that Commissioner Heyn would not be present at the trial, because the judge had not requested his presence. Following his advice, we immediately wrote to Yiedl regarding Hyosne's recommendations. We sent him the letter via the prison guards, which was no small feat, as it was always very difficult to communicate with the prisoners. On October 23, after witnessing Yiedl's transfer from prison to court hearing, and relieved to know Heyn wouldn't be there, we all made it to court. We were eager to hear what the judge's decision would be. At 10 am as the trial began, the attorney general said he was demanding Superintendent Heyn's presence in court. Consequently, they called him at his office. After some discussion, the verdict was a sentence of three months in prison, plus a fine of 3000 zlotys. Since 45 days were already spent in prison, Yiedl only had 45 days left to serve. Mr. Hyosne walked out of court to break the news to Mrs. Goldberg. A few minutes later, the policeman in charge of escorting the prisoners back to prison, went over to "Madame Bekierman". Mrs. Goldberg was promptly arrested and taken away with all the other prisoners. We stood there stunned. Yiedl in chains, and Madame Goldberg taken with him to prison. It startled us as we didn't know why or how and we didn't understand at all what had happened. Why had she been arrested? We were thinking so much about it that our heads were beginning to throb. She had been arrested under the name of Madame Bekierman, while carrying all the papers in the name of Malke Goldberg. However, when entering prison, you were forced to remove everything you were wearing while the police checked everything very carefully. They would inevitably realize that her real name was Goldberg, not Bekierman. Who could know what problems this could cause? Malke was obviously aware of this problem, as she tried to rid herself of her purse on the way to prison. The policeman noticed this and began to beat Mrs. Goldberg. Malke understood that everything would be revealed at the prison office. We returned home in a state of confusion. Concerned about the gravity of Malke's situation, we no longer rejoiced at Yiedl being given a light sentence. My wife didn't feel it was safe for me to remain at home. She

was worried that Malke had in her bag, the permission paper to take the train to Krakow, with my name on it. What if they asked Malke about the reasons for this trip to Krakow? What if they asked her who Moyshe Meyer Baum was? They would probably come and arrest me.

The next day, Elke went to see Hyosne. He told her that the prosecutor had wanted to send Madame Goldberg to Buchenwald, on the grounds that she had tried to cause a scandal in his office. Ultimately, the judges only sentenced her to one month in prison. Hyosne warned her not to go to the prosecutor. Elke didn't share everything with him as she feared it was dangerous and Hyosne would also feel too compromised.

We waited impatiently for the month to pass and for Malke to return home. Upon returning, Malke told us everything that had happened. When she entered the office, the policeman immediately announced that she had tried to get rid of her handbag. The commissioner, believing that she was Yiedl's wife, didn't think this was such a serious issue. He got Yiedl out of his cell so they could straighten this out and everything went smoothly. She then passed Yiedl's message to us. He wanted us to take care of paying the 3,000 zlotys, either by withdrawing it from our savings bank or paying out of pocket so he could come out after serving his sentence. I went to court to find out how to make this payment. They told me that our account in the savings bank had been confiscated. All Jewish stores, all Jewish factories, and all Jewish assets disappeared at the same time and in the same way. Therefore, we paid the requested amount out of our pocket and Yiedl was able to be released from prison. We had no more savings, but we were happy to finally have him home. We were no longer doing any business and we were only left with the hope for Hitler's defeat.

On the day of Yiedl Bekierman's trial, five young Jewish workers were also sentenced to two years in prison for the crime of arriving a little late for their work. This created a dark cloud over the Jewish community. We could not take any new work procedures lightly without risking prison. It was interesting to see what factories "cleaned" of the Jews looked like and how the German officials in the administration of Jewish goods handled matters. Jews who tried to save some of their property so their families would not suffer from starvation, had to constantly outmaneuver Germans and Poles. The latter watched them very closely, and sucked them dry at the slightest opportunity. With regard to dealing with the Germans, everything was different. Some Jews were able to get entire trucks laden with goods out of

factories and sold on the black market. They did not have to fear since Polish merchants and German commissioners were all partners in the blackmarket enterprises. I have to say that there were also several Jews needed by Polish merchants because some of the merchandise was illegally sold at tiny stalls run by Jews. The Jews were also indispensable for another reason. The money the commissioners made from the goods were of little interest. More important than Deutchmarks or Polish special-issue zlotys was gold or paper dollars. This was what was wanted and to be gotten through the Jews. But we didn't have to put up with the sight of these Germans and Poles sharing our possessions for too long. Soon empty Jewish factories and businesses were liquidated. All this was nothing compared to what they would do to the Jewish populations a little later and which I will write about in the following chapters.

Even the best and the most refined individuals would reveal their base animal instincts. This is something that we Jews could not foresee. Meanwhile, the Jewish council in Kielce was doing its job, obeying the Germans, which was getting harder day by day as the Jewish population grew poorer and misery flourished. The task that the Gestapo imposed on the council was not easy. It was becoming impossible to live life in any normal way. President, Dr. Peltz had arranged for foodstuffs to be distributed to the Jews and he obtained potatoes and some flour for bread. Each Jewish family received a little of each, but not every week. Sometimes we received some flour. Other times, baked bread. We received something at least once a month and it was so important to the Jewish population. Not that the distributions made by the Germans were considerable, but thanks to the flour, the Jewish bakers, who no longer had the right to work, could now bake bread. However, they had to bake their bread at night, when the doors to buildings were closed. This was necessitated by their fear of being assaulted and having their bread taken away and being sent to jail. Baking at night was not easy because if the Germans saw the chimney smoking, they would realize what was going on. We still hadn't found a way to cook without the fireplace giving off smoke. Nevertheless, the Jews were doing well thanks to receiving a little flour for bread. However, there were rumors about the upcoming establishment of a ghetto. The Jews had learned from an engineer, who worked at the town hall, that plans were underway. We tried to predict which streets would enter it and which not. Anyway, no one had any useful information and no one wanted to believe such a thing. President, Dr Peltz demanded that we stop talking about it because the whole thing was so much noise.

At the end of December 1940, the Gestapo arrested President Dr Peltz. It drew the entire Jewish community into turmoil. We didn't know why. As a result, the Jewish council became totally inactive. The only intermediary between us and the Gestapo was Dr. Peltz. Now no one knew what to do and we were afraid to go and ask why they arrested him. Whoever went to ask such questions would probably no longer be heard from. The only solution was to wait patiently for the Gestapo to order us what we need to do. At the same time as the President was arrested, Adolf Lewi was arrested and executed immediately. This greatly increased our anxiety. We feared for the life of the President. To reassure ourselves, we found a semblance of an explanation for the execution of Adolf Lewi. He had once served in the Polish Legion during Pilsudski's time. Dr Peltz, who bore a Jewish name, had a Jewish heart and understood what Nazism was. He had chosen to sacrifice himself by taking charge over the Jewish population of Kielce. His mission was to do everything possible to lessen the plight of the Jews. This is what displeased the Gestapo. They wanted to have a Jewish president, with a Jewish name, and a Nazi heart. Not being the case, they arrested Dr. Peltz in order to name someone more to their liking. On January 10, 1941, the Gestapo summoned Herman Levi and appointed him to the leadership of the Jewish council, pending the council members electing a new president. Of course, the council members elected him immediately, since the Gestapo had chosen him. The Jewish people of Kielce were satisfied. At least Herman Levi was also a Jew. Finally, we would have someone to go and speak to the Gestapo or to the Stadt-hauptmann (police captain) on behalf of the Jews. Perhaps he could intervene on behalf of Dr Peltz. As soon Herman Levi took over the board, he turned everything upside down. He appointed new council members. He fired all of the employees who Dr Peltz had hired and replaced them with his relatives. He acted very pompous, as if he were a great statesman. It appeared that he led the council with authority and the Gestapo were satisfied. He quickly got more flour for making the bread and he had several more stoves installed in the kitchen so that he could provide more meals. He was also able to intervene on behalf of Dr. Peltz, who was released after a few weeks. On the other hand, he complied perfectly with the orders of the Gestapo, as well as of Captain Geier (the chief of the German police).

After several weeks had passed, on March 10, 1941, President Herman Levi received an order from Captain Geier that he enlist 80 Jewish policemen. The President has put up a notice for this enlistment. Jewish police? What could it be used for? It's incomprehensible! Under Polish rule there was no

Jewish police, but now under Hitler we will have one. Everyone was anxious to try to understand what it would be like when a council member came to a Jew's home, accompanied by a Jewish policeman, in order to take away his furniture. Or when a few Jews had to be captured and sent to forced labor, requiring Jewish police officers tasked with this. I remember when this notice was posted. I had several of my friends in my house. We did not understand who among the Jews might want to become a police officer. Why would Geier want to create a Jewish police force? If Geier or the Gestapo wanted to search a Jew's house, confiscate his meager possessions, maybe even kill him, why would they bother to send the Jewish police to do it? It would never work. Jews would never volunteer. If Geier wanted a Jewish police force, he would have to raid, arrest Jews, write down their names, and tell them that they have been designated to be police officers. This is what we imagined. But this was wishful thinking, as things turned out quite differently. While 80 were requested, there were at least, several hundred men who registered. Among all those registered, only those who had support from the President were taken, even though they were of the worst characters in the city. Only the ones the President wanted. So, it was easy to guess the character of the Jewish police. The President, therefore chose 80 men. Some were from Łódź, who had come to settle in Kielce, some Viennese Jews and others from Kielce itself. Geier immediately found work for them. At first, they didn't have uniforms and on the street you couldn't tell who was a police officer. It was very bad because you didn't know who to beware of. On March 20 they raided, arrested Jews and sent them to Shitkavke as stone breakers. The raid by the Jewish police was perhaps even better than that of the German police. Indeed, you could often hide when a German policeman arrived (who was in no danger if he couldn't find you) while you couldn't escape the much more skillful Jewish policemen. Another difference was if the Germans raided because they needed 300 men and brought back only 280, that was fine, whereas if the Jewish police were ordered to present 300 men, it was absolutely vital to never miss the count by a single one. But the real reason Geier ordered the creation of a Jewish police force was that the German authorities were about to set up a ghetto.

The Ghetto

At the end of March, Captain Geier ordered the President to enlist 70 more Jewish police officers so that there would be 150 in all. This was necessary as a ghetto was going to be created in a few days. Plans were already

underway to find out which streets. The President did recruit another 70 police officers and they received special hats from Captain Geier. These hats, worn by all the Jewish police in the General Government, distinguished them from other Jews. We've been talking about it for a long time. But now it had happened. They had finally come to an agreement. There was nothing more to laugh about. They were setting up a ghetto and we couldn't even imagine what it would look like. Crowding 25,000 people into just a few alleys? Twelve in the same room? Barbed wire or a fence with police officers to make sure no one escapes? Would we be able to go in or out? We tried to imagine the inconceivable. 25,000 people in the ghetto. How much bread would be required each day? How many potatoes needed so that we don't die of hunger? And then we would need some wood or charcoal to cook the food. If we can't go in or out and we're being watched, where would we get it all? Let's not even consider all those who had to go to work every day in order to earn their bread and now would no longer be able to do so. But even those who still had a little money, could you imagine how much a bread, a kilo of potatoes, and other essentials would be? People were going to starve in the middle of the street without anyone being able to help them. We had already heard of ghettos. There had already been some for the Jews in the Middle Ages, but who would have thought that in the 20th century, one would have to think again about how to survive in a ghetto? Our imaginations were helpless and we couldn't imagine how life was going to be organized. But we had to leave the reflections there and focus on the practical side. We weren't thinking, we were just caught in the evolution of Jewish life. It is true that most of the Jews stayed at home, no longer traded, no longer went out into the streets. They only waited every day for night to fall and for the gate to be closed. It was only then that we felt a little safer. Our neighbors were meeting. We talked politics, we read the newspapers full of anti-Semitic hatred. We were really shaking in horror. What if we were locked up? Where would we find any food? How long would we survive without eating? On April 1, 1941, Captain Geier summoned the President of the Council, Herman Levi, and informed him of the creation of a ghetto for the Jews. He gave him the map of the streets that would be part of it, specifying that the Poles who lived there had until April 3 to move and that the Jews of the entire city would have from April 3 to 6 to settle there. On April 6 at noon, the ghetto would be closed. As soon as he left the Captain's office, the President called the Council and shared with them what was required of them. This was what the plan looked like. One side of Piotrków Street, running the full length to the train gate, the side that goes to the 'new world of Shelnits', and also one side or part of the Zayzitshin Street; this

entire neighborhood down to Kaleka Street. All the doors and windows facing the rest of the city had to be blocked with planks so that one could neither go out nor even look out. Streets leading from the ghetto to non-ghetto areas of the city were to be closed with four-meter-high fences at the expense of the Jewish Council. Jews would also not be allowed to be in two streets intersecting the ghetto, the street following the "Warsaw - Krakow" line (ie Warsaw Street), and the one where the sawmill was located. Jews would also be denied the government office, as well as the factory "The Glass Factory of Ludwig" on Jasny Street. The ghetto gates and windows on both sides had to be sealed off. Crossing from one side of the street to the other could only be done in one location. At this single crossing point, there would be a barrier, to be guarded by three policemen, a German, a Pole and a Jew. This was how the ghetto found itself split into three sections. The junction being made by a gate and a barrier guarded by three policemen. Several ghetto buildings lined Adolf Hitler Square. They were to remain empty. Not a single Jew was to live there, lest he glance through a crack, viewing Adolf Hitler Square. Poles also were not allowed to live there, since these buildings belonged in the ghetto. In the district chosen for the ghetto, 15,000 souls previously lived. It was already tight enough, even with those who had been kicked out. Almost all of the old streets were located in the Jewish Quarter. Now 25,000 Jews were going to have to live there. The Council started by choosing the two tallest and most beautiful buildings. One for themselves and the other for the hospital. They were opposite each other on Varsovie Street, which was closed to traffic. In this way, the Council made sure that the only passage from one part of the ghetto to the other was located between these two buildings. Then they sent their men to survey the homes and put it on record that no one had the right to occupy any apartment. Only the Council could allocate the lodgings which the Poles had to vacate and remained empty. In apartments already occupied by Jews, a family or maybe two would have to be accommodated. But the owner would have the right to choose people he liked and with whom he could get along. If anyone moved into an apartment on their own, they should report it immediately to the Council. Otherwise, if the apartment was designated for someone else, the Jewish police would take care of evicting. The Council demanded payment from wealthy Jews, but for the poor, the allocations were free. We could not begin to guess how long the financially indigent had to wait by the Council before getting a lodging assignment. You also had to see what kind of apartments they were getting! Of course, if you could slip a few zlotys into the pocket of a Jewish policeman, things would go a little faster. But in reality, the inhabitants of the ghetto paid no attention to the Council

posters and settled themselves wherever they wanted, or where they were accepted. If the police came, we bribed them to look the other way and they didn't throw anyone out. In the ghetto, the streets were crowded with carts full of packages and luggage. Those who did not manage to secure an apartment, piled their belongings in a ghetto courtyard under the supervision of a child. Then they would have to go to the Council to await their lodging assignment. But Council employees quickly saw that it would be impossible to please everyone. They ordered everyone who didn't have an apartment yet, to come to the ghetto in the meantime. This set off a whirlwind of packages and furniture traversing the streets. In all the courtyards and in all the streets, children were watching over the meager possessions of their parents. It goes without saying that the "best" conditions were not to be for the poor. They were assigned rooms in dark cellars, without doors or windows. The Council employees, tasked with transferring the Jewish hospital and Council offices, failed to carry out all that was required of them and they left many people unhappy. The first concern of those who had to move was not considering what might happen later, but to find a place to sleep. Those who had already lived in this newly formed ghetto, were able to set aside some food, potatoes, a little flour, a little wood for heating. Everything was also getting more expensive by the minute. On April 6 at noon, everyone was in the ghetto. The exits were sealed and the police were stationed to ensure that no one entered or exited. I remember, it was the day before Passover. Everyone had a few matzoh that the Council had distributed. That made us forget about bread for a few days.

Living on Shelnits Street, I was lucky enough to be able to stay in my apartment. My family members, my brother-in-law Yiedl, and my brother Yudl were also able to stay in their homes because they were already living in the ghetto. In my two-room apartment, I was already welcoming two people, Mr. Lerer and his wife, from Vienna. But I did my best to ensure that other people were not entrusted to join me in my apartment because it was said that the Jews of Bialogon would also be forced to move into the Kielce ghetto, and my whole family was there. I wanted to save them a space in my apartment. In the meantime, my eldest sister-in-law, Freyde (Yiedl's first wife), had come to join me in the ghetto, bringing some food with her, as she still believed in the possibility of returning to Palestine. She thought it would be better to be in Kielce, in case all British visa holders were asked to show up. When the ghetto was closed, there were 24,500 Jews there. From day one, some had nothing to eat, not even a board of matzoh because the Council employees had not always been fair in their distribution. In each

courtyard, people organized themselves so that the poor had at least a few potatoes. But this did nothing to alleviate Jewish misery. Everyone wondered when the first loaf would arrive. The German authorities declared the ghetto a "contaminated zone". They said that because of the presence of people with contagious diseases, germs could spread throughout the city. Jews were therefore forbidden to mingle with the inhabitants of other neighborhoods. As a result, all the laissez-passes available to some Jews, especially those who worked in factories or with Germans, were abolished. From then on, no one was able to enter or leave the ghetto. This seriously complicated our situation. We had always thought that a few workers could come out of the ghetto in order to work and that they would bring back food. What could this mean? Was this even possible? Yet, we were happy about one thing. The Germans were not entering the ghetto. We would be able to breathe a little. Venture out into the streets without fear of being beaten or being arrested for forced labor. The Germans scrupulously respected this prohibition and no one entered the ghetto for fear of germs. They even forbade the removal of the dead from the city in order to be buried in the Jewish cemetery. They demanded that a piece of land in the ghetto be set aside to carry out all the burials, until the end of the "risk of death epidemic". The first days in the ghetto coincided with the holidays. The majority of the population had prepared a small food reserve. This meant that almost everyone, more or less, had something to eat. Poles came out to see what things looked like at the ghetto boundary. In the street, Polish children could be seen throwing bread over the fences of the ghetto while Jews inside, grabbed the bread and threw money back. We immediately understood that a solution was found. The Poles would bring bread, and these Jews would sell it in the ghetto. Seeing this, a ray of hope appeared. Maybe we would finally have something to eat. Little by little, all kinds of bartering took place with the inhabitants of the ghetto. This trade soon took on important proportions. In each street there were three policemen who were able to watch everything, in return for financial rewards. Periodically, the gate was briefly opened and a few carts of potatoes or flour were quickly brought in. Even when the police closed the entrances, you could tear off a board and agree with a Pole from a building across the street, to bring whatever he could during the night. Almost at every entrance, "business partnerships" were forming. However, the police made their rounds, warning in the name of Captain Geier, that if anyone was caught bringing anything in or taking anything out of a building, all the old people would be arrested and shot. But some did not pay any attention to those threats and continued their business.

Several weeks passed and the situation was not as bad as we had feared. The ghetto had created a good source of livelihood for some of us. As long as one had a window to the outside of the ghetto, one could trade with Poles. This activity increased over time. We even managed to bring in some cattle that we slaughtered for meat. It was hoped that when the "risk of epidemic" was proclaimed, the workers would still be able to go out to work and craftsmen would be able to get passes to return to work for the Germans. This would further improve our situation. We initially feared that we would not have enough food, but it turned out to be the opposite. You could find almost anything in the ghetto and of the highest quality. You just had to pay the price. We even joked that if somebody got sick outside the ghetto and needed an orange or a lemon, they'd have to send someone to buy it from us. Even German newspapers were available in the ghetto. A few weeks later, the "risk of an epidemic" was effectively lifted and the workers were again granted work permits. Certain Jewish artisans, tailors, shoemakers, whose work was valued by the Germans, also were able to obtain work permits. It reached the point where, for a few zlotys, anyone could get a pass. This alleviated our difficulties a bit since the Jews were able to move around and were able to start importing and exporting whatever they could. But from another perspective, things got much worse with the removal of the "contaminated zone". The Germans stopped fearing germs and no longer hesitated to enter the ghetto. Captain Geier placed one of his high-ranking police officers, named Würtz, as head of the ghetto. He was made responsible for day to day Jewish life in the ghetto. Würtz was seen walking from building to building asking what we lived on. If he found something irregular, he would have everything removed from the building. Luckily, he just imposed fines and didn't send anyone to prison. He enjoyed sharing his witticism, "I have plenty of time to put you in jail. I want to take your money first!"

From time to time the Gestapo would level an attack on a Jewish building. They would surround it, inspect it and confiscate all the possessions from certain residents. This forced more and more families to get their food from the Council kitchen. When the Gestapo wanted to search a building, all they had to do was let the Jewish police know and they would surround it. The Gestapo no longer had to hurry, knowing full well that no one could leave the building until their arrival. They could count on the Jewish police, who fulfilled their mission much better than the Germans themselves. If the Gestapo wanted to put someone in jail, they would warn the Jewish police who made sure that the person in question was not able to go into hiding. If

this Jew was able to evade arrest by not being in Kielce, he was obliged to turn himself in because otherwise the Jewish police would arrest his wife, his children or even his mother, and hold them until he came to surrender. If one asked a Jewish policeman to show some compassion, when he was not under observation by Germans, to just look the other way when a Jew is trying to save himself, he would retort that he did not want to risk his head for that of another. If one asked him who had forced him to become a police officer and risking his head for others, one would most likely be fined for insulting, or perhaps be immediately arrested and taken to the police station to receive a beating and still be made to pay the fine. During the entire ghetto period, not a single Jewish policeman risked his head for anyone else. On the other hand, the Jewish population lost many members to the actions of the Jewish police. In addition, the Jewish police also counted a good number of snitches. Do not think that the Gestapo was going after random buildings and searching them without knowing that there was something to be found. No, the Gestapo was not infallible and they always seemed to hit the mark. They never had to spring into action for nothing, thanks to the most despicable elements of the population.

The Jewish Council also seemed to be a good place to thrive. They had a considerable staff. If an applicant knew the president or the mayor, he was hired by the Council. From then on, he no longer feared being forcefully enlisted for work or had more taxes imposed on him. Being employed by the Council certainly had its perks. Before the creation of the ghetto, it was Poles who collected the rents from the homes where Jews lived, as well as collecting other taxes, such as on water. Engaging with them was easier to skirt regulations or get extensions. In the ghetto, on the other hand, councilmen had taken over these functions and appointed tax collectors. With them, even the poorest, those who had nothing to eat, were forced to pay their rent punctually. The people on the council knew how to extract money. It is safe to say that the entire Council apparatus was concerned with being in compliance with their Nazi masters, rather than rendering services to the Jewish population. This appeared to be the case with all the Jewish Councils and their police enforcers in all the towns of the General Government.

The Polish police and their secret agents also played an important role in the plight of the Jews. In fact, the first ghetto victim was shot dead by a Polish policeman, who seeing children playing near one of the ghetto fences, shot dead a 15-year-old girl. His excuse was that the girl was trying to get out of

the ghetto. This was how the ghetto evolved. A small world apart. On one hand, you could see people lining up in front of the Council kitchen, waiting for the ration that they would be given for the day. These were people who were never destitute or ever expected to experience such deprivation. On the other hand, there were also people who were able to lead a fairly normal life, lacking absolutely nothing. It was hard to ignore seeing people who were going from courtyard to courtyard, rummaging through the trash near the toilets, in case someone threw away something edible which they would not hesitate to devour on the spot. At the same time, one could see people sitting in cafes, drinking, eating and having a good time. The dichotomy was so striking when one saw people in the street literally naked, while other people walked around dressed in the best clothes. Entire families were seen languishing in their homes with children cold and swollen with hunger, while others were able to enjoy concerts or play football. I have often wondered whether the well-to-do Jews could have alleviated the misery of the starving Jews. Should we blame them, and hold liable this fraction of the Jewish population that still had some money to live on? I have asked myself this question more than once, never finding an answer. In the entire Jewish population, there was no one who could feel assured that they will continue to enjoy material comforts. There will always be poor Jews and their numbers were increasing day by day. But there were no longer any rich Jews, in the fullest sense of the word because all Jewish assets, buildings, businesses, factories, had been confiscated by the Germans. Very few Jews had managed to hide some merchandise or convert their savings into gold or foreign currency. Some had calculated that by selling all their possessions and staying locked within the four walls of their room, they would have enough to last six months. Others might be able to survive that way for a year and still others for more than a year or two. For all of them, the goal was to hold out until after the war, which we understood would not end after a month or two. There was a growing concern about having enough to be able to feed their children. Some were already faced with no more to eat. Should the others have shared with them the reserves they kept for the following day, thus everyone would be able to eat their fill for the present and starve afterwards? Mankind is not yet able to deal with these questions. You can see how many well-off Jews there were by the numbers. On the first of April 1941 there were 24,500 Jews in the ghetto. July 1, 1942, 21,000. In fifteen months, 3,500 Jews had died of hunger, disease, or for some, torture inflicted by the Germans. Among these 21,000, 13,000 were registered with the support committee. Some of them ate lunch in the canteen and a majority received non-perishable food once a month. Four

hundred and fifty people were provided with financial contribution by the Council. There were 7,500 Jews in the ghetto who neither took nor paid for anything. Quite a number of Jews preferred to let themselves die rather than go to the canteen to ask for food which was insufficient to stay alive and for which one would also have to stand in line for hours. If these Jews had known that at the end of 1942 that they would no longer be alive and that all their possessions would be in the hands of these murderers, I doubt that they would have passively spent their last dying days starving and suffering in the cold. Unfortunately, it was impossible for us to imagine our future. We thought we had foreseen all the trouble that could befall us, but we could never have imagined taking an entire people, including women and children, in order to exterminate them. The human mind is incapable of grasping such things. A man can only foresee as far as his imagination allows. Beyond that, everyone is helpless. Hitler's barbaric actions and the means he used to annihilate the Jewish people were well beyond comprehension.

In the meantime, the Jews stayed in the ghetto, in their own little world and waited without really knowing what fate awaited them. Would it be salvation or death? We wondered if the barbaric Germans had locked us in this ghetto, had taken over our businesses and confiscated our property, in order that we had no more means to live on and would gradually disappear to attrition. Was this the ultimate goal of the Nazis for the Jewish people? Maybe it was just a means to some other end goal? Perhaps we had been concentrated in one place in order to facilitate the achievement of this goal? The German propaganda in all the pages of the German newspapers and articles of the Propaganda Minister Goebbels, reminded us that the only war to be waged was the war against the Jewish people! They wrote, "We are not making war on either the English people or British imperialism. No, the English people love the German people. We only wage war on the British state's apparatus, on members of the British government, who are all Jews, bar none. Isn't Churchill (the British Prime Minister) a Jew? And Minister Eden is also a Jew", and so on. Every British minister and statesman, was simply accorded a Jewish great-grandmother and thereby became a Jew. This propaganda saddened us. If, during this war against England, the Germans had already deprived us of everything and locked us up behind four walls, without means of subsistence, then what would be the situation when the war against Soviet Union broke out? No matter how much they wrote in their newspapers that England would fail to sever the friendship between Germany and the Soviet Union, we knew war was inevitable. For months the German armies had been moving, day and night, towards the

Soviet border. And we asked ourselves, what are they going to do with us when they begin their propaganda that Bolshevism really came from the Jews? Unfortunately, we didn't have to wait long for the response. On June 22, 1941, German newspapers announced the start of hostilities. "The whole of Europe must bow with respect to the German people who attacked Jewish Bolshevism a few weeks ago, as they were preparing their weapons to attack. We must thank our Führer, who knew how to anticipate these designs and allowed us to deal the first fatal blow to Jewish Bolshevism." A few days later there was talk of the advance of Germans troops. According to the newspapers, they were finally able to tear the whole Red Army to pieces, "We are fighting against the last remnants of the army that the Bolsheviks are throwing at us on all fronts. They fight without discipline and without command". The radios loudly praised, the exploits of the Führer day and night. We read the newspapers with great bitterness. Not that we feared that Hitler had actually destroyed the Red Army. We were convinced that he would not be able to destroy it so quickly. But we were concerned about what the Nazis would do with us. We didn't have to worry too long. The blows started to rain down one after the other. We could no longer think about what would happen to us in days ahead, as we were caught in the midst of uncertainty and misfortunes with each new day.

Orders in the Ghetto

On July 15, 1941 at 4 a.m., while we were all still asleep, I heard the fence on Shelnits Street smashed down and heard the military footsteps of four men. I jumped out of bed and peeked out the window. Terrified, I said to my wife Rukhtshe (Rachel), "Look what is going on! The street is full of German policemen. There are also the mounted police. They are entering all the apartments one by one". My wife replied, "Surely another roundup for work. Hide yourself!" I grabbed some clothing and ran off to find a hiding place. The yard was already overrun by the police. I went up to the attic, but all the men in the building were already hiding there. I realized that the police would be sure to discover them, so I climbed onto the roof and laid face down. I heard the police forcing everyone out of the attic with their rifle butts. Then everything became calm again. From several courts away, I still heard orders shouted from police, demanding that everything be removed from every room. I heard the noise of men and women emptying their apartments. I also saw people layering several articles of clothing. I then realized that it was not about sending men to forced labor. Was this deportation? Geier had often said that if he caught anyone sneaking goods

into the ghetto, he would deport the "culprits" immediately. My position on the roof was tenuous. The police could easily notice me from the neighboring yard and shoot me. I said to myself that if they deported people, I needed to stay with my wife and my children. I went back down to the attic and saw that no one was there. Everything was quiet. I reached the second floor, looking everywhere. The doors to all the apartments were wide open and the furniture was knocked over. Clothes and other belongings were scattered about. I did not see anyone. I kept going down the stairs and found the same sights as the previous floor. I entered my apartment. No one was there. I was greeted by open cupboards, overturned tables and stools and some possessions scattered on the ground. I remained frozen, certain that everyone had been deported. The courtyard was full of men, women and children, all lined up with hands up, facing the wall. A policeman was pacing up and down guarding them. Careful not to be noticed, I slipped past my wife and children. My wife whispered in a low voice, as if to herself, "They are going to deport us. All the neighbors took their winter clothes and they put their valuables in the carts. That way they will have, at least, something to sell and get a piece of bread for the children, wherever they are going to send us. But we were not given any time to gather anything". She told me that in another courtyard there were several apparently "friendly" German policemen that advised everyone to take valuables and put them in carts. But in her case, she was confronted by a bunch of Nazis. They did not hesitate to knock everything over and refused taking any possessions. This was why my wife and children ended up with no coats or shoes on. Several hours later, around noon, we were visited by Captain Geier and the Commander of the Jewish Police, Zhimnovoda. They ordered us to return home and to close the gate that led to the street where the carts with the luggage remained. No one was to come out or they would be shot dead on the spot. The policeman who was watching us, was ordered to leave. We closed the gate. Imagine our joy to be able to return home! We kissed and hugged each other. Even though the Germans had emptied our apartments, at least we had a place to reside. "Our neighbors began to understand that they had unwittingly been blessed by such caring policemen." On their own, they would have chosen their most precious objects and put them in the carts. The same thing occurred in all the buildings on several streets. Until then, Jews had sometimes been able to save their lives with money hidden. Now that wouldn't be any longer possible. Würtz, Geier or even the Gestapo would no longer have to run the risk of illegally accepting Jewish money in exchange for services, since the Jews had nothing left. Now they were able to simply pocket the money, gold and valuables.

On August 12, 1941, the Gestapo arrested the former president, Dr. Peltz, as well as the commander of the Jewish police, Zhimnovoda along with several members of the Jewish Council. They were all, including some doctors, immediately sent to Oswiecim. The Germans appointed Singer, a German Jew, as head of the Jewish police. He would be seen roaming the streets, armed with a rubber whip, which he used to beat the Jews. Singer felt this would satisfy the Gestapo and thereby escape his fate. Captain Geier was unhappy to learn that the Gestapo had deported his personally chosen Jewish Police Commander to appoint another, as the police were his domain and he was the boss. A few days later, while the Gestapo chief was away on a trip, Geier took the opportunity to deport Singer and several of his Jewish Police friends to Oswiecim. While the prisoners were at the station, ready to be sent off to Oswiecim, the deputy head of the Gestapo arrived. He approached Spiegel and slapped him in the face, ordering him to be returned to the ghetto. Captain Geier then appointed a new commander, Schindler, a Hungarian Jew, who by the way, appeared to be a very honest person.

Oswiecim

I cannot describe Oswiecim, as I didn't go there myself and because no one has ever returned yet alive. (I omitted this section pertaining to Oswiecim, as his perceptions had no basis and were filled with many inaccuracies).

Dr Philosopher

On September 1, 1941, a new Gestapo chief arrived in Kielce. As soon as the Jews heard the news, they began to inquire as to what kind of man he was. Perhaps he would ease their torments a little, instead of persecuting them day after day like the previous chief did. We quickly learned that the new chief was a man in his fifties. His name was Thomas and he also bore the title of Dr. of Philosophy. The Jews rejoiced. A mature and cultured man would certainly behave better than the young chief who had just left. But we quickly saw what this German, Dr. Philosophy, revealed himself to be. Germany can rightly be proud of its culture. "Even if we brought together all the philosophers of the entire earth, they would be unable to accomplish as much as this one German philosopher." The first occurrence happened a few days after his arrival, at around 10 p.m. The streets of the ghetto were empty. Everyone was at home, behind the closed gates of the ghetto. We felt a little more relaxed than during the day. Suddenly we heard a car drive up the street from Shelnits Street. It stopped in front of my backyard gate. We then

heard a knock. The new Gestapo chief accompanied by four men entered. They asked where Fishl Zavatski lived. I don't know what they had on Fishl Zavatski, but it's clear that "it wasn't about offering him business". They entered his home, but he was not there. They only found his young and pretty wife. They wanted to know where her husband was. She didn't know what to do because her husband was at a neighbor's house. She told them that her husband had gone to the house of prayer and had not yet returned. They then demanded that she accompany them there and point out her husband. There was a small apartment in the opposite building where the men gathered to pray, study and share with each other their troubles. These gatherings occurred in the evenings, once the gate was closed. She wasn't sure whether she would still find anyone there. She led them there and knocked. But they didn't wait for someone to open the door for them. They immediately smashed down the door and entered the apartment. There they found a few young people studying as usual and others just chatting. Seeing the Gestapo men enter, everyone remained petrified with fear. No one was allowed to leave. Blows started to rain down on their heads. First, they went to the Torah scrolls, took them out and tore them into pieces. Then, the Gestapo chief ordered the Jewish policemen who were also there, to round up all the men and women in the courtyard. Within a few minutes, twenty women and ten men were gathered. The chief ordered them to take off all their clothes. Upon obeying, the clothes were immediately burned. Then the chief ordered the women to get on one table and the men to stand on another, while Gestapo officers photographed them. Then they asked everyone to sit on the same table while they photographed them again. Then they had them assume different poses while taking continuous photos. After that, they hit all the women with rubber riding crops. They hit women on the breasts and men on the genitals. Everything darkened when the Jewish policeman were ordered to turn off the large floodlight that they carried for taking photos. The Gestapo officers struck everywhere and on everyone before leaving and without asking anything about Fishl Zavatski. All the inhabitants of the street watched from their apartments through small openings in their windows. They didn't want to be noticed, but they wanted to see who would get arrested. But only the five men who entered, were seen getting back into their car. They did not take anyone. A few minutes later, we saw Madame Zavatski, completely naked, emerge through the same door, returning home. We did not feel right to question her about what happened, as we didn't want to shame her any further. It wasn't until the next morning that we learned the whole story. It didn't stop with this incident. Every Sunday, the chief would attack another building and repeat the same

story in order to amuse his friends who came along with him. All his friends offered suggestions to improve the perversity of the scenes each time. This was the high level attained by German culture. This was what a German philosopher was capable of doing. "But other philosophers still awaited us for other exploits."

Capital punishment for those who want to leave the ghetto

In October 1941, a new law went into effect: "Any Jew found on a road or in a part of the city not belonging to the ghetto would be arrested and brought before the Sondergericht (special court). Leaving the ghetto would be punished with death". Each new decision made against the Jews somehow prepared us for what was to follow. For example, before confiscating Jewish businesses, they began by placing commissioners to make us believe that it might be possible to live with them. As a result, they encountered no difficulty in carrying out the rest of their plans. When Jewish assets were confiscated, shops and factories alike, the next logical step was questioning why Jews would be walking around. There was no reason for not staying at home. Home was the ghetto and only the ghetto. In fact, once stripped of their businesses, Jews more easily accepted the ghetto. Earlier, when Jews still had their businesses, their shops, their workshops, it would have been far more difficult to lock up three million Jews. It might have slowed down the realization of German projects. Once we were locked in the ghetto, it became easier for us to accept the law punishing all exiting the ghetto with death. We rationalized that since we're not going outside anyway, what does a death penalty matter. We did not react strongly to this law because it was beyond our understanding. Could it be that a court could sentence a person to death for taking a few steps on the other side of a wall? Is not a court supposed to represent justice? If a 12 or 13-year-old child forgot the law and stepped beyond the prescribed limit, would that be a death sentence? No, this did not seem possible. Yet, each new measure entailed its share of victims. Some who did not have enough to feed their children risked their lives by sneaking past former Polish neighbors on the other side, in order to bring back something to eat. Every day Jews were caught and imprisoned. The court would arbitrarily sentence them to death, however the sentences was not immediately carried out. The victims usually spent two or three months in prison. This gave some the false impression that such sentences wouldn't be carried out and they could even send their young children to Poles, in order to work and earn money to buy bread. Most of us were under

the impression that the Germans would never condemn and kill children. But, of course, we were wrong.

Even Jews who had never left the ghetto were often arrested and killed. For these arrests, the Polish police, with their secret informers, were much more effective than the German. Indeed, the German police were unable to distinguish a Jewish woman or girl from a non-Jew, if she was not wearing the armband. However, the Polish police were able to recognize them without any difficulty and took them mercilessly to the slaughterhouse. They did so with so much enthusiasm that one would have thought that was the normal order of things. I would like to recall here the name of the Polish secret informer, Matószko, who was decorated by the German authorities for having supplied the largest number of Jews and Jewish children to the special court. Thanks to him, they were all condemned to death. But the stream of tears caused by these measures gradually dried up, as this became the norm in the ghetto. The Jews were getting anesthetized to this new situation and the community might have been able to adjust to these misfortunes, had not more misfortunes continued to befall the Jews.

Jews are forced to donate their furs

On January 1, 1942, the President of the Jewish Council ordered the Jewish population to deliver all fur coats and hats, as well as all fur-trimmed clothing, to the Council by January 3. If any piece of fur in a Jew's house was found after that date, he would be shot. This decree was issued under the authority of Captain Geier, and signed by the President of the Jewish Council of Kielce, Herman Levi. People were wondering what to do. For many, it was a matter of life and death. Jews kept their coats in order to sell. It was the last hope of having enough to feed their children for a few more weeks and suddenly this had to be given up. Some claimed that until this edict was announced in the newspaper, the law did not apply. Moreover, the decree was only signed by the President. If he used Captain Geier's name to instill the fear of execution, that only proved his willingness to scare people into giving up their possessions. Everyone was waiting to see how others in the community would react. But near the Council headquarters, we could already see people quickly queuing to bring their finest furs. It was rumored that Geier would shoot at Jews for no particular reason. He felt that he had no need of laws. So, if the President said that Geier would have any Jew who was in possession of furs shot, one should believe it. Was a piece of clothing worth risking one's life? Hadn't we already given up things more important

than coats, our businesses and all of our assets. Our response ultimately was a surrender of any furs we had. We consoled ourselves by thinking that this was a sign of Hitler's stupidity. Until then, the Führer had planned and calculated everything, without ever making a mistake. As a brilliant strategy, he arrived in Norway, a few hours before the English. He had fallen on the Soviets several weeks in advance. But he allowed the German soldiers to freeze on the Eastern Front and he only thought of warming them up with the furs of Jews as an afterthought. I viewed this as his first mistake. The brilliant Führer did not foresee that during the winter, his soldiers would suffer from the cold. He had no doubt believed that they would be occupy Russian houses and cafes before the snowfall. Unfortunately for him, things did not go as planned and he was trying to get by with the furs of the Jews. This is what the Jews said among themselves to console each other as they lined up to hand over their fur coats. My brother, brother-in-law and I immediately gathered our six fur coats, without waiting for the final deadline. We placed a sentry outside our gate, in case Würtz appeared. We then lit the stove and threw in all our coats with such enthusiasm, as if by burning these coats we were helping to freeze six more German soldiers on the Eastern Front. We were not the only ones to do this. If one could estimate all the coats that were burned in the General Government, one would arrive at a fortune that many American Jews would be happy to have. But since everyone still had to appear to give something, I still stood in line. They knew we had furs and we had to think how we needed to appear to have delivered them. We were aware that there were some Jews to be wary of. Unfortunately, this decree also caused its share of victims. After the deadline expired, bits of fur, sometimes old pieces of no value were found with several Jews. As there was no law punishing fur owners with death, the Germans did not bring anyone before the special court. Nevertheless, the Jews who were caught and arrested, were found dead a few hours later. Their bodies were deposited in front of the Council headquarters. Every day, there were additional victims deposited in front of the council headquarters. Even those who did not have any furs were in danger. Many Jews had sold their furs to Poles prior to the decree that was issued. Some of these Poles came to claim reimbursement for the furs, threatening to declare having bought them after January 3. Some Poles were able to be repaid, but others had already spent their money on feeding their children. These Jews were denounced and executed. Poles had the right to own furs. And the Poles were coming to take back the money they had paid for furs bought prior to the confiscation decree. Similar occurrences happened in many villages where Jews had not yet been gathered into ghettos and still lived among

Poles. There were many Poles who had no problem exposing their Jewish neighbor. If a Jew and a Pole did not live on good terms, or if the Poles wanted to get rid of a Jewish family in order to appropriate their property, he need only accuse the Jew of hiding furs. This meant, that whether your home was searched and nothing found or even if they didn't bother to search, your entire family was shot.

Ritual bath

Geier, the chief of police, who got along very well with the chief of the Gestapo, Dr. Philosopher Thomas, no doubt felt inferior to him in the eyes of his friends. Thomas played nasty tricks on the Jews every week, laughing at their humiliation. Geier wasn't doing anything nearly amusing. "Finally, he decided to put into effect his personal achievement for which he certainly would be praised by his friends." It was in January 1942. It was a very cold Friday and the fresh snow was very deep. As Jews we went to the ritual bath on Friday to wash and ritually purify ourselves. It was difficult to wash at home, where several families lived under the same roof. So, on Friday when the bath was open to everyone, we all rushed there. On that particular day, Captain Geier and several policemen surrounded the bath. He strode in and started attacking and striking Jews, knocking them down and throwing people out naked in the yard. Then, with the help of Jewish policemen, he marched all the people out of the bath naked into the snow and cold street. The German police continued to lash the Jews on their naked bodies. One could not imagine the scene. The Germans finally dispersed everyone and the victims had to run naked to their homes. After this masterpiece, Captain Geier no longer felt ashamed, as it certainly earned him honor (sarcasm).

Execution of those condemned to death

On February 10, 1942, the President received orders from Captain Geier to send ten diggers to the Jewish cemetery. They would have to dig a pit for 65 people, prepare several bags of quicklime, and wait for Geier to arrive. Everyone understood that death sentences were being passed on innocent Jews and were going to be carried out. Those who had someone in prison volunteered for this work. Thus, they would be able to see if, by misfortune, their brother, their father, their sister or their mother were executed. The President chose ten men and Shmuel-Zelik, the gravedigger. The whole ghetto was sad. Heartbreaking scenes would take place in the cemetery when 65 people, healthy and well, faced the hole that awaited them. The

gravedigger and the 10 men dug the pit according to instruction given by Geier. When they were done, they waited, wondering who he would bring. They were sitting there waiting, their hearts petrified with dread at the sight of possibly one of their imprisoned relatives arriving. At 4:00 p.m., a car arrived. Geier and several of his friends have descended from it.

Immediately after, two trucks arrived, filled with people, guarded by armed police. Geier locked the gravedigger and his ten grave diggers in a house. He told them not to come out until he ordered it. Through the windows, they were able to see how they unloaded trucks, filled with women, girls, men, and also children of 10 or 11 years old. The screams heard were so frightful, you'd think the whole world would hear them. The unfortunate victims, beaten with rifle butts, were forced to approach the pit. The house was too far away, so the diggers were not able to recognize the victims. They could just hear the machine guns firing relentlessly and people falling into the pit screaming, "Almighty God! Why did we deserve this? Why". When the machine guns stopped firing, the diggers were brought out. They were ordered to pour lime into the pit and fill it in. The screaming began once more, in greater intensity, as many of the victims were still alive. Some had fallen into the pit with a bullet in the leg or in the arm. Several had thrown themselves into the pit before being critically injured. Cries were raised: "Shmuel-Zelik! Save me! What did we do? Shmuel-Zelik went to tell the Germans that the people were still alive, but he was only beaten for his efforts. He was ordered to complete the pouring of the lime immediately and fill the pit. And that's what they did. Once the grave was filled in, we could still hear the cries of some of the victims: "Why? Why?" Shmuel-Zelik and the other diggers returned home in deep shock and tears. On entering the ghetto, they started to beat their heads and cry hysterically. The whole ghetto was in a state of total shock and in tears. Several of the volunteer grave workers took off their shoes when they arrived home and went into fitful mourning. Some had recognized in the open grave, a sister or a brother who they heard crying from the bottom of their grave and crying out to them by name. The rabbi did not push them to mourn, as some of those who witnessed, could not be sure of what they had even seen under such nightmarish conditions. But, convinced what they witnessed, they mourned their loss. Similar occurrences happened on the 1st and 15th of each month. Men, women and children from all over the country were taken to Jewish cemeteries. I imagined that the arrested Jews all uttered, pretty much the same mournful cries, "Almighty God, why? Why?"

Arrest of Jews returning from Russia

At the end of March 1942, the Gestapo arrested all the Jews who had stayed beyond the former Russian border. At the start of the war, many Jews had taken refuge in Polish districts under the Russian occupation, such as Lemberg (Polish: Lwów; today: Lviv), Bialystok, etc. They had stayed there, protected by the Soviet regime. Then, in 1941, when Hitler attacked the Soviet Union and occupied these territories, the Jews who had fled Nazism, fell back into German hands. Some were murdered on the spot, others had been allowed to return home, to their families. But in '42, they were arrested and imprisoned in Oswiecim. A few days later, we received all their death certificates. Also, in March 1942, on behalf of Captain Geier, the Jewish Council ordered all Jewish officers, whether German or Polish, to report. German Jews assumed that Geier simply wanted to incorporate Jewish officers into Jewish Police. So almost all of them showed up without too much concern. The plight of the Jews was accelerating. Until then, the decrees and provisions against the Jews had been issued one at a time and there was time to get used to one decree before the next one. However, now the decrees were getting much worse than the ones that preceded. Now, several new decrees were issued every day. It was no longer humanly possible to even follow them. Not to mention that the new decrees in no way nullified the old ones. On a typical morning, when we went out into the street, we would hear various reports, such as Würtz was emptying someone's apartment, as he caught her selling two kilos of potatoes. Or the Gestapo searched another apartment during the night and arrested several Jews who had returned from Russia. People would personally guard what they have seen, so it wouldn't be known throughout the ghetto. We also heard on the street that all the Jews of Lublin had been deported. We did not know exactly where or what happened. A little later on, we heard that Würtz allegedly said, that if he were to ever meet a Jew in Kielce in two months, he would be surprised. All these rumors going around were making us insane. What else could we hear about what was happening in Lublin? We heard that the Germans had made a sort of electric machine which they needed for military purposes and which they wanted to ensure for proper operation. They had taken all the Jews in Lublin and tested the machine on them. We heard all had been burned to death. A few days later, an article appeared in a German newspaper, "General Frank and the German police chief Himmler went to Lublin, the first town in the country and of the General Government to be Judenrein (free of Jews)". According to the newspaper, the Jews had been moved to Majdan-Tatarsky (Maidanek) and were able to take

everything with them. We read the newspaper and wondered how this was possible. Lublin was such a large city, with more than 30,000 Jews, while Majdan-Tatarsky was a village that could accommodate, at most 4,000 people. We didn't understand any of this. After a while, a few people received cards explaining that their entire family had been deported. The deportations took place under tragic conditions, which I will not detail for various reasons. The only people left were those who were able to work in factories, or as stone breakers and included a few artisan positions. In all, 4,000 men remained. Nothing was known yet of those who were deported. May God help us and may we see our loved ones again. But there were rumors, very bad rumors. I didn't want to repeat them. In fact, no one knew anything. Jews who received these postcards didn't want to show their postcard to anyone. I heard that these cards circulated in town but there was no proof since the families who received them did not want to tell anyone. Having heard of this, everyone began to search for a way to save themselves and avoid the deportations by enlisting to work either in a factory or in a stone quarry. Others managed to get themselves employed by the Council, thinking that this served a useful function which would be recognized by the German labor office. Some had even spent large sums of money to be taken into a factory or a stone quarry. Unfortunately, there were not enough places for everyone. Geier, the Gestapo, and all the German personnel knew what was going to happen to the Jews. Therefore, they were in a hurry to order all kinds of quality goods from Jewish artisans, which they then shipped home to Germany. As a result, their wives had the prettiest clothes made by Jewish tailors. They said to themselves, that when the Jews were evacuated, they would no longer have anyone working for them. So, they organized Jewish artisans and set up workshops in empty ghetto buildings, where neither Jews nor Poles were allowed to live because their windows overlooked Adolf Hitler Square. Jewish workers entered the workshops from behind, that is, through the ghetto and the Germans entered through Adolf Hitler Square. Birgental, a Hungarian Jew, was director of these factories. When the Jews learned of the creation of these Jewish factories, everyone wanted to join. Knowledge of a trade was not required and helpers were always welcomed. During this time, I imagined Geier and Thomas saying to each other, "Work, little Jews! Work! You will not escape us". I too signed up for a job and got it after a few days. I was assigned to the Ludwig Glass Factory. My brother Yudl was also with me. It was a great job. My brother-in-law, Yiedl, got a job at the stone quarry. It was one of the best positions, because the chief of administration, Klasts, reported to the Gestapo leader of the entire Kielce

district. It was clear that he would not deport any Jewish workers that were needed.

No house without death

On April 27, 1942, at 7:00 a.m., we were all still in bed when my wife's cousin, Elke Bekierman, her eyes red with tears, arrived at our house. Seeing me, she thanked Heaven and said, that here at least everything was in order. She cried out that we had no idea of the disaster last night. All the Jewish officers who made themselves known were executed, as well as several doctors. Dr. Schatz had been shot in his bed. He hadn't even been given time to get dressed. Most of the Jewish intellectuals had been dragged out of their homes and shot. Almost all those, who in pre-war Polish time, had been involved in Communist activities, had been taken. Some had been shot, others arrested. There was hardly a home without a victim. Dr Schmetterling was not at home. The Jewish Police were given until 6 p.m. to find him. We burst into tears, and cried for quite some time. A deluge of calamities was coming against the Jews and we were unable to protect ourselves. What broke our hearts even more, were the children's tears. Innocent children, who had hurt no one, who knew nothing, and nevertheless were exposed to the same crisis and fate as us adults. We looked at the children and cried. Why had they come into the world, only to be cruelly swept away in such a deluge of misfortunes? Each tear of our young children burned and seared into our flesh. We always hoped that the civilized world, that exists beyond the borders of barbaric Nazism, might just open their hearts to their suffering. Maybe the free world could gather the resources to save us from the bestial Nazism, at least our young innocent children. All the while I didn't allow myself to go to my children, whom I loved so much and were my very life, to just kiss them. I could not. I kept imagining that my present state of consciousness was only a nightmare and I would wake from this. I prayed that the moment would come when I would wake up from this nightmare and I would no longer find any of the evil characters in this nightmare surrounding me. We feared that we would no longer have children, no more wives, no more relatives, because bestial Nazism would devour us. Those who managed to survive, wouldn't be able to recognize each other anymore. Those Jews who were arrested and not killed immediately, were sent to Oswiecim, where they were tortured to death. The Jewish Police who found and handed over Dr. Schmetterling, was shot in the stomach by the Germans before locking him up with the many corpses while still alive. No one was allowed to approach these victims until they died on

their own. Because of this policy, he suffered like this for two days before he died. We thought that this whole operation had been carried out because of May 1st a day of international celebration. Alas, we did not know that their purpose was to make things easier for themselves, so as not to be disturbed in carrying out their great plans for the Jewish people.

On June 15th, my sister-in-law Elke came with my brother-in-law (Yiedl). They got permission to go to Kielce because Bialogon's doctor referred them to a specialist there. We were happy because it had been a long time since we had seen each other. They spent several days with us and told us what was happening in Bialogon. How, on May 1, when Berl Shternfeld (my older brother's father-in-law) was on the porch of his house, Commissioner Heine had passed by and summoned him to his office. From there he heard Heine telephone the German police to say that he had just arrested a Jew on the road to Kielce who was discussing May 1 with Poles. The German police asked him to deliver this Jew to Kielce. Hearing what the Superintendent was saying on the phone, Berl Shternfeld became terrified. His wife and children, who were waiting outside, looked out the window and saw him beat himself over his head while shouting that he was being murdered. They hadn't understood what was happening. It was the Polish police who were responsible for driving him to Kielce. As soon as he was imprisoned, Berl wrote a letter begging Commissioner Heine to have mercy and tell the truth about where he had found him. But during the first prison search, Berl had become frightened and had thrown his letter away. The police noticed this and added this letter to his file. Thanks to this letter, the special tribunal had postponed his trial hearing, since Berl's letter indicated that the commissioner had not met him on the road and begged him to admit the truth. At the rescheduled trial hearing, Heine attended. Regardless of the facts, Berl was sentenced to death. As a result, no one knew if he was still alive. As his family's residence permit expired on June 19, his family was forced to vacate. My wife and I accompanied them to the gates of the ghetto. Elke took me by the arm and pulled me aside and whispered, "Moyshe-Meyer. My heart is so heavy. You must remember the time, when we were still under Polish jurisdiction, I was investigated possessing Communist literature. They found nothing and they cleared me, but the report of the investigation remained on file and is still there. Regarding what happened last week in Checiny, Thomas, accompanied by several Gestapo men, in an early morning raid, broke into the homes of all those who had been involved in past communist activities. They immediately killed about twenty people, men and women. For those they didn't find at home, they killed anyone else

they found there". I interrupted her, that in Kielce no women had been killed, only men. She continued to explain "In Checiny, they indeed killed women. I thought I could sleep somewhere other than my home, but I'm afraid that if they come and don't find me, they'll take my family". She didn't ask me for any advice and she firmly believed that she should stay home in case they were looking for her. She shared this with me so I would know that she had made this decision, as she did not want to risk harming anyone in the family. Despite her words, I could imagine her heart pounding with fear. As I left her, I didn't want to compound her fears by telling her that I was also frightened about this situation.

On June 23, 1942, coming home from work, I feared the worst. Usually, when I returned, my wife and children were waiting for me at the entrance to the ghetto. The children would rush over to kiss me and tell me the news of the day. This time, seeing no one, I immediately knew there was something amiss. Anxious, I quickened my pace. On entering my apartment, I saw my wife lying on the bed, crying, her head wrapped in a towel. The children were also crying. My sister-in-law Freyde, who was there, rushed over to me. She was hysterically crying, and beating herself on her head, while trying to tell me that something has happened to us in Bialogon. She did not know what, but people there didn't want to talk about it in front of her. She begged me to go out into the street find out. My legs suddenly went limp. I was shaking from head to toe. I noticed Mr. Levi, very pale, sitting silently near his wife who was crying. He must certainly know everything, but he didn't want to say anything to me. In the street, I noticed some people that I knew, conversing. As soon as they saw me, they abruptly stopped, hoping I wouldn't question them. I wasted no time running over to the Jewish Council, certain that I would find someone that was from Bialogon. As I approached, I saw the Chairman of the Jewish Council of Bialogon, Shakhne Kharendorf, walking over to me. I insisted that Shakhne, tell me exactly what happened and not to hide anything from me. In a hesitant voice he related to me (page 92 in the French manuscript), "This morning at 4 a.m. a car stopped in front of the Polish police station. One of the passengers entered and asked a Polish policeman to accompany him. The car left for your father-in-law (Mendel Bekierman). The Gestapo chief and four men entered Beynish's home while two men staying outside to watch that no one escaped through the windows. Those who entered shouted at Beynish, "Hands up! Are you the dentist? Where's your wife?" Beynish was forced to reveal that she was with her parents who lived right next door. They immediately went knocking at your father-in-law's (Mendel) house, while

taking Beynish away. Hearing the knocking on the door so early in the morning, Elke sensed they were coming for her. They entered her room. It was still dark, so they aimed their flashlights on her, while striking her in the face. Elke had to admit that she was Mrs. Bekierman. They searched everywhere. They only found several letters and some pictures of Elke. They spent a while reading the letters, while Elke stood next to them in her slippers and nightgown, trembling like a leaf. Then they looked at the photographs. The chief took one and wrote the date on the back of the photo before slipping it into his pocket. Then he told everyone in the house not to leave the house for half an hour, warning them that the first one to go out gets shot. They then left, taking Elke with them. Everyone in the house burst into tears and frightful sobbing. No one spoke, but everyone thought, "What if they were going to shoot her? They took her without her clothes, without anything." When they took her out, they brought her into the yard next to the house. Elke slumped down on the bench by the window as one of the Gestapo men loaded his rifle. She pleaded in a trembling voice and asked them what they wanted from her. In response the chief asked her why she was shaking like that. She replied that she was cold. In a puzzling gesture, the chief told her to go back into the house, get dressed and come back immediately. Elke returned inside to put on her winter clothes. Elke initially believed she was going to be shot. But now, after these remarks to get dressed, she probably thought that she was going to be taken to prison, where it must be very cold. She ran to kiss her child and say goodbye. To everyone else, her parting words were, "Be well, don't think too much of me, and take care of the little one." As she opened the door, she saw that one of the men was pointing his gun directly at her and was about to shoot. Raising her hands, she shouted, "I'm only asking one thing before you shoot me!" The chief waved his hand to pause the execution. Elke pleaded, "I only ask that you don't shoot me here at the door. My mom (Esther Bekierman) is sick and it will hurt her. Take me there in the yard". These were her final words spoken, as they led her into the yard. There she stopped near the latrine, her hands covering her eyes as they fired two shots, instantly killing her (page 93 in the French manuscript). The Gestapo men asked the Polish policeman to immediately go inform the President of the Jewish Council to have Elke buried there in the yard. Hearing the sounds of the shooting in the yard, Beynish peered outside his house, not knowing what just took place. He couldn't see anything. Seeing the Polish police commander and his wife, he asked them where Elke had been taken. The commander and his wife were in tears, as they were very good friends with Elke. They told Beynish to return home. Returning home, he found Elke's family grieving in the

yard, next to Elke's corpse. They were weeping, moaning and kissing her still warm body. Her child was leaning over her and crying. Not far from where they were, the President and a few men from the Council were already digging the grave.

I want to share one more incredible thing, which illustrates what fate had in store. Last night Elke was with the Malinaks at the factory. She saw a whole bunch of little stools there. She took two of them, saying they would be very useful around the house. Whenever her father wanted to shine his shoes, he would bend down so much that he suffered terrible back pains. As it was already late, they didn't want to leave. They offered that she should spend the night with them. But she refused, saying she had to go home because she wanted to bring home the stools. This would make her father so happy. As fate would have it, my father in-law and mother in-law are now beside her, crying and lamenting that the stools she brought were being used for the shiva week! " Since Elke was buried in the yard, the family was spending all their time there crying and in a state of continual mourning without eating or sleeping. It was suggested to me to go and talk to the Council President and ask him to seek permission that she be buried in the Jewish cemetery. I promised that I will take care of these arrangements.

When I returned home, my wife was crying and wringing her hands. She knew that they murdered Elke, but she didn't know why or how this all came about. I couldn't answer her. I could only lay down and silently cry my heart out. The next morning, my wife went to see the Council President to discuss the matter. He knew everything, but in his opinion, he felt that it was better to do nothing. He did not want to assume the possible consequences upon himself. He felt his intervention could risk causing more casualties. He refused to deal with it, but if we wanted, he could write a request on our behalf. He would take it upon himself to transmit such request to the Gestapo. My wife came home and told me everything. Our family members in Kielce decided that it be best to do nothing. But we had to, at least write a letter to our parents. Consequently, I wrote the letter and sent it to Bialogon.

“Dear parents and children!

It is difficult for me to bring you words of consolation when I myself am inconsolable. We, your children in Kielce, are by your side and share your pain at the grave of the blessed child, whom the barbaric Nazis tore from us for no reason. Alas, today we have little consolation, as everything is going

so badly. This is all of so little comfort. The only little comfort that I can offer is the fact that the entire Jewish people is plunged along with us into the same misfortunes. I saw Shakhne yesterday. He told me about the tragedy of Elke's death and the fact that she was buried in the courtyard without being accorded the honor of burial in the Jewish cemetery. But, dear parents, we believe that it would be our greatest honor to have the grave of our dearest child so near us. That we are able to go and feel close to her at any time. This tomb contains the body of a dear family member, who was killed simply because she was Jewish. It is absolutely no affront to her that she could not be buried in the Jewish cemetery. On the contrary, it is an honor for us and for her, that she rests in the very place where she died so heroically and where she sacrificed herself in the name of the Jews. Dear parents, Rukhtshe (Rachel) did go to see the President, but he told her the same thing, to do nothing, since we are unable to foresee the consequences that this may have. It could, very well, cause more casualties. You are probably aware of what happened to Etke Nodel's family. His son was arrested. His son-in-law went to ask why. He never came back either. Then it was the son-in-law's brother who went to inquire as to why his brother did not come home. Ultimately, the Gestapo sent the dead bodies of all three of them, to the Council in the ghetto. Dear parents, we feel it best to do nothing. You can cover the place where Elke is buried with stones, but you must give up spending entire days at the grave. You have to think of yourselves and take to heart the last words of our darling child. "Take care of yourselves. Do not worry about me. Take care of the child". I am writing this letter on behalf of all your children. Moyshe-Meyer."

My sister-in-law Freyde (Yiedl's wife) got permission to go to Bialogon to personally deliver this letter. Events were happening at a very rapid pace. They did slow down before reaching their tragic culmination. Tragedies were accelerating by the day. In the streets, people began to share rumors about how bad everything was in Warsaw. They heard that the Chairman of the Warsaw Jewish Council, Czerniaków, and the head of the Jewish Police had committed suicide. We even speculated the reasons for this. It appeared to us that the German authorities, having decided to deport the Jewish population from Warsaw, allegedly asked the Jewish Council and police to take charge of the operation. A clause, reportedly called for separate deportations of women, men and children. The President, reportedly, immediately called the "assembly" and outlined what was expected of them. He and the police chief are said to have personally opposed any involvement in such an undertaking. They allegedly said "We have no right to soil our

hands with the blood of our children and we will not help shed it. Let them do what they want, but we will not help them". But the assembly, reportedly, took the opposite decision, in exchange for the promise to council members and police officers, that neither they nor their families would be deported. In desperation, the President and the Chief of Police committed suicide. But no one knew exactly what had happened, or where this took place. A few days later, it was said that in Radom, all the Jews had been deported from the small ghetto and that the workers who had remained, had to pass into the great ghetto. The deportation was particularly tragic with many deaths reported. No one knew where the evacuees were being sent. Everyone was sharing the fears and anxieties that were going through their heads. The days went by with increasing anxiety. Knowing about Radom, we were shaking with fear in Kielce. The rumor spread that our deportation was imminent. I continued to go to work regularly. There was nothing to be done about all these rumors anyway. We had no choice but to be ready to accept whatever came up. But one cannot imagine what we went through, day and night, just watching over our young children and hearing what was predicted for us.

I remember, it was August 19, 1942. I came home from work and found my wife's cousin, who had just been released from prison, where she had spent 6 months because she was discovered having a piece of leather in her house. She told me about the tragedies that were taking place in prison. One story was of two sisters from Jedrzejów. These two young girls were pretty and well off. One was 17 years old and the other 19. They lived on the side of the road that ran to the ghetto and their windows looked out on that road. Once the eldest (her name was Gitele) stood at the window and looked out. A passing car on the road abruptly stopped. someone had noticed her. A German in civilian clothes had stepped out and ordered her to come out. She had tried to hide, but he entered her house through the window and dragged her outside, along with her younger sister. He threw them both in the car and drove off. Their parents had no idea what had happened to them. Once in the car, he subjected them to his bestial instincts. They were both thrown in jail. A few days later, their death warrants were signed. It was so heartbreaking to listen to the conversations that the sisters had with each other. Once, I overheard the eldest contemplate out loud to herself, "Mom, you've gone to great lengths for years. Deprived yourself of sleep all night long, to raise your children until you can finally see the fruits of your efforts. The day has come when you witnessed the beautiful blossoming of your daughters, the strengthening of their blood and flesh that you kissed and caressed. And now you don't even know where we are. You don't even know that we spend our

days staring at the sheet of paper announcing our death sentence and not knowing why. Nature has carried us in its fold for years, finally making us beautiful and decent beings, able to enjoy what life has given us. For years she carried us in her womb, and made us beautiful, ripe, full of health, so that we could begin to live and to enjoy the beautiful world God created. But alas, we have not even tasted the first fruit of the tree yet. The barbaric, bestial Nazis arrived and passed sentence on us by this sheet of paper, that we were condemned to death, without even knowing why. It may be that tomorrow, or even today, a soldier shows up here, with rifle in hand, leading me to the spot they have prepared for my grave. He will bring me near the hole. He will walk away a bit and aim his rifle at me. My last words as I fall into the pit will be: "Almighty God! Why? Why?" Having said that, she collapsed on the ground sobbing. Her sister grabbed hold of her tightly as they hugged, cried and laughing hysterically. We thought they had lost their minds. Everyone in our cell burst into tears as the emotional dam burst." We all listened and wept over the plight of these two young girls, and over the hundreds and hundreds of people who were going through untold agonies in so many prisons. Had we only known what Thomas, the Chief of the Gestapo, and Geier, the Chief of Police, were preparing for the Jews in Kielce that very evening.

Wysiedlenie (Polish word for deportation or eviction)

I find it very difficult writing about what has come to be known as the "Wysiedlenie" (deportation). It is so difficult for me to write this word which served to cover up the blood of all the Jewish people, the men, women and the little children, without exception. This was so brutal, barbaric and incomprehensible. For years, the Jewish people had endured hardship and suffering, and had accepted everything in the hope of the defeat of barbaric Nazism. None of us imagined the extermination of the Jewish people. Hitler had made it very clear that this time was not going to be a second Purim for the Jewish people. We did not realize that he meant that there would be no Jews to celebrate a second Purim. Of course, there were Jews in America and in other countries that did not fall under Nazism. But we, the Jews of Europe, were to be completely exterminated by Hitler, at a time when our community was the very heart of the Jewish people.

On the evening of August 19, in the streets of the ghetto, you could tell that something major was about to happen. The Jewish Police released all those who had been arrested previously. All had been sent home without

explanation. We awaited the arrival of the President who had gone to the Gestapo, hoping to bring back some good news. In the meantime, we were telling ourselves that at the train station, the train already arrived that was to take the Jews away. It was the same procedure when they took the Jews from Radom. The President arrived and was immediately surrounded by all his Council members. They were talking in hushed voices so that no one in the crowd could hear them. Then all of the members of the Council quickly returned home and secretly informed their relatives that they needed to pack their bags at once. The next day it was learned that the President's visit to the Gestapo had only been aimed at requesting exemptions from deportation for him and his family, members of the Jewish Police, Council members and their families. As for the Council members, they had been denied exemption. On the other hand, the President had been assured not to worry about his relatives, the Jewish Police officers and their families. Only a few ghetto residents knew about these secret arrangements. So almost the entire Jewish population went to bed that night as usual, not knowing what was about to happen. I, who had heard everything that was being said in the street, returned home to tell my wife. We did not go to bed that night. My wife prepared the children's winter clothes and some basic necessities. It was not until late at night that we stretched out a bit, without undressing. At about half past one in the morning, a Jewish policeman arrived in a hurry and shouted out my name from the street below. I immediately recognized the voice of Avrom Bolitsky, who lived in the same building as me. I leaned out the window as he warned me that we should start to prepare. He said this is the night that the wysiedlenia, the deportation, will take place. Geier and Thomas will soon arrive. Ukshea Street is already full of German police. He asked me to go up to his sister-in-law Poli Bolitsky and warn her. He added that he had to run to Ukshea Street to join the Jewish Police squad there. All the Jewish police were required to attend. I immediately went to warn Ms. Bolitski and the other residents of the building. My wife and I packed our luggage and two small bags for the children. The children were already sleeping and we were looking out the window. If something happened in the street and the police came to wake people up, we would have time to dress them. Through the window we could see that almost everyone was getting ready. My wife would cry very softly, stifling her sobs. At 5:00 am we heard gunshots. They were from Ukshea Street. My wife hurried to dress the children. We were shaking with fear. We thought back to what was said about the evacuation in Radom. Anyone who delayed leaving their homes was immediately killed. We understood that the deportation had started in Ukshea Street and that those who were not hurrying fast enough were being

shot. We were all waiting with our luggage in hand. I took my little Yentl (approx. 3 yrs old) by the hand and my wife took Sara (approx. 7 yrs old). We promised we would do everything to stay together, so as not to get lost. We decided to leave the house as soon as we saw the police. The children heard the shooting and with each shot they turned to us, trembling. The streets were deserted. Everyone at home was nervously waiting, ready to go. No one dared leaving their apartment for fear of not having time to collect their bags and join their family. We stayed like that for several hours. At ten past eight, several Jewish Policemen arrived. They rushed to the other side of our street and gave the order to get out quickly. They motioned to our side to not move. We saw the people across the street running out of their homes with their suitcases, holding their children by the hand. From the very first steps, there were those who lost their bags and some, even a child. Screams, hysteria and tears erupted. Everyone was running to get out as quickly as possible. A few moments later, Gestapo men appeared, pistols in hand. A Jewish Policeman came to meet them, clicked his heels and told them that in one of the houses was an elderly woman who was unable to walk. They ordered him to take her to the street immediately. The Jewish Policemen dragged the woman outside while she cried and shouted, "That a Jew? Good Lord! What is happening on this earth? What does he want from me?" The Gestapo men responded by shooting her several times, leaving her body in the street. A little further on, in front of another building, another Jewish Policeman announced that a woman had remained on the second floor because her two children were sick. Several Jewish Policemen went in and brought the mother and her two children out. The Gestapo men approached and shot them in the street. Then they continued, building to building, checking that no one was left inside. We watched all this in horror, through the window. The children asked, "Mum, why did the Jewish policeman say that the lady and her two children had stayed at home, when the German policeman didn't even look?" We didn't respond. My wife only cried. We were also waiting for orders to come out. Suddenly we saw these same people, who had just left their houses running, going back home crying with joy, hugging each other. Some, however, remained on the street moaning and screaming that they had lost their children. I ran out to the street. People were saying that Thomas and Geier had ordered everyone back. We wondered out loud whether God has finally taken pity on us. Someone added to that by suggesting that it was out of respect for the innocence of children. Several people in one corner claimed it must have been the result of American pressure. We believed American Jews were certainly making every effort. The deportation was therefore stopped. Jewish Police soon took

away the bodies of those who had been shot. People were seen wandering the streets looking for their children. There were also children who were looking to find their parents. We knew this was a fruitless activity. The missing people were certainly those who had been taken to fill the train. A little later it was reported that the people that were able to work and were left behind, were taken to empty barracks. One of my neighbors hesitantly told me that he had seen my brother-in-law Yiedl Bekierman among these workers. Shortly after, a Council member, named Zaltsberg, who lived in my building arrived. He explained to me that the Jews from Kielce would be deported in three convoys, on the 20th, 22nd and 24th. Each convoy was to contain 6,000 people. And since the first convoy was not quite complete, they had taken out half of the inhabitants of this street, and they had taken among them as many people as necessary. The others had been sent home. For now, young people were allowed to work. Our street would be evacuated on the 22nd, that is to say Saturday, in the morning. While waiting, we could, at least be at rest. When I heard that we had two more days, I went home. We started by checking our luggage, exchanged various items and reduced the size of the packages. Then we started to think about what we would do with our money. I had hidden about a thousand gold dollars in my room. But I couldn't get to it easily because it was buried a meter below the floor. However, I still had a few gold dollars in the apartment and a lot of valuables we could take. I took my wife and kids' shoes, and went to a shoemaker to open the heels and hide the gold dollars and some gems in them, that my brother-in-law Beynish (a dentist) had put between my wife's teeth. We also made a shoe brush in which I put my gold watch and two set rings. In addition, I had sewn hundred paper dollars into the linings of my wife's and children's clothes. We put the special issue zlotys (the Polish money the Germans made) in our outside pockets. There was a rumor that this money would probably be useless. We didn't even know where we were being sent. Maybe east, and there you couldn't do anything with that money. Then I chose the most valuable items and hid them well in the house. After all of that was done, I burst into tears without being able to control myself. My wife approached me, "Moyshe-Meyer, you are completely falling apart! Even I hold up better than you. What's the use of crying? We must be strong. We have two children. We are forced to take the path of exile, without even knowing which direction." Our unfortunate neighbors entered and also took some things. Our wardrobes remained open, since no one could take everything with them. Everything had to be abandoned. It seemed strange that the poor carried larger packages than the rich. They must have thought that if there were no valuables, it would be good to have

some clothes to sell in order to buy bread. It was a beautiful day and the sun was beating down, getting us very hot. We took off the winter clothes we were wearing because the heat was getting unbearable. I went out to take a few steps in the yard. My children ran after me, taking me by my hands and kissing them. I remember Sara saying "Daddy, don't cry anymore! Maybe we won't be carried away after all". In the courtyard, I joined our neighbors who were seated at their doors. There was a family of five. One of their sons was a policeman, but he had decided to throw off his cap and hide the fact that he was a policeman in order to accompany his parents. They were all adults and therefore would never be lost. Anywhere sent, they would surely find a way to make money. Others had decided not to show their work permits in order to accompany their relatives. I listened intently to all these conversations, thinking to myself, "I hope everything goes well this way". I had very bad feelings. I thought, "Right now, fathers and mothers are still surrounded by their children, their brothers and sisters. We know that today and tomorrow are the last two days when we can watch our children and where children can watch their parents. Soon we'll be scattered and who knows if we'll ever see each other again? " No one had yet come from Ukshea Street. As we were chatting, the Jewish Policeman, Avrom Bolitsky, arrived. He called me from afar, and took me up to his place. There he told me how the deportation of the first group went. He told me, "At half past one, we received the following order, that all the Jewish Police, under the leadership of Commander Schindler, report to the Second Police Station on Ukshea Street. When we entered the room, we found ourselves between two rows of German Policemen, accompanied by H.H. and a few men from the Gestapo. At their head were Geier, Thomas, and Wallschleger, who held a very high rank within the Gestapo. They started hitting us on the head. Our hats rolled on the floor and blood began to flow. It was dark in the room. Thus, under the blows, we reached the other room where it was very bright. The three assassins, Geier, Thomas, Wallschleger, were waiting for us there. Geier stood up and said, "The time has finally come to make the city of Kielce Judenrein (free of Jews). Today is the evacuation of these accursed and forsaken Jews of God. I am sure that since you have served me faithfully so far, you will do the same during this deportation. This will give you the right to remain. As for your wives and children, I don't know yet. We will decide tomorrow. I think it will be granted to you and you can remain with your families. It is now four o'clock. You are going to move from building to building and tell the Jews that they must all assemble in less than 15 minutes in the plaza of Jasna Street. If someone refuses to go out or if there is a sick person somewhere, you must immediately report this to the German Police

who will be waiting in the street". When we got out, we weren't hit anymore. We distributed the building assignments among ourselves and began our work. Realize! We entered the homes of people who were asleep, who knew nothing about it. They were told to get to Jasna Street Square in less than 15 minutes. It just drove them crazy. Some were able to take a small piece of luggage, others didn't. They all ran towards the square with their children in their arms. At a quarter past four, all the German Policemen came out into the streets. As soon as they encountered anyone, they would shoot them. No exception, young and old alike, and even children. The streets were strewn with the dead. Some did not want to step outside, especially the old and the sick, whom we were required to report. We were ordered to drag them outside and shoot them. The square was surrounded by Ukrainian and Polish militia. At the entrance to the square, a Gestapo group asked each person if they had a work permit. Those who had it for government factories or for the stone quarry, were put to one side. The others were pushed to the other side. Work permits from the Council or from other employers were not valid. They were torn up. All these people were put in rows of ten and were forbidden to move or talk to each other. Often, parents had been sent to one side and their children to the other side. They were not allowed to join each other. The Ukrainians fired their guns at the slightest movement. At eight o'clock in the morning Geier, Thomas and Wallschleger arrived at the square. They ordered the wives and children of Jewish Policemen to regroup separately. The same was ordered for all doctors and their families. Anyone who tried to trick and follow them were shot on the spot. Then they walked around the square. When they didn't like the way someone looked, they pulled them out of line and shot them immediately. They also kept several of the Jewish factory workers who worked only for them and added them to the selected people. These exempted people were then ordered to be taken to the barracks next to the Jewish Council. All the dead were transport to another place not far from the Council (this was the place we called the "New World"). Then they brought in Jewish workers and made them dig pits. A German was there, in a white lab coat, like a doctor. It was he who indicated how to dig the graves and how to dispose of the dead. Soon a truck brought bags of lime and dropped them near the pits. All the dead were undressed and the clothes were taken away. They fully recognized that everyone had hidden something in their clothes or in their shoes. The dead were to be placed upright, one beside the other. When one layer of bodies was finished, it was necessary to pour lime, and lay out a second layer of bodies. If one of the workers positioned a dead person not quite as he was told, the German in the white coat would order him to lie down and then he would shoot him.

Some were able to recognize the body of a father or a brother there. They whispered the Kaddish. All the people who were ready for the deportation were waiting in the square. It was very hot and no one had anything to drink. They did not allow water to be brought with them. The children were consumed with thirst. The designated train for the deportation was a freight train, normally used for transporting pigs and cattle. The windows were blocked off with planks and barbed wire. The train has 60 wagon cars and they put 6,000 people on each train. We were on the ramp at the other side of the station, where cattle and wood were normally loaded. From the square to the train was about two kilometers. The path goes through a side street that is not part of the ghetto. When the Jews were led through there, this street was surrounded on all sides by Ukrainian and Polish militiamen, German mounted police, S.S., and also the Gestapo. They deported everyone in the square in packs of 1,000, divided into 10 groups of 100 people, in rows of ten. These groups were to be separated from each other and taken out of the square one by one. Even when there was a child who was separated from the mother who was in another group. The child had to follow his, or her, group. Sometimes it was the opposite, and the mother was forced into another group separated from her child. They were then forced into different train wagons and no longer were able to remain together. Each group was followed by several horse-drawn wagons. The Gestapo men stood on both sides to ensure that everyone was walking in line. If an old man couldn't walk fast enough, they waved to a Jewish Policeman who would usher them into the wagon, where they were immediately shot. They didn't want to shoot anyone in the street and have to drag their bodies onto the wagon, as that would have slowed down their work. Efficiency! A Gestapo man motioned for Jewish Policeman, Midlarz, to get old Sharegroder and his wife into the wagon. The old man begged Midlarz to spare them. He kissed the hem of his shirt while praying and crying, invoking his Jewish faith. Nevertheless, Midlarz forced him and his wife up onto the wagon and they were shot immediately. Before being shot, his wife begged also, assuring him that she was going to walk faster. She shouted, "What kind of Jew is this?" The elderly couple did not realize that the Gestapo man signaled Midlarz to take this action.

Even more tragic, was the moment when Jewish Policeman, Joseph Zilberstein, was ordered to get Rabbi Yitskhok Finkler onto the wagon. They knew each other well. The Rebbe said something to him that we couldn't hear. Then they started arguing and Zilberstein pushed him onto the wagon. The Rebbe raised both hands to heaven and opened his mouth to call upon

God, but he abruptly stopped in mid-sentence by a bullet. He was shot dead. It just went on that way, group after group. In every group, people were selected and shot. The wagons would transport the dead to the place where the pits were dug, bodies unloaded and returned to continue this macabre cycle.

One hundred people were forced into each train wagon. It was so hot! All day the people were not allowed to bring even a drop of water with them onto the train. Many of the people had on their winter clothes and carried knapsacks on their backs. It was almost impossible to squeeze so many people into one wagon. Nevertheless, they were thrown in, often one on top of the other. Some were begging to be killed. But to those who asked for this favor, it was systematically refused. It was almost impossible to close the crowded wagons. Nevertheless, they forcibly shut the doors, without worrying about any arms or legs being torn off in the process or children being crushed. It all happened very quickly. I don't think more than half of all these people will arrive alive at their destination, although I don't know how long this trip will take or where they're taking them. They're all so tight crushed behind the locked doors and windows, no air, no water. Who knows if they will survive this? Especially the children".

It was already 9 a.m. before my neighbor, policeman Avrom Bolitsky, finished relating his shocking report and got up to go home. Upon leaving, he advised me not to tell anyone, because the Jewish Police had agreed to keep these events and the orders that they were forced to follow, a secret. I asked him to come back the next evening to update me on the day's events. My wife was already putting the children to bed. She spoke to them through her tears, "Lie down, my children, and sleep. Have a good rest tonight. I don't know if you will be able to sleep well next night". She told me to eat something, but I couldn't swallow anything. I was dizzy. I slumped down on the couch and that's where my fatigue overpowered and put me to sleep.

On Friday, that is, August 21, 1942, people spent their day preparing their belongings. Every effort was made to reduce them in size as much as possible, because there was a rumor that large luggage was not allowed on the train wagons. Everyone wanted to prepare themselves for at least two days. The bakers didn't want to bake any more bread, so the Council gave everyone a little flour and everyone had to bake their own bread. Everyone also took bottles of water, because that was the most needed thing. The Jewish policemen who lived in Shelnits Street or in the neighborhood that

was to be deported by the second convoy, took their wives and children, as well as all their belongings, and settled in the barracks which had been prepared for them. Some Jewish Police had also obtained permission from the Gestapo to stay, such as Birgental, the director of the Jewish workshops, along with his family. The President of the Council, along with three council employees, who were among his relatives, were allowed to remain. All the Jewish doctors and their families were also exempted for the time being to the deportation. All of them have been moved from the designated streets to their barracks. In several cases, Jewish Police officers who were single took with them girlfriends or even sisters, and also children of friends, posing as their wives and children. All of this was to be kept strictly secret. There was also a children's home on Shelnits Street. Among the 210 children accommodated, some were orphans, but a large part came from poor families. At home, they had no food to eat. During the winter they shivered with cold. Consequently, their parents put them in the shelter, hoping to save them from hunger. The director of the home was Miss Gotshe, a very pretty young girl in her twenties, who came from Łódź, not from Kielce.

Avrom Bolitsky returned in the evening. He still wanted to spend one last night with his mother. He asked me to go upstairs with him. He looked desperate. I saw immediately that he had something very difficult to tell me. He obviously didn't know where to start, so he spoke, as if to himself, "Do you know what we did to the children in the children's home? They were taken to the square where all the dead were buried. There were several Ukrainians and German policemen waiting for them. A few Jewish workers were finishing digging one of the pits. The German gravedigger in the white coat told them how long and wide the grave should be. Rapel, the German policeman nicknamed "the Gunner", stood beside him and laughed. We arrived with the children. Ukrainians and German police surrounded them. Rapel, who knew Miss Gotshe well, ordered her to take all their clothes off. But she refused categorically and without hesitation. The Jewish Policemen began to undress the children, but the children would not cooperate. They were screaming and crying. The Ukrainians began to hit them. Frightened, the terrified children finished undressing while they were being beaten. Rapel ordered us to lead each child separately to the edge of the pit. He approached each child with his gun and fired. The children fell into the pit. It went on and on, one child after another, with one bullet serving for each child. When there were 20 children in the grave, the German gravedigger ordered several Jewish workers to get down into the pit and line the bodies up, side by side, with their heads against the wall. Some, still alive, were

seen stirring, as the single bullet had not killed them at once. The Jewish workers were therefore commanded to crush the bodies of those who were still showing some signs of life by trampling them to death. Those who refused would be shot on the spot. The workers lined up the corpses before getting out of the pit. This was followed by another 20 children brought to the pit. Again, one bullet for each child and once again, the workers came down into the pit to line up the bodies with their heads against the other wall. This went on until there were no longer any children. When each layer was full, even though some children were still alive, a little lime with sand were poured over them. This continued till the last child was buried. Just imagine, that these children who were there, were able to see what was going to happen to them. Can you imagine how they must have cried in terror? They couldn't even cry. They were petrified and frozen by the fear of death as they were about to be shot. It was so painful seeing them all trembling with fear. Rapel didn't want to shoot more than one bullet for each child. He boasted that, since his name was Rapel the Shooter, he was able to hit his target on the first try. When they were done with the children, Rapel approached Miss Gotshe to ask, "What do we do with you? She replied with force and courage, "You can do the same to me as to children." She then went of her own accord to the pit and cried out, "The world will never forgive you for the barbarity with which you shed the innocent blood of these young children!" And she fell into the pit, shot down by Rapel's one bullet. The workers were already digging new pits. They were preparing them for tomorrow. " Police officer Avrom Bolitsky continued, "Moyshe-Meyer, I don't know if life is worth living at this cost of witnessing all of this and participating in it with my own hands". I replied, "I can see that you prefer the heroic death of Miss Gotshe to the life granted to you. I thought, "Hitler won't let you live anyway," but I didn't say this, because this was our last meeting. He was lucky enough to remain in Kielce, I was forced to leave my home. We said goodbye, and I went home. In the meantime, my wife had washed the children and put them to bed.

Second convoy August

On August 22, 1942 at three in the morning, while it was still pitch dark, my wife said to me, "We have to wake the children. You have to dress them. We must not wait until the last minute. I walked over to my little Yentl to wake her up. The little one, half asleep, kissed me and said, "Daddy, why don't you let me sleep? I covered her with kisses to wake her up gently by whispering: "It's not me who is preventing you from sleeping, it's this world

of evil doers, it's all these twentieth century politicians". I looked at her and my tears welled up. These were perhaps the last words I will ever say to my daughter. My wife reminded me, "Moyshe-Meyer, what's the matter with you? You scare children with your talk and your tears. Let me do it. I will take care of dressing them". I walked into the next room and, in front of the window, I began to weep uncontrollably. My heart was so heavy that I couldn't utter another word. My oldest daughter Sara walked back and forth in the room and swallowed her tears and sorrow silently. She would come closer every now and then and look me straight in the eye. I could tell she wanted to tell me something but she had a heavy heart, and couldn't. Seeing my daughter contain her tears, mine began to flow even more. While I was at the window, I could hear my wife say, as if she were talking to herself, "Yes, children. It's no wonder Dad is crying. We are forced to leave our home and our entire existence. He worked year after year for it all and now we have to give it all up. Who knows where we are going? Yes, dear children, we are the ones being denied on this Earth. These creatures are not ones who will take pity on us. I wonder who we could have hurt so much to be treated so cruelly. Where does so much hatred for us come from? Such complete hatred, for no reason, the worst hate ever". By 4 a.m. everything was ready and we were waiting for the orders. As soon as we saw the first Jewish Policeman, we left our house. We were among the first on the street. We crossed several courtyards following the directions of the Jewish Policemen. As we approached the bridge leading to Ukshea Street, the crowd grew denser. On both sides of the street were German Policemen, Ukrainians, as well as many S. S. all waiting for us. We were lined up in rows of 10. We ended up in one of the first rows, all in the same row. The police shouted that anyone who did not walk straight, lagged behind, or could not walk fast enough, would be immediately shot. In order to frighten us, they pulled several people out of the line, took them to a yard and promptly shot them. We walked to Ukshea Street, near the Jewish Police Section of the Second Ward. There we were arrested. On the sidewalks, on both sides, German officers, guns in hand, were waiting. When the three chief robbers (Thomas, Geier, Wallschleger) arrived, everyone fell silent. Thomas stood in front of us and shouted, "Let all young people under the age of 35, able to work, and in possession of a work permit issued by their previous employer, step aside". No one moved. Many wanted to accompany their families. Many others didn't know what to do. So, no one stepped out of line. The officers then approached and began to examine each row. Those they liked were taken out of line and gathered to one side. My brother Yudl, a few rows away from me, had already been chosen. As the officers

approached, I hid behind my wife. Geier yelled at me, "Come here! Despite his gaze on me, I leaned over and kissed my children. As I walked away, I heard them cry "Daddy, where are you going?" And my wife replied, "Have no fear, my children, I will not leave you". I didn't catch the words my wife said to the children next, but I guessed what they probably were.

Considering the calmness with which she was speaking to them, I fully understood their meaning, "No, my dear children, I will not leave you, even if I am killed. I am your mother. Don't be afraid my children, our destinies are now merged into one". I followed the instructions of the German Police. My tears were flowing and I was heartbroken. My wife's words made me ashamed. It was as if, leaving their row, I had surrendered to the greatest of crimes against my wife and daughters. The fear of death shouldn't have superseded my love for them. I should have acted like a hero and died without leaving their side. I realized then, that this idea would always haunt me. As long as I live, my heart would be tortured by this thought. I found myself in the first row of those selected for the job. Yudi was next to me. We didn't say a word. We were overwhelmed and our eyes were filled with tears. The Gestapo men arranged all the selected workers in rows of ten. They took out a few stools from the buildings, sat down and paraded all these workers in front of them. They now made a new selection among them, pushing some aside and slaughtering them. In Jasna Street Square, the Gestapo circled around people waiting to be deported and pointed out to the Jewish Police those who were to be pushed to one side and shot. I saw a little boy fall to the ground with his backpack on his back. He couldn't get up. Schindler, the Jewish Police Chief, came running and pulled him to his feet. Those in the Gestapo noticed him and shouted, "Schindler! Schindler! What are you doing?" They nodded their disapproval to him and the police took the boy to one side to be shot. But Schindler wasn't worried about their gestures to him. As soon as he could help someone, he did so, without thinking about the consequences. This was how the second convoy was set up, with complete German precision. Geier and Thomas no longer let themselves be deceived. Whoever wanted to stay, they deported, and whoever would have preferred to accompany their family, they forced to stay. It was during this second convoy, that among the Jews gathered in the symbolic square where the entire community of Kielce was concentrated, was the Kielce Rabbi, Rav Rapoport, blessed be his memory. Thomas and Geier, during their tour of inspecting the Jews, noticed the Rabbi, surrounded by his entire family. They went to him and asked him to explain to them the meaning of the festival of Purim. The Rabbi started to say something, but they hit him. Realizing that they were going to take him out

of the line and shoot him, he raised his arms and cried out, "God of heaven and earth! What then are you doing with your people of Israel? "

The Rabbi of Chmielnik, God bless his soul, was so weakened that he did not want to leave his home for the deportation. The Jewish Police had denounced him to the Gestapo who came to his front door. The Gestapo entered and slaughtered the Rabbi while he was lying in his bed.

After these selections, everyone was led to the train, following the same system and with the same methods as used for the first convoy. Then the rest of us, who remained, had to collect all the dead from each yard and transport them to the graves that had been prepared. Then we were taken to the barracks. The workers of the first convoy had been housed next door, in what was the synagogue. It was a very long, unfinished barrack, the windows of which were broken. As soon as we entered, everyone hastily appropriated a space to put down the meager possessions they carried. My brother and I lay down, like the others, near our packs. We talked between our sobbing. Although we were feeling miserable and feeling the unbearable heat, we tried to imagine how our women and children must be feeling. We could not imagine what their journey was or where they were even going. Shortly after entering the barrack, we saw two neighbors approaching. One was Shmuel Liberman, and the other was a cousin, Leybl Goldsheyd. They sat down close by and asked if they could stay with us. Then a friend of mine, Yisroel Lemberger, joined our group. He had stayed with his wife. He had no children. He was not staying in the barracks but in the building that had been assigned to the Jewish Police. He owed this privilege to certain supporters. He suggested that I get out of the barrack and go with him. I absolutely refused and told him why I did not want to leave my friends who shared the same pains of losing their wives and children. I had my brother here, as well as my brother-in-law, Yiedl Bekierman, whom I have yet seen. He's was in the synagogue with those of the first convoy. We saw people arriving all the time, dressed in different clothes. Some people chose to get rid of their meager packs that they brought and returned from some of the vacated wealthier homes dressed in more luxurious clothes that they found. Some came back with their pockets full of money and even some gold items. This had its risks, as we were not allowed to be in the streets from which the Jews had been removed. If you had to go there to work, you had to be accompanied by a Jewish Policeman. Everyone was seeking to work. Consequently, when the police asked for workers to bury the dead and to dig the new graves for the third convoy, many rushed to volunteer. They were

taken to where the dead were to be buried and put to work. It wasn't what they had wanted. Each time, two or three of these volunteers were killed during this work. When the sun started to set, and the air got a little cooler, I was a little relieved to think that, perhaps in the train wagon where my wife and children were, they also had it a little better. The barracks we were in, were the middle of the street, in proximity to where the Jews who would form the third convoy, had not yet been deported. Some of them wanted to enter the barracks to avoid deportation. But the new Jewish Police commander, Spiegel, came to see us. Everyone was afraid of him. It was said that the Gestapo had taken him out of a convoy bound for Oswiecim (Auschwitz) to make him their undercover agent among the Jews. He was from Vienna. He had therefore ordered all those occupying spaces near the windows to be sure to not let anyone in, or else they would be on the next convoy. At night, some young people told us that during the day they had been talking with those of the "New World", who were getting ready for deportation. They were told to take everything they possessed, rather than leaving anything for the Germans or their Polish neighbors who eagerly waited to loot what we had to leave behind. What despicable people who take satisfaction on the fire that is consuming us! During the night, several people still tried to enter through the windows of our barrack. They were only women. Their husbands hoped they could stay, since they had work permits. Despite Spiegel's threats, no one tried to prevent anyone from entering our barrack. A woman who had taken a space next to us, told us that during the evening several Viennese Jews had committed suicide. They had come to the dreaded realization that they weren't going to survive what awaited them. She also recounted the tragic liquidation of the asylum for the elderly, which was in one of the streets intended for the third convoy. Some old people had fled even before the asylum was surrounded when they heard about the liquidation of the children's home. But around 5 am several German and Jewish Policemen arrived and surrounded the asylum under Rapel's command. They had taken people out one by one to execute them in the yard. As Rapel, "the Shooter" didn't have the patience to wait for the Jewish Policeman to bring out the next victim, he would shoot anything that moved in the meantime. Early in the morning, a good friend of mine, Moyshe Gorevits, a former tanner, accompanied by Rozenblum came to see me. He took me aside and said, "Moyshe-Meyer, you knew my wife and my three children. I cannot bear to be separated from them. I have decided that since the third convoy is leaving tomorrow, I will be leaving the barracks today to reach another building and tomorrow I'll show up for the convoy and go along with them. In this way, maybe I will be able to find my wife

and children". He asked for my opinion. I told him that I wasn't sure that these convoys were all going to the same place and how would his wife contact him if he didn't remain in Kielce. Regardless of my opinion, his decision was made and he left with the third convoy.

August: Jewish hospital August: third convoy

At the Jewish hospital, which was in the "last convoy" area, orders were awaited from Thomas, who was to decide what to do with the sick. All the sick who were able to leave the hospital had already left. But there were still 88 people and among them several young people in relatively good health. Those individuals could have left, but had no place to go. Their families had already been deported with the earlier convoys. We wondered what would happen to them. But Geier, Thomas and Wallschleger's plans were already set. At 6 a.m. on August 23, 1942, Geier and Thomas broke into the hospital courtyard and summoned all the Jewish doctors, headed by Dr Reiter and Deputy Director Dr Levenson. Orders were given to them, that by 8 a.m. that all the sick should be out of their beds and lined up in the yard. The Director, Dr Reiter, promptly assembled the hospital assistants and nurses and began to bring down the patients. They were all shaking with fear. They feared what was going to happen to them. The speed with which this operation was carried out did not even give anyone any time to calm down. At half past seven, everyone was already in the yard. All Jewish staff were waiting for Thomas and Geier to return for further instructions. At 8 o'clock the three devils arrived, Geier, Thomas, Wallschleger, accompanied by Rapel "the Shooter". Rapel was about to get to work when Thomas waved his hand and asked him to wait. They had a discussion, as they looked at the German hospital which was very close to the Jewish hospital. They concluded that if they slaughtered the sick Jews in the courtyard, the German soldiers being treated in their hospital might hear the shootings and fear the Gestapo with regard to their own safety. Their meeting lasted a while. Then Thomas called the manager, Dr Reiter and stated to him. "It's 8 o'clock. When we come back at noon, all the sick Jews must be dead". The doctor asked shakily, "How?" Geier pointed to his knife that he always carried by his side. It became apparent. Before leaving, he threatened "By noon when we return, if the orders have not been carried out, we will kill all the Jewish doctors along with their families. The doctors returned to the hospital to discuss how to deal with this. They asked the assistants to pick up all the sick. The patients first rejoiced when they saw that nothing was being done to them. The doctors felt forced to act without delay. They injected each patient with a

poison that instantly killed. However, in some cases, the poison was too slow to work, or perhaps there was not enough left for an immediate effect. In the meantime, the hours were passing and noon was quickly approaching. The doctors and their assistants, in frightening scenes of desperation, attacked the sick and violently ended their lives. The dying screams were frightful. The patients aware of what was taking place, were screaming horribly and begging for mercy. In the end, all the patients, without exception, were killed. At noon, Rapel arrived and ordered them to bring all the bodies to the place where the dead were to be buried. This frightful event had remained strictly secret. Outside of this hospital, no one knew how all the patients had met their end.

I was sitting in the barracks watching our luggage, while my brother was walking around the yard. A Jewish Policeman walked in and asked for ten people for a job. No one wanted to go out. As the Jewish Policeman was getting nowhere, he returned after a while, with a German Policeman. They grabbed 20 people, whom I was among. They led us to the "New World" (World to come) where the dead were buried. Several groups of workers were already there digging pits. We were taken to a pit where there was already a layer of corpses covered with lime and sand, but which was not yet full. We understood that it was all about filling it. The German gravedigger in the white coat ordered ten of us to join a digging group, from which he replaced ten people who had already worked there for hours with little rest. I was among the ten who stayed near the pit. Soon a load of dead arrived. The German gravedigger made them stop in front of the grave. Rapel also arrived and told the gravedigger that this was a shipment of 88 bodies that were in the wagon. We quickly guessed that they were from the hospital because they were all naked with shaved heads. We placed 30 bodies in the pit and covered them with lime and a little sand. Then we put another layer of bodies into the pit. The last layer consisted of only 28 bodies. The German gravedigger pointed out to us that we were lucky that Rapel was not there. If he had been present, he would have chosen from among us, for the two bodies that were missing to completely fill the grave. We hurried to cover the pit, anxiously watching for Rapel's possible arrival. When we were done with this job, the gravedigger sent us away. When I got back to the barracks, my brother didn't know where I had been. I told him what I was just forced to do. He already knew about the patients in the hospital. A friend of his, Zilberberg, had given him all the horrible details. But it was to be kept secret and no one was to know anything about it. Soon though, it was no longer a secret. The doctors themselves confessed the entire event. Their consciences

did not leave them in peace, so they felt the need to confess to their friends. I myself have heard the story from Dr Shteynbakh's mouth. He told me they had no choice. The horrible situation became far more horrible as they hadn't had enough poison to inject. In the evening, the Jewish Policemen asked us again to be careful and not let anyone in. But this time they kept a guard watch, for they sensed that during this last night, people would certainly want to break in. Despite this heightened surveillance, several people managed to slip inside.

On August 24 at 4 a.m., the intended deportees were taken to the courtyard of the Jewish Hospital, because the barracks had to be available for those who remained from the third convoy (which we referred to as "the last convoy"). The eviction of the people from their homes, the selection of workers, the executions and the whole deportation procedure to the train followed the pattern of the first and second convoy. In the last convoy there were also all Jewish inmates from the Kielce prison. Those serving a light sentence, as well as those who were sentenced to death. All Jews, without exception, have thus been dispatched. Even the prison has become judenrein, (Jew free). The train of the third convoy did not leave until nightfall. Previously, Geier had taken Schindler, the Jewish Police Commander, aside and led him to a courtyard where he was shot. Then Geier gathered all the Jewish Police Officers and ordered them to pick up all the dead that were lying in the streets and carry them to the pits, throw them in and bury them. Then he ordered them to gather all the remaining people in the square in front of the synagogue. Line them up in rows of ten and wait for further instructions from him. Thomas, Geier and Wallischleger arrived to make a new selection from those who remained. First, they took a good half of the Jewish Policemen to the barracks where their wives and children were and ordered them to take their families with them. Then they brought them all, including Schindler's family, to the synagogue square, and put them in a corner. Then everyone was forced to march past them. Those they didn't like were pulled out. This also included all the nurses and staff of the Jewish Hospital, as well as the members of the Jewish Council and their families, who thought they could remain. Several trucks arrived. Anyone who had been pulled out, was shoved, with heavy blows, onto the trucks and led to the train. They all left along with the third convoy. Only half of the Jewish Policemen remained, with their families, and Spiegel was placed at their head. He remained with his family, as well as the Chairman of the Jewish Council with his family. Also left were the Jewish doctors with their families, and we, the workers, almost all young men. It was only then, that I

reunited with my brother-in-law, Yiedl Bekierman. We were there, in front of the synagogue, not knowing what was going to be our fate, my brother Yudl, my brother-in-law Yiedl and my friends, Liberman, Lemberger (he managed to stay with his wife until the recent selection that forced their separation) and me. After this third convoy, of the 21,000 Jews in the ghetto, 18,000 had been deported in three convoys of 6,000 each, 2,000 had been killed. There were about a thousand of us remaining. There were various rumors circulating about what to do with us. The President of the Council set up a canteen in the synagogue and was able to give everyone some food. The workers still busy burying the dead didn't have to queue for food. They had the privilege of receiving their share in their workplace. Then we were all taken back to the barracks. Some said we were going to stay there and that we would only be released for work. But there was also a rumor that we would be given a part of the ghetto to live in and that we would be allowed to come out in order to go to work. For now, as long as the job was to remove all the possessions left by the Jews in the ghetto, the question of housing did not even arise. As far as I was concerned, I was assigned to work in Jasna Square, which is littered with packages. I don't know if they were forbidden to take them to the train or if they themselves had abandoned them because they were too heavy or too hard to carry in the scorching heat. Some of us recognized our parents' luggage and collapsed in tears. (This square will remain as a symbol for the Jewish community of Kielce). There were also all kinds of documents on the floor, as well as photos that people had thrown away. When someone found a photograph of their family or children, one could only imagine the pain and the powerful emotions expressed. If someone from the outside had arrived there without knowing anything of what had happened, he would certainly have thought he saw a bunch of crazed insane people. There were also watches, rings, and even silver, gold items lying around. No one could take any of these items because the Jewish Policemen were watching us. We knew that after work, when we got home, we would be searched by the German Police. Anyone found in possession of any object, would be shot on the spot. But the Jewish Policemen knew exactly how to get away with it. They did not have room for any concern, as they still had wives and children with them. Consequently, their concerns had to focus on money matters. The ghetto had been surrounded by German and Polish Police the night before the first convoy left, and no one had been able to enter or leave since. Now the ghetto was empty. All the houses had open doors and open windows. The streets were so silent that you could hear the echo of footsteps on a nearby street. Eerie silence. The sight of the desolate streets filled you with dread. The

spilled blood on the streets hadn't even had time to dry yet. We saw it on every street and in every courtyard. Now it was a matter of making sure that no Poles came inside the ghetto to take away the meager possessions left by the Jews. And indeed, the police shot dead several Poles who tried to slip into the ghetto. The work to clear the ghetto was carefully organized. All the German and Polish Police were placed under the command of Geier's deputy, German Lieutenant M. Wallschleger, a cold-blooded man, very ruthless, with the air of a dictator. He was always accompanied by Rapel "the Shooter". Every day at 7 a.m., several hundred Jewish workers were to appear in front of some 40 German police officers. Each policeman took ten under his command along with two Jewish Policemen, and all went out into the street where each group was assigned a building. All the rooms were then searched, and with the exception of the furniture, everything in it, linen, clothes, sheets had to be thrown into the street. If anyone found money or jewelry, they were required to report it immediately. The collected items were taken to a special warehouse. In reality, much, perhaps most, ended up in the hands of Poles long before they reached the warehouse. Indeed, each German Policeman had relationships, children or just friends, with whom he arranged meetings in advance of any building reconnaissance. The policemen distributed entire packages with everything that was of value and good quality. Despite this, there were always some Poles who had paid with their lives for these very items.

My brother, brother-in-law and I were looking for an opportunity to contact our parents and families in Bialogon. (Bialogon was 5 kilometers from Kielce, but the Jews from there were not deported with those from Kielce, but with those from Checiny). We wrote a letter recounting everything that had happened to us. One day after we finished working in the old Warsaw area, we saw the night porter, Stanislaw, in front of our apartment building. We passed the letter to him and asked him to send it to our families.

August

In the morning, we learned that we were going to be allocated a piece of ghetto on Jasna Street. It was said that the President of the Council had already gone there to choose the building where the council would sit, as well as his apartment. All the policemen and all the Jewish doctors had already chosen apartments there. In this portion of the ghetto, the buildings had not been emptied. Each room still contained everything the previous residents had left behind when the deportations occurred. But German policemen were on guard. We couldn't believe we would have access to it

the same day. Nor that these apartments would be intact. It goes without saying that the President, the Jewish Policemen and priority given to the now official commander of the Jewish Police, Spiegel, had reserved the best lodgings for themselves. They filled their new apartments with everything they had found of interest and had locked them up whenever leaving. They had thus ensured, for the future, a certain comfort. Thus, President Herman Levi and Spiegel, assigned themselves the first building at the entrance to the small ghetto, which was called "the Jewish Camp". At 3 o'clock in the afternoon, when the Jewish workers came home from work, Wallschleger ordered them to line up in rows of ten, with their belongings, and wait for Geier and Thomas to arrive. You can imagine the haste with which everyone gathered their belongings. Everyone wanted to be in the front rows so that they could be among the first to enter the small ghetto and thus have a chance of finding an apartment. Trucks were made available to the President, police officers and doctors to load their luggage and put the children on as well. The others had to wait while the President and his men counted the presents and wrote down the names, then told Thomas and Geier precisely who should enter the small ghetto. At one point, Midlarz, one of the Jewish Policemen, came running and put a package in one of the trucks. Wallschleger noticed it and glanced at Rapel. Rapel understood. He pulled the Jewish Policeman aside and shot him dead. We waited standing for hours with our packs on our backs. The President and Spiegel came and went past us. We were forced to wait. At 7, in the evening, they arrived with their cameras and asked President Herman Levi how many of us there were. The president gave the precise number of workers, policemen, doctors, children (I don't know exactly what number he arrived at, but, according to our estimates, I would say about 1,400 people). They ordered us to turn around several times and they photographed us from all angles. When we entered the small ghetto, they asked the President to assemble us the next day at 4 am in the square, the women and children aside, and to count everyone carefully while awaiting their arrival.

The little Ghetto

The German police took us into the small ghetto. At the entrance, they stopped and proceeded to push us inside. When we entered the ghetto, known as the "labor camp", we wanted only one thing, to find a place to unload our packs that we found increasingly heavy to carry. But at every door, a Jewish Policeman announced that the place was already occupied. In fact, they, who were the first to enter, had settled in the few houses still available to live decently. The rest of the workers were left with the option

of massing 6 or 7 people per room in the wooden buildings. My brother, my brother-in-law, Yiedl, a friend, Shmuel Liberman and I rushed to a one-story house that was virtually the last remaining one in the ghetto. As we climbed the stairs, we trampled over dozens of packs that had been abandoned in the square and then piled up in the houses of the small ghetto, in order to clear the square. In the room we entered, others followed us. When the room reached capacity, everyone began to put down their belongings. A person named Zilberstein shortly arrived with his brother-in-law. He started to cry inconsolably as he threw himself on the small crib in the room. Through his tears, we heard him cry "Where are my wife and child now?" It immediately became apparent that he was the previous owner of the apartment. Although he had lived there, he didn't know if he should stay there. He wasn't sure he could handle it. "Everything, in every corner, will remind me of my wife and child. I will be heartbroken all the time and I will not be able to stop crying". The others in the room, hearing that he was the owner of the apartment, picked up their belongings and left to find other accommodations. They preferred to find a place without a legitimate occupant so they could appropriate the objects found there. There were six of us, my brother, my brother-in-law Yiedl, my friend Shmuel Liberman, the owner Zilberstein and his brother-in-law and I. In the kitchen there were also six people, but we did not mingle. Those staying in the kitchen did not come to our room. Immediately after putting down their belongings, many went into the yard to pick out the prettiest things from the bundles lying around and take them back to their little piece of the room. Of course, the German Police were on guard, but they were not preventing anyone from taking for themselves. The order had certainly been given to let the remaining Jews take what they wanted. People spent the night sorting and carrying things away. Not everyone had the strength and courage, at a time like this, to go rummage through the possessions left. But one had to understand that many were so poor. They could possibly sell some of these found items to the Poles. At four in the morning, we went to the Square. President Herman Levi and Spiegel, the commander of the Jewish Police, ordered us to line up in groups of ten, give our names accurately, and get on the list. Those who do not join will be considered illegal and will not be able to stay with us. They said Geier and Thomas would not be coming around, this time. But the next day, at six o'clock in the morning, everyone should meet again in the Square. Geier would review us and give us the orders for what we need to do next. Everyone signed up and went home. When the President and Spiegel finished the registrations, the police went up to the attics to look for the valuables that the inhabitants must have hidden there. Some have indeed

found quantities of valuables. This prompted some people to start breaking down the walls of their homes they stayed in. In some places were found banknotes, gold and other valuables. This went on for days and weeks. My cousin, Leybl Goldsheyd, who was also in the camp, came to see me and told me that he shared a room with six companions. They had found so many things there that they had to throw some away. They had decided to divide everything into seven, regardless of what each possessed personally. So almost everyone had money. What was missing was food. We looked forward to the time when we could return to work. We hoped that at the factory we would be given something to eat, and that we might be able to take some food home. If the German Police did not search us at the door, we could take out some small items and exchange them with the Poles for food. The President and Spiegel from day one dismissed a majority of the Jewish Police. They only kept 50. The fallen police had to resign themselves to going to work, but were able to choose the best jobs. Some became assistants to the President, and generally remained at Spiegel's disposal. When he needed more police officers for a given mission, he called on them.

At Work

The next day, at six in the morning, everyone was in the square. Geier arrived with his deputy Wallschleger. Rapel, the Shooter, no longer had his pistol in his hand, but a rubber whip. He was hitting anyone who did not stand quite straight. Geier ordered those who had previously worked at Ludwig Glass Factory to step aside. Everyone obeyed without delay, including my brother Yudl and me. The Jewish group leader took out his list and made sure no one was slipping through his fingers, then he led us to work. The Ludwig Glass Factory was the only factory to be assigned Jewish workers. Above all, we needed people in the ghetto to sort out the belongings of the Jews. This work in the ghetto lasted for weeks on end. At first, the clothes, linen and sheets were picked up and taken to a private depot. Then the furniture was sold. Poles came with their wagons to buy them. When a street was empty and everything had been sold, Poles moved into the apartments. As soon as they entered an apartment, the Poles thoroughly searched it. They suspected that the Jews must have hidden a lot of valuables, not being able to take everything with them. They tore down floors, smashed windows, and looked everywhere. They destroyed most of the tiled stoves in the ghetto to look behind the tiles. The city council having decreed that all the wooden houses in the ghetto should be destroyed, the Poles bought them for a few pennies, knocked them down, and found all that the Jews had hidden there, silver, gold, and sometimes foreign currencies.

They filled their pockets nicely with Jewish goods. Jewish workers sometimes even showed the hiding places to the German Police. In return, these informers were entitled to take some clothes for themselves after work. This was how great fortunes were discovered which were well hidden and which could have been hidden for years without falling into Nazi hands. At the glassworks, Poles from Bialogon worked with us. Through them, we sent a letter to our family. In it we said that my brother Yudl and I were now working in the factory, but that Yiedl Bekierman, my brother-in-law, who before the evacuation was assigned to the stone quarries, now worked in the ghetto. Our days and nights felt bitter and poisoned because we did not know where our wives and children were. We had only rumors. There was no news from them, as if they totally disappeared. There were so many of our families gone, yet no one among them was able to get back any word indicating the slightest sign of life! Maybe those in Bialogon knew something. We have no food at the moment. It has been several days since we had almost anything to eat. In our letter we wrote "answer us tomorrow through the same intermediaries, and tell us how you are. You can also send us some food. Also have this letter read to our brothers Avrom-Mordkhe, Pintshe and Yankev-Hersh". In delivering this letter to the Poles, we asked them to deliver it as soon as possible and try to get us an answer. But they explained to us that we wouldn't get an answer for two days because they didn't get home until very late. After work, we brought home some potatoes that we bought from a factory worker. At home, everyone sat in a corner to mourn and lament. What we made that night was cooked with tears rather than water. Every evening our friends gathered at our house, the Lemberger brothers, Shklarz, Klaski, Yaroslav, Borenshteyn, Vayntrob, Kohn Mintsber, Dovid Taub. Our "father", so to speak, was Simkhe-Bunem Goldman. He had been Chairman of the Kielce Council up until the beginning of the war. Nevertheless, he was still President Herman Levi's secret adviser. He was generally considered to be a very intelligent person. In the labor camp, we were called "the committee of pessimists." The worst of us was Dovid Taub. He was all the more embittered because when the war broke out, he had just arrived from Palestine with his wife and two children for a vacation. When it was time to flee Łódź, he had come to Kielce, and now found himself without his wife and children who had been deported. From day one, Taub was sure that Hitler had sent all of these convoys to their deaths, as the conditions and the way the deportations took place left no doubt. "They take thousands of people and they send them without even a doctor to accompany them! All their IDs are ripped up and no one ever hears from them again! ". He spoke frankly, "If I was sure my wife and children were dead, I wouldn't

feel worse than I do now. I suspect they won't survive, but who knows how much more miseries they will have to endure before they die? "And he added," You may think that Hitler will leave us alive? Or that he will let the police and doctors who remain in every town live? No, he will not leave any Jew alive! They are keeping us for now to help with their plans. They want to exploit us a little more. Yes, we will still see all the colors before killing us". He couldn't speak so frankly and so openly to everyone. It was only possible with us, because our misfortunes had robbed us of all hope. But many Jewish Policemen and doctors, including Mr. Levi, who still had their wives and children, were still optimistic. They didn't want to hear anything negative, God forbid. They explained and rationalized everything in the most favorable sense. Once or twice Taub got too indulged in talking in the street in front of others. They wanted to hit him and they began to insult him by cursing him, saying that an individual, such as him, who has lost all hope and promises nothing but misfortune, could not be allowed to be among good Jews.

To illustrate German barbarism, this is what our friend Vayntrob once told us: "After the third convoy, a Jewish Policeman discovered in a house two children, a boy and a girl, age 4-5. No one knows how they managed to stay there on their own and why they did not accompany their parents. The policeman took the two children to Geier and told him that he had found them alone in an apartment. There were, with Geier, about fifty German police officers. They placed the children near a wall to practice shooting. One of them drew his gun, pointed it at the children and fired. The boy fell against the wall, dead. The girl burst into tears and turned around. But, as the police were shouting, she got scared and turned back to the wall. A second policeman took out his revolver and fired, without hitting his target. On the next shot the girl was hit in the hand, and she grabbed his arm, crying. A third policeman said, we are wasting cartridges! He rushed at the girl and murdered her with a butt of his gun. Everyone else, including Geier, burst out laughing". We discussed all this, but we refused to talk about the "barbaric Hitlerism". No, we had witnessed all kinds of horrors, persecutions, pogroms, massacres, cruelties, but in no human language was there a name that could describe what was taking place here. It was the failure of universal culture, the defeat of all literature. We thought it was not simply a question of party or of Hitlerism. The fault lay on the whole (supposedly civilized) German people. Almost every evening after work, we got together to talk. Each found some degree of comfort in the other.

"Shared woe is worth half a consolation" is not just a phrase, it really helps ease men's sorrows.

On September 4, 1942, we received several letters from Bialogon. The Poles gave them to me during work. I started with my father-in-law's:

“Dear children,

We received your letter and we were very touched to learn of your sufferings, which are also ours. Throughout this time, we have kept asking Poles if they knew anything about the fate of the Jews in Kielce or where they were sent. Unfortunately, they couldn't inform us of anything. We didn't even know what happened in Kielce, how the deportations went. Now, immersed in our misfortunes and sufferings, we rely on finding out what is occurring from those who have lived among us for all these years. From Bialogon to Kielce, it is only 5 kilometers, and Poles have the right to go into town as much as they want. However, they did not indicate the slightest curiosity about the fate of 20,000 of their fellow citizens. They take our misfortunes so lightly that they don't even see the point in finding out what is happening to us. You can clearly see on their faces that they see their hopes come true. Dear children, do not let yourselves be overwhelmed by our troubles. As long as you live, you have to keep hope. If they want to kill someone, they can very well do it on the spot, no one is stopping them. My children, we send you, by the same emissary, a piece of butter. Maybe you also need the money? Write to us, and be well. We all now live with the one hope that we will one day be blessed to see our children from whom we have been so cruelly separated. The children are now at work. Almost all of the Jews in Bialogon work in the stone quarry.

Your father,

Mendel Bekierman”.

(letter from Fraydle (Yiedl Bekierman's 1st wife) to Moshe Mayer)

“Dear brother-in-law and brother,

I want to share the good news that I have learned with you. First about the deportees, they were given water on the way. They were sent to work in the east. They cannot write from there because the place is outside the General Government, and Jews are forbidden to correspond. Globally, the deportation of the Jews has now ended. It is said that it must have been due to pressure from American Jews. As for us, we all work in Janów, in the

stone quarry. We even pay to be registered for work. We think that even if they still deport people, it will not affect us in Bialogon, because everyone has a job there. It is very late, and we have to get up very early to go to work. I will write to you at greater length another time. Don't be so worried. We have to believe and something tells me that, God willing, we can soon see those we were separated from once again. Be well and receive salvation from your sister-in-law Fraydle. "

(letter from Elke's husband to Moshe Mayer)

"My dear brother-in-law,

I read your letter. My heart understands and sympathizes with your pain, but you must hold on and not lose heart, because we must live. Your brother-in-law Beynish."

I read the letters I had just received, standing by myself in a corner of the factory, out of view. The few lines from my brother-in-law made me think: We must live! We must live! But why? For revenge! Since his wife Elke was murdered, he thinks only of getting revenge on our persecutors. Yes, he is right, we have to live, indeed, and witness with our own eyes that they be punished! From Bialogon, my brother Yudl and I also received three letters from our three brothers whom we admired so much. Unfortunately, I don't have the letters anymore and I can't exactly transcribe them from memory. We had no idea these letters would be the last letters from our brothers. I remember when we started reading the one from the eldest, Avrom-Mordkhe. We couldn't control our emotions. I had to rush to the bathroom to continue reading. The German factory foreman came in and found me there, in tears, with letters in hand. He tore them away from me and ripped them apart. He then ordered me to return to my post. As punishment, I was deprived of the few spoonfuls of the soup that was distributed at the factory, which they called a "meal".

Relations between Polish workers and us Jewish workers

Before the deportations, Jewish workers who worked in the factory were paid 20% less than Poles. Already, it was almost volunteer work. For example, for a week's work, a worker received 30 zlotys, exactly the price of a kilogram of bread. After the deportations, we were told that we would no longer be paid. As a salary, we would simply be given a little soup every day. For every Jewish worker, the factory had to pay 5 zlotys a day to the District in Radom, because a Jew was not allowed to earn any money. To

survive, we had to make do with the daily soup. Some factories, which were happy with their Jewish workers, asked the District in Radom, if in addition to the five zlotys they paid per worker, per day, they could give extra soup so that their workers could maintain their strength. It was refused. No exemptions. The Jewish workers were asking for only one thing, to be able to stay alive. For the rest, they would be able to manage. At the factory, all the Jewish workers tried to trade something with the Polish workers for food. If they didn't come to an agreement, the Poles would routinely go and find the German foreman and tell him that the Jews were trafficking goods in the factory. The foreman would confiscate everything and give the Jew a good beating as a bonus. For the workers and for the Polish population in general, there could be no mercy shown for the Jews. They did not want to understand that a Jew carried the weight of his troubles with him throughout the day. The Jew had to constantly worry where his wife and children were. In addition to these burdens, once the day's work was completed, the Pole could go home for his evening meal with his family, while the Jew had no home to return to and nowhere to go. I remember a Polish foreman named Tomicek. A skinny little man. His anti-Semitism was bigger than he was. He was jealous of the surviving Jews who never gave up hope, and jealousy bred his hatred for Jews. But now, seeing what these Jews had been reduced to, and perhaps even knowing the truth about the fate of these Jews, he could have softened his attitude a little. At least, in front of Jews who were in deep anguish and in search of any subsistence. But this was not to be. His attitude hadn't changed one bit and he continued to systematically reserve the most difficult tasks for them. There was also a Pole who was in charge of leading the Jewish teams. His name was Kashinski. Every day he unloaded the wagons filled with wood, hurling logs purposefully to break an arm or a leg. On the other hand, I must admit that Kashinski, was a very liberally minded. Thanks to him, many Jews were able to work in the markets where the tasks were a little easier. I must also admit that our work in Henrików was the best possible place for the Jews. Other posts were far worse. For those who worked at HASAG Kielce or Skarzysko, conditions were much worse. Generally speaking, the Polish population was the major obstacle for the Jews who tried to stay alive. This was a permanent obstacle. When it was time to leave the factory, the Polish workers were the first to leave. The Jews were required to line up in threes and march at a military pace to the door. They were not allowed to step out of line. Those who wanted anything, such as a few kilograms of potatoes or some bread, had to slip out among the Poles, rush to the Polish stores and hurriedly shop there while the other Jews lined up. Then, they had to take advantage of surreptitiously jumping into

the column of Jewish workers passing in the street and regain their place in their row before returning home. Often Polish secret agents would seize any purchases in their possession. There were times when the Poles who noticed a Jew sneaking out among them would shout, "Get out!" as if he was guilty of committing the worst crime. Weiz (Württemberg?) who was in charge of the depot where the deportees' clothes were stored, called on Jewish workers to sort and store them. He only took young girls who he personally told, to take clothes home with them when they return home. One time, he noticed a girl with the flu. He waited until the end of the day and he walked right up and stopped and searched her. He snatched away what he himself had told her to take. She was then accused of theft in front of Wallschleger and shot on the spot. This is how these tragic days followed one another. In the evening, after work, all our friends gathered at our house. Everyone had something to relate. Almost every day we learned that one of our fellow Jews working in the camp had been shot dead. But despite these assassinations, Jewish workers continued to bring back packs of clothing every day. In the evening, Poles would come to the small "labor camp" to make their choice of purchases. For these exchanges, they brought food and drink and a wide assortment of items. Some Jews had become very good at smuggling products, often with the complicity of the Jewish Police. They would eat and drink and get drunk entire nights with the Jewish Police. There have even been several marriages between young men and women. It was not money that they were concerned, but about the future. Not knowing what awaited them the next day, they lived the moment. Among my friends, opinions were mixed about those who lived like this in the labor camp. Some considered them to be the most abject elements of mankind. To live like this and to forget the past, when all of us experienced seeing our parents forced to leave without knowing what had become of them! No, it was unworthy of human beings. Others tried to justify their behavior, "We all live day today, in the present moment, permanently on the brink between life and death. It's impossible to think about what's happening to our neighbors or to someone very close, since we don't even have any idea of what will happen to us. We may have to regret being among the living more than once. Thus, if a young man and a young girl who had not yet experienced anything and who imagine their death is imminent, wish to take advantage of their final days or hours to taste a bit of life, we cannot blame them. We cannot demand of others, who stand on the brink between life and death and are unable to prevent the sword of the angel of death, to act in a more moral manner. Let everyone live their final moments as they wish".

We wrote regularly to our families in Bialogon. I can't remember the exact date. I only remember that it was two days before Rosh Hashanah. The Polish woman to whom I had entrusted my letter came back with it. The Polish woman was unable to carry it because the German Police had been sent out at four in the morning. Since she had to leave for work, she was unable to learn what it was about. In the evening, when I returned, I learned that all the Jews had been expelled from Bialogon to Checiny. I wanted to know how the deportation went. If they'd been allowed to take their possessions with them? But I couldn't find out exactly. I was hoping to learn more from the Poles who worked at the factory. On the second day of Rosh Hashanah, some workers said that as they unloaded wooden wagons on the ramp, they saw a train pass. It was the same train that had been used in the Kielce convoys. They heard the Jews shouting that they came from Checiny. I realized then, that the Jews from the surrounding villages must have been rounded up in Checiny, in order to form a convoy of 6,000 people before being transported. Since the convoys in Kielce, we have not heard of any more deportation operations. We believed the deportations were over.

How did the evacuation of the small villages go?

There were no ghettos in the villages. But at the time when they were introduced in the big cities, a decree was made that all the Jews of a group of villages administered by the same council, should henceforth be gathered into one ghetto. Any Jews seen elsewhere should be turned over to the police and immediately shot. In theory, even in this village, Poles would not have the right to enter. But finally, as there was neither ghetto nor surveillance, contacts with Poles were able to continue. A day or two before the deportation, all the Jews were forcibly regrouped in one village to form a convoy of 6,000 people. Some towns were far from the station where the train was waiting. The German and Ukrainian police, tasked with forcing the Jews to leave, let them take as much baggage as they wanted. But they made them walk the path at such a speed, that almost all of them had to leave their baggage on the road. Wagons and a few carts followed the columns and picked up whatever was left behind. There were also people (old people and children) unable to sustain the effort over such a distance. They were put on the carts. When these carts were filled to capacity, they were brought to a place, where they were forced to dig a pit and were all shot. Their baggage and clothing remained in the carts. This was how it was until they all reached the train station. Learning that those who were carried in the carts were being shot, people made enormous efforts and dragged themselves with their last bit of strength to walk. Sometimes the Ukrainians "rewarded" those

unable to keep up, by pulling them out and shooting them. As the Jews passed through the villages, they begged the Poles to give them some water. Some gave it, but most held water in one hand and held out their other hand for payment because the Jews would have given anything for a little water. Even this token act of mercy was very rarely allowed by the German Police officers and the Ukrainians. Many hundreds of Jews were shot dead on their way to the train station. Their clothes and luggage were taken to the camps in the cities. After the convoy from Checiny, the news poured in almost daily. Every day we heard about a new convoy. Jews from villages near Kielce have even been seen walking towards the train station. When Pinczów's convoy passed, the Gestapo brought a few people out of the convoy to our home in the small ghetto. They were Jews, foreign nationals. There was the family of the Rabbi of Pinczów, Rapaport, who had Swiss citizenship, and a young man, a citizen of Palestine who only left Palestine a few weeks prior. The Rabbi from Pinczów and his family were transferred sometime later to Warsaw, to the Powiak prison, where the foreign nationals were being held. But foreigners were not systematically isolated from each convoy. It was rare. During the convoys from Kielce, the foreign passports that some presented had been torn up. My brother, my brother-in-law and I didn't have much money. We didn't have anything to sell either. And there was no more hope of receiving anything from those in Bialogon, since our families had also been deported. We decided to attempt to go to our old apartments, in order find something there to be able to live on. There was still time, because workers were being sent to the ghetto. If work were to cease and Poles moved into our apartments, we could be sure that they would search and find whatever was hidden. Even if they didn't find anything, we would be lost. We could, God forbid, starve without being able to get to our money. With my brother Yudl, who was working at the stone quarry at the time, we decided one day not to go to work and secretly join with those who worked in the ghetto. This required the complicity of the Jewish Policeman who led this group to work. He took almost half of what we claimed we had. We went out with the workers assigned to the ghetto and the Jewish Policeman made sure that we arrived at the apartment building where we had lived. He stood guard in case someone came. I entered my room and I was able to get some of the money that I had hidden between the bricks. However, I was unable to touch what I had buried deep in the ground. Everything went well and Yudl also was able to recover what he had been hiding. In the evening, when we told our friends where we had been, they found us to be reckless. After all it had been more than once when Jews were caught and shot for trying to do what we did.

A letter from a Jewish worker at Hasag

Hasag was a company that produced weapons, ammunition, etc. The seat of the General Government was in Skarzysko. But back home in Kielce there was also a factory of the same name. After the deportations of Kielce, Captain Geier shipped more than a hundred forcibly obtained Jewish laborers there. They were not allowed to enter our camp. Only the Jewish group leader was allowed to come to our house every Sunday. It was from him that we learned this. The factory manager understood that this was the best time to take advantage and make a good deal with the Jews. He got in his car and drove around the villages where the deportations had not yet taken place. He was accompanied by the Jewish group leader in order to inspire confidence. They allowed those who were willing to pay well to be admitted at Hasag and into the car. Jews from small villages, who already knew what to expect, feared they would be driven to the wagon at any minute. So, they rushed to this car that could take them to Hasag and they were outbidding each other in order to be hired. This is how a few hundred Jews ended up in the Hasag in Kielce. At first, the living conditions were not too bad. Jews were not allowed to have money, but since everyone was bribed, this rule didn't really matter anymore. And those who had money were able to live in better conditions. But then things changed. Two Germans came from the Skarzysko Hasag to seize 100 Jewish workers. It goes without saying, that none of the Jews in Kielce wanted to go. Some went into hiding. But those who were found, were shot on the spot. These kinds of executions were an everyday occurrence. Almost every day, the two Germans entered the barracks where Jewish women lived and chose two of the prettiest there. They took them to a separate room where they were tortured and raped with the utmost barbarity. Then they were always shot. It is so painful just to relate this. But their bestial and barbaric German instincts did not end there. They ordered the Jewish workers to lay out the bodies of these girls next to the toilet and leave them there all day for the Polish workers to see just how they had been defiled. Polish workers did spend time throughout their day going to the toilet to witness the defilement of Jewish women. One day after work, when we were all at home discussing and lamenting over our misfortunes, we received a visit from my friend, Kohn, who read us a letter from his brother who worked at the Hasag in Skarzysko, where he had been sent two weeks prior to the deportation. He read it to us through his tears. "Dear brother, it was with great difficulty that I was able to find an opportunity to write you this letter. I want to continue our exchanges, even in writing, because I do not believe that we will ever be

able to meet again. I don't know what your working conditions are, but it is clear from where I am, that I will not survive mine. Indeed, of the 100 men who arrived at the same time as me, only 12 remain, including myself. All the others no longer have to endure the torment and suffering that we endure, because they are now dead. Here in the Hasag of Skarzysko there are three camps for the Jews, A, B and C. When a convoy of Jews arrives, the healthy ones are selected and they are sent to camp A. The weakest go to the camp B. The workers at camp A are employed in the factory at relatively normal tasks, but how long can you survive without eating? Or sleeping on planks with nothing to cover up. Without water to wash, and continually being eaten up by lice. After several weeks in these conditions, we find ourselves weakened and we are sent to Camp B. The workers there are even weaker and the conditions even worse. You can't last very long there. As a result, the workers are sent to Camp C, where they routinely select and shoot the workers every day. If in one of these camps someone catches typhus, which is inevitable given the unimaginable filth that reigns here and the contagious nature of the disease, the workers in the entire barrack are shot. Jewish workers arrive and are replaced daily from all the villages. There are about a thousand Jews at the moment, but their numbers are dwindling day by day. It is time for God to have mercy on us and put an end to the plight of the Jews. My beloved brother, maybe you could send me a shirt or some zlotys. Write me how you are. Be well. Maybe, who knows, God will help us and we can see each other alive again". Our friend, Taub, was present among us and listened to this letter being read. Hearing "God will help us", he was seized with anger and was trembling. He almost fell off his stool. He addressed Goldman, a very pious man (Goldman was the son of the Rebbe of Chmielnik). "So, Goldman, where are you and your God? " Goldman didn't say anything for a while. Then, after a few minutes of silence, he responded. "I must confess the truth to you. At this time, in the face of all the present misfortunes, I am no longer able to justify my belief in the Creator. No, there is no justification for all of this". Another said, "I'm not complaining about God. I never believed all these tragedies have been caused by him, and I don't expect help from him either. I only have to complain about mankind, the world, modern civilization, this civilization which has led to the most horrific behavior. Only the sword, brutal force and violence reign on the earth today. It all depends on the hand holding the sword. Even revenge is only possible for the one who holds the sword. But who will be able to avenge the innocent blood of our women and our children? "

Treblinka

On November 1, 1942, on the way home from work, people were talking in low voices about a boy of about fifteen who had been deported from Kielce with the third convoy and had returned. This boy reportedly spoke of a place called Treblinka where Jews were taken and where they were killed with gas machines. Our friends all gathered at my house and everyone spoke about this boy, although no one had been able to personally speak with him yet. Indeed, his father would not let anyone into his home, because the child was illegally in the small ghetto. The father feared the reaction of the Jewish Police. He also didn't know if we would let his son stay. The father worked in the same factory as me. At work, all the workers tried questioning him. He denied everything and explained that his son was crazy, that he had never been there and that he no longer knew what he was saying. He was afraid that this story would spread and that it would reach Geier's ears. He was afraid that he would have to pay for it all with his life. A few days later, on November 10, I was told at the factory that a cousin of mine, Moishe Pozitsky, had arrived in the ghetto. He said he came from Treblinka. Originally from Bialogon, he had been deported with the Checiny convoy. At the factory, we all agreed to meet at my house in the evening after work and finally learn from my cousin the truth about what had happened. He was no longer a young boy and he had gone to this place with his entire family! He could certainly be trusted. That's what I told my friends, "If he was indeed there, then we'll know all the details soon". When I got home, a crowd of people were already waiting, including all the doctors and even some Jewish policemen. I kissed my cousin and we burst into tears. We couldn't yet exchange words, so we prepared something to eat while we waited for everyone else to arrive. He began his story. "It was 4 a.m. on the eve of Rosh Hashanah. Suddenly, there were several forceful knocks on the door. The Germans burst in and pushed us out. My wife and I hurriedly dragged our two sleeping, 10 and 8 year old, children. We hastily grabbed some clothing and food and left the house with all our belongings. The same scene unfolded from door to door, in every Jewish home. We were taken to a square where the Jews of Bialogon were gathered. At 6 a.m., we were all gathered together, young and old, women and children, surrounded by armed Germans. Without paying the slightest attention to the crying of the women and children, the Germans pushed us all along the road to Checiny. Along the way, they made us throw away the luggage that we were carrying with us. We traveled 9 kilometers in this manner. Once in Checiny, we were taken into a small ghetto and handed over to the Jewish police. On the same

day the Jews from other villages joined us, such as from Piekoszów, Lopuszno, Moravica. In total, with those from Checiny, we were 6,500. For the New Year, we were all there, not knowing what to expect. The first day of Rosh-Hashanah, the German police surrounded the ghetto and took us out of the houses and led us to a square, guarded by Ukrainians and Polish Policemen. The Ukrainians were running around hitting us, tearing off the women's rings and forcing the men to give them their boots and thereby remaining barefoot. Orders were given to those who had bulky bags, to leave them immediately in the square. We were then counted. Then we were taken 7 km to Tokarnia station where a freight train was waiting for us. The Poles in the area watched us and laughed at our misfortunes, saying that these train wagons were for us and that we were being taken away to be made into canned food. We were pushed into barb-wired train wagons. To my misfortune, I was the last one on the train wagon when it closed immediately behind me. My wife and children had to get on the next wagon. We were very cramped. We stood literally on top of each other. Some were in deep distress and were shouting "Water! Some water! " But the wagons were closed and the windows were also tightly closed and so there was no one to hear the screams. At two o'clock in the afternoon, the train started. My brother, Shloyme, asked me, "Moishe, what do you think? Where are we going?" I told him that I had a very bad feeling and my heart was telling me that maybe we were being led to our death. I told him that if my wife and children hadn't been in the next car, I wouldn't have hesitated to kick in the window mesh and jump. The situation got worse along the way. The heat and the lack of air was beyond anything anyone can imagine. Everyone, adults and children, were literally suffocating. We traveled like that for about 20 hours and then the train suddenly stopped. We could see that we were at Malkinia Station, 80 or 90 kilometers from Warsaw. Looking through the skylight, I saw our locomotive detached and leaving as another one came up on the other side of the train. Our train entered a secondary track, which I could see, was taking us on a new rail line. The train took us another 15 kilometers or so. Looking outside, I could only see heaven and earth. We entered a camp entirely surrounded by barbed wire and a palisade maybe three kilometers long. On each side there was a large tower, and on these towers stood Ukrainians with machine guns. I saw a high and wide portal open. Everywhere, Ukrainians armed with guns. The train entered and stopped. The doors suddenly opened and the Ukrainians started banging and shouting, "Get out! Quick! Get Outside! ". I wanted to see my wife and children, but it had become impossible. We were dragged some distance away from the train and we heard orders ring out, "Women and children on

one side!" The other side for men! Get undressed, quickly! We're going to the shower! " As we got off the train, everyone had left their luggage on the train wagons. There were also the bodies of women, children and men who died on the way there. While we were undressing, the S.S., accompanied by several Ukrainians, went around the crowd and selected a number of people for work. I was chosen along with your brother, Pintshe, and Dovid Bekerman, and we were put aside, for now. Among those who stood naked in line to enter the so-called "showers", I saw my entire family. I also saw your brothers Avrom-Mordkhe and Yankev-Hersh, and your brother-in-law, Beynish. They had gathered around the rabbi. And among the women, I saw the wife of Avrom-Mordkhe with four of her children. The other four must have died in the train wagons. The women and children were the first to be pushed into barracks that were topped with a large chimney, which kept spitting out smoke. The Rabbi of Bialogon did not want to take off his prayer shawl despite the blows of the Ukrainians. Wounded and bleeding, he unfolded his tallis and cried out: "Brothers, join me! Let's confess before we die! Then he yelled the "Shema-Yisroel". Realize, even Beynish the Communist, went to throw himself under the Rabbi's tallis! In the barracks, where they were made to enter, they could already see the gas chambers. The screams were so loud that you couldn't even hear the rifles of the S.S. firing at those who were too slow to enter. What do you want me to tell you? After two hours, everybody was dead. We, who had been chosen for the job, were first forced to empty the train cars. Several Jews from a previous convoy worked with us. I asked them where we were. They said, "We are in Treblinka. Do you know what Treblinka is? It's Hell for the Jewish people". One of them threw the bodies out of the train cars. He explained to us that we would not need anything from now on. We would only have to make sure, while we were still alive, to find something to eat. We were responsible for sorting all things left into different piles. Clothes on one side, shoes on the other. You cannot even imagine the height of these piles. All around we were finding hidden money. In the distance we could see other identical mountains of clothes and shoes. The place we were in was huge. A large hut in the middle of this square divided it into two halves. Naked people were brought in on one side of the barracks, then rushed out on the other side. This was where the gas chambers and the crematoriums were located. It was there that the worst horrors were committed. The convoys followed one another, day after day, at the rate of 6,000 people each time. Two hours after arrival, there was not a living person left. Everyone suffered the same fate. There were also convoys arriving from abroad. Arriving from France, Holland and Belgium. In the early days, people arrived on quality trains,

dressed in beautiful clothes. It wasn't until they got off the train that they realized where they were and what they were going to do to them. On the first day, while working in the place where people undressed, we found silver, gold and jewels, and even diamonds thrown away or left hidden in clothes. We have seen it all. The SS and the Ukrainians watched us, but they didn't say anything. It was only after work when four Ukrainians arrived with a large crate which they carried on their shoulders and which they put in front of us. An S.S. arrived immediately after and ordered us to throw everything we had on us into the crate. They announced that anyone who was subsequently found in possession of any valuables would be shot. You can imagine the rest. They passed the cash register in the middle of all the workers, and everyone threw in what they had. The crate filled quickly with gold. This camp was called a "death camp". Several German Jews worked there. One of them said that they were the ones who built the camp. There were more than a thousand at the start, and only a handful now. The others had been shot one by one. He further explained that no living witnesses would be allowed out of the "death camp". Even the Ukrainians would be shot. They do not want the world to learn, by what barbaric means, they have exterminated an entire people. The clothes that were left, were carefully preserved. They knew that in the liners, there were, in a number of cases, hidden money or diamonds. Everything was sent to a special barrack where the seams of each garment, of each shoe, were undone, to extract all the riches. Every other day, a plane landed at this camp and left loaded with suitcases full of silver, gold and diamonds that had once belonged to Jews. The gas chambers and crematoria were not sufficient to liquidate all these convoys. Excavation machines were used to dig large and deep pits. It was in these pits, that those that escaped the gas chambers and crematoria had met their end. For the 200 people selected for the clean-up job, it was the start of a new Hell. From the first days, we convinced ourselves that it would have been much better to share the same fate with our wives and children.

We were taken to a square surrounded by armed Ukrainians. We thought we were going to be shot. This square belonged to the No. 1 death camp and was surrounded by machine guns. Then we left it to go to a second nearby camp. Along the way Ukrainians asked if we had money, watches, gold with us, and if so, to give it to them. Some gave them what they had. Others threw what they had with them in the sand. We were taken to a square surrounded with barbed wire. An entry sign on the portal read: "Treblinka Labor Camp No. 2". We were lined up and counted. Then the S.S. arrived with several German Jews carrying a crate. They asked us once again to

throw in any money, gold, watches in our possession. Each time, they got something. In this camp, there were still several German Jews who had originally built the "death camp". We were placed under their orders. There were also a good number of Jews from Warsaw and other towns.

At 9 o'clock in the evening, we were taken into a barrack. We were shaking with fear. We lied down on the boards, but it was impossible to sleep. During the night we heard shots being fired. Several workers were immediately killed. I thanked Heaven when at five in the morning finally arrived and the order was shouted to get up. I jumped off my boards quickly. We went out into the yard and lined up for the appel (line-up). We were divided into blocks and each block into five groups. For breakfast we were given some water. I didn't have any. The two German Jews who distributed the water, spilled water on everyone. Once the bell rang, we all left for work. I was assigned to a group of 70 men. Four Ukrainians took us to work. We were building a road between Malkinia and Treblinka. We were working near the "death camp," when suddenly in the midst of the work, a Ukrainian rushed, with a shovel in his hand, at one of the Jewish workers. He hit him on the head with so much force that he died immediately. Another Jew nearby tried to run away and he was instantly shot. At noon, we returned to the camp. We took the bodies of the two workers and buried them in the woods. When we returned to the barracks, we got ready for the roll call. The S.S. counted us and the two men missing were noted. The Ukrainians reported that they were shot dead during an attempted escape. The midday meal was distributed. It was solely the same portion of water as distributed in the morning. Once the bell rang, we had to return to work. I didn't even have time to exchange a few words with some of my friends assigned to other labor tasks. Day after day we saw the convoys arriving. We were so used to seeing this that it no longer affected us. But after several days, when a few hundred workers had been shot, some of the men in an incoming convoy were needed to be selected for replacement. At 4 o'clock we returned to camp. We took our places on the roll call and waited until 8 p.m. Each of us received a little black coffee. I asked one of the German Jews, by the name of Erwin, if they were going to give us bread. He replied that it was only every other day and it would be 170 grams per person. At 9 o'clock we lay down on our boards. By chance, I was able to meet your brother, Pintshe, and also your brother-in-law, Dovid. They told me what they were doing and they also told me they wouldn't survive it. They were carrying large crates of sand from one place to another, four men per crate. Inhumane work! Its only purpose was to torture them. They were made to run with the crates and the

ones who did not run fast enough were shot. The night was rather quiet, without gunfire. In the morning, dead Jews who died during the night were taken away. Where are we taking the bodies? Behind the toilet. Why there? When we have ten bodies, we will go and bury them in the woods. We didn't have to wait long to have ten bodies. Some Jews were on their knees begging to be killed with a bullet. Death with a shovel seemed much worse for them. We went back to work. My legs felt like they were no longer able to carry me. It had been two days since I had eaten anything. I was hoping to finally get a piece of bread. In the evening, back in our barracks, we were lined up in a row. Two doctors arrived and examined us. It was the daily procedure. They picked the weakest ones and pushed them aside, to be taken into the woods and shot. These selected workers were never even given their piece of bread. It goes without saying, that given our living conditions, these doctors were kept busy every day. We each finally received our 170 grams of bread, to last us for two days, until we receive the next piece of bread.

Each day, several groups were transported to Malkinia for work. Pintshe Baum, Dovid Bekierman, and a few other men from Bialogon were among them. One day, coming home from work, I saw Pintshe Baum coming. He told me that Dovid Bekierman, Bogós and Khayml had run away. Khayml was shot by the Ukrainians right away. Bogós had jumped into the Bug River and no one knew whatever had happened to him. Dovid had managed to escape. I told Pintshe that I was also thinking of running away. But he replied categorically, "I have no intention of moving from here. This is where we live, where our wives and children, our fathers and mothers, our brothers and sisters, our whole family rests. I must remain here and face whatever fate awaits me". I replied, "There is nothing good in staying here. You can see that people are dying and that they are shot every day. Death brushes against us all the time. I am determined to run away as soon as the opportunity arises. Hunger is worse in my eyes than death". I never saw Pintshe again. The next day they came to tell me that he had run over to a Ukrainian and slapped him. He was killed immediately. The construction of the road where I was working was progressing well. I felt that the opportunity to escape was not far off, because we were approaching some woods in which it would be easy to hide when the time came. The day before Yom Kippur, we got home from our work at 9 a.m. In the barracks, we began to recite Kol Nidre, sobbing silently and shedding many tears. After the prayer, the two German Jews, Erwin and Julius, who were our leaders at work, and a Jew from Warsaw, Ignac, stood up and began to beg for our forgiveness. They begged us and apologized for their brutal behavior

towards us. They cried that it was not their fault, as they were forced to behave this way. The next morning, we were made to line up by three a.m. The lieutenant (Sturmführer), we called him Dzodekil, appeared armed with a carbine. He shot the first three of us. None of us knew why. Then he quickly left. One day we were told not to report to work. We were ordered to undress and put our clothes next to the cauldron. Shoes were returned to us and brought to the barracks. We were naked for three days. They steamed all our clothes and threw them in a pile. We then had to search and retrieve our belongings among this disorderly pile. At this time, the lieutenant (Dzodekil) came by and shot at us, killing several of us. I was lucky enough to find my clothes that morning. Everyone who was already dressed had to line up. The lieutenant arrived on horseback. He jumped off his mount, fired his gun, killing 13 Jews and remounted, taking off at a gallop. On the way to work, I told myself that I would not go back to the barracks, come whatever may. The Ukrainians who supervised our work detail did not lack for money. They received money, along with other goods, from Ukrainians in the "death camp", and therefore they lived comfortably. These Ukrainians weren't lacking in food either. The Poles who provided the stones for our site, also brought them brandy, roast chickens, geese, and other good things. In return, the Ukrainians gave them lots of cash and valuables. We were forced to attend their banquets and drinking bouts, while we had nothing to eat. I took advantage of one of those moments. Poles came with their delivery of stones, while the Ukrainians threw themselves on the carts and began to eat and drink. Seeing them busy at their feast, I quickly glanced around, heart pounding, and darted off into the woods. I ran without looking back, my ears only listening if shots were being fired. Everything was silent. I finally ran out of the forest. I arrived in a clear field. My legs refused to carry me any further. Not being able to run anymore, I continued walking with small steps. I walked a dozen kilometers in this way, until I came to a near village in which I saw a field where radishes were growing. I ripped some up and ate them. They gave me some needed strength. I filled my pockets with radishes and continued on my way, not knowing where I was. When I arrived in the village, I entered a Polish person's house. He didn't know that I was Jewish (since my physical features resembled that of a typical Pole). He gave me a piece of bread and some boiled potatoes. I devoured everything and resumed my journey. I entered a very large and very dense forest. I walked continuously an entire day. It was getting dark and I couldn't find my way out of this forest. When it became totally dark, I laid down among the thick trees. I was tired, but I couldn't fall asleep and I was freezing. I remember it was two days after Sucoth. I spent the night in

the cold forest. As soon as day dawned, I started walking again. I was able to eat a few radishes in order to calm my hunger. That was all I had. I did not have money. After much effort, I finally was able to emerge from this forest. I saw a village in the distance. I walked over to one of the houses where I saw women and children in front of the door. I realized immediately that these women must be Jewish. Seeing me approach frightened them and they quickly backed away. Sensing their fear of me, I called out to them, "Do not be afraid. I am a Jew too". They asked me where I was from. I tried to explain to them that I had run away from Treblinka and I told them everything that happened to the Jews in Treblinka. They took me into the woods where I could see several scattered Jewish families. The women and children were all shaking with fear. They came from the surrounding villages. They were afraid to stay in their homes since the Germans had come and executed any Jews they found in the villages. They had managed to escape. They had been here for 8 days already and they didn't know what to do. Winter was approaching and it was starting to get cold. Two young people stood up and said they were going into the forest because it was becoming impossible to stay there. I offered to join them. I told them I wanted to go to Kielce, but did not know how. I did not even know where I was. They gave me some food, a few zlotys, and explained how to get to Warsaw, knowing that there was a road leading directly to Kielce through Radom. As we were talking, a young boy came running and alerted us that a group of Germans had arrived. We all quickly took refuge in the forest and stayed there for the night. In the morning, I took my leave of these Jewish families and resumed my journey. I still had 60 kilometers remaining to go to Warsaw. It was an overcast day and it was raining a little. After 20 kilometers, I arrived in a village. It was almost dark, so I knocked on a Pole's house without revealing that I was a Jew. I asked him if he could put me up for the night. He told me to get a certificate from the village mayor. But I was afraid to go to the mayor's house, so I laid down in a field. The problem was that I couldn't stay there very long because I started to feel cold. I hopped around a bit to warm up before taking off again on my journey. I could barely walk. After 8 kilometers, I arrived in another village. I walked into a Polish store to buy a piece of bread. I sat in a corner quickly eating. But as the Pole kept watching me, I became afraid. I quickly got up and left. After a few minutes of walking, I saw two Poles running after me. The store owner must have sent them to pursue me. When they caught up to me, they grabbed me, shouting "Come with us to the police, you are Jewish! ". I told them that they were mistaken, but they did not believe me. Grabbing me, they forced me to walk with them. I was able to tear myself away from them

despite their efforts to grab my legs and hold me by my neck. They chased after me. While running, I lost my balance and fell hard to the floor. They once again were able to capture me. As I struggled, I saw a third Pole arriving on a bicycle. I realized to myself that it is over. I am finished! But the cyclist came over and asked me if I was a Jew. I screamed that I was not. In response, he chased away the two pursuers and told me to move on. Relieved, I reached a grove and laid down for a while to regain my composure. I was not able to move anymore that night. From where I was, I saw two Poles pushing a woman and her little girl who was moaning and pleading to be let free. The crying of the little girl was heartbreaking. I felt overwhelmed. The Poles were hitting them, saying, "You are Jews, you have to go to the police! " After witnessing all that I have seen, I avoided all encountering with Poles. I came to the realization that they couldn't be trusted. Night was beginning to fall. I had a dry throat and I needed to drink some water. Despite the bad experience that I had, I walked into a yard and saw a woman drawing water from a well. Seeing me, she asked me what I wanted. I told her that I needed some water. She directed me into her house and invited me to sit down. The walls were covered with holy Christian images. I saw that she was not a peasant woman. From the next room, a 12 or 13-year-old girl entered. The woman introduced her to me as her daughter. The child sat next to me while her mother set the table and brought over food. While eating, I found the food to have a familiar taste. The girl began to wonder where I had come from. I told her I came from a village, but she didn't believe me. She insisted, "Don't be afraid and tell me the truth, are you a Jew? Do not be afraid". I saw her mother in the kitchen weeping silently, and I suddenly realized that they must be Jews with Aryan papers, trying to hide their identity. Coming to this realization, I told them about my escape from Treblinka and what was going on there. Listening to me, the girl started to cry, unable to contain her emotions, her head falling on the table. Her mother made sure the door was locked to prevent anyone from entering before telling me that they were from Warsaw. They had left the capital for fear of being arrested and sent to Germany to work there. "Here in the country side we are safer. My husband and three other children are still in Warsaw". The girl, hearing the words "still in Warsaw", began to cry even more and asked me if I had seen any Jews from Warsaw in Treblinka. It was getting late. The woman apologized that they would have offered me to stay for the night, but they were afraid of possible searches by the villagers. They gave me food, a bottle of water and a few zlotys before leaving them. I had 15 kilometers left to Warsaw. I finally got to Warsaw. I walked the streets of the city with great trepidation before I found the road leading towards

Radom and Kielce. I finally arrived in Kielce with little difficulty. After reaching Bialogon, I waited in the forest for nightfall so as not to be seen when entering the town. I walked along the Jewish streets of Bialogon, looking into the windows to see who was inside the houses. The rooms were pleasantly lit. I heard singing and laughter escaping. I had to ask myself, "Where are the Jews?" The homes were occupied by Poles! No more traces of any Jews who once lived there". I went to one of my Polish neighbors. She didn't recognize me and she responded by asking me what I wanted. I said to her "Don't you recognize me? I am Pozitsky. She grabbed her head with both hands, not understanding how I was able to return and asked me to come inside for a moment. Her child was not yet sleeping and she was afraid that her son would me. She quickly put him to bed and motioned for me to come inside. She gave me some food and began asking me about my wife and my children. I related to her that they were no longer alive and she burst into tears. I stayed for a while. She asked me where I was planning to go. She didn't want to let me spend the night at her house, as she was afraid. Returning to my former home, I saw that the Poles had already taken all that we had left in our home. I also went to the tannery, now empty, whose doors, windows, floors had been broken apart by Poles. I spent the night there. I was told in Bialogon that there were still a few Jews left in Kielce, so that is why I came here".

Our cousin Moyshe Pozitski added again: "Moyshe-Meyer, Yudl, please know that the date of death of your father and mother, siblings and all family members who once lived in Bialogon, was the second day after Rosh-Hashana. To know the date of death of your wives and children, you simply need to add a day to the date of their convoy departure". He told us again that he heard in Bialogon, that Dovid Bekierman had returned, but he did not know where he had taken refuge. It was 3 am. Everyone had listened to Moyshe Pozitski without moving. No one had said a word. My friend, Taub, spoke to the Jewish police and to the doctors present and said to them, "So you can believe now that Hitler is going to kill us all? Do you all see this ghetto full of bustling people? Well, they're just living dead. I wish at least one of us will survive, so we could tell the world how we were exterminated". Most of the people already left. We continued to ask questions about our loved ones and anything about their last moments. What we heard brought us to many tears and desolation. He (?) told us that his intention was not to stay with us in the ghetto. He would spend only a few days there in order to regain his strength and then return to Bialogon where he would seek refuge. He did not consider the ghetto a safe place. He felt

that we lived there on borrowed time. I place my right hand on my heart and am stating the entire pure truth when I say that, when Moyshe told us, that the day after the convoy left, that there was no one alive, I felt a deep relief, as if we had taken a heavy burden from my soul. How can one understand this feeling? For anyone who has not seen the conditions in which our families were torn away will not be able to understand.

(In the historical references, there is no mention anywhere of actual crematoriums in the Treblinka camp. The first cremations of corpses were unearthed as of March 1943.)

November

We read in the German newspaper that a special status was granted to several towns of the General Government, in order that Jews could reside there for the time being. All the Jews from the villages and the countryside, as well as those who had avoided the deportations and were wandering through the forests, had until December 1, 1942 to reach the cities indicated. After that date, any Jew found elsewhere would be executed. We immediately understood that they were probably finished with eliminating most of the Jews in the General Government. All that remained, was to deal with the few remaining Jews who had been set aside in order to first facilitate operations. They wanted to bring all the Jews together in one place so that they could manage them in an efficient manner (economy of scale). Over time, the German and Polish police largely succeeded in rounding up the remaining Jews and taking them to the towns designated for this purpose. Each district had its own police force. This is how the remaining Jewish population was brought together.

The Small Ghetto declared a Labor Camp

Each district has chosen two small isolated villages in its territory to concentrate its few scattered Jews. In most of the large towns where Jews worked in state factories, they were only allowed to stay until December 1, 1942. For us in the small ghetto of Kielce, the deadline was the same. Everyone feared that he would be caught overnight and taken to one of these designated villages. Some Jews tried to find any solution. Some had Christian papers made (Aryan documents) from specialists in this type of production. Some of these Jews who had such papers, were indeed able to leave the ghetto right away. Others preferred to stay and hold on to these papers, with the idea of using them to get out of the ghetto when things got worse. The most worried were the Jewish police, President Herman Levi,

and doctors. They did not live too badly in this ghetto. They weren't working and they weren't short of money. Above all, they still had their wives and children with them. Consider the situation! Leaving the ghetto to go to a small remote village, where you knew from hearsay, that the Jews would only be allocated a few houses and that there would not be adequate space. These locations would also be under continual surveillance, without the opportunity of being able to bring in food. Letters had been received from the Jews in these villages, who told us that they would have preferred to finally be taken to the trains that led to their death, rather than to suffer in their current conditions. The last days prior to December 1 had passed in anxiety. On December 1, Geier summoned Spiegel (the commander of the Jewish police) and informed him that the Kielce ghetto was declared a labor camp. He ordered him to remove the sign reading "Kielce Ghetto for Jews" and replace it with the sign "Jewish Labor Camp". When Spiegel arrived with the good news, a wave of happiness spread. Policemen and doctors hugged each other on the streets. This news was important, as we could remain in the ghetto. Things would undoubtedly improve. As the ghetto had now become a labor camp, there would be a plethora of work. This situation would hopefully be allowed to continue until the end of the war. The people were so happy that they began to drink and get drunk that same evening as in the old days on Simchas Torah day. We were not aware that the labor camp had only been established for three months. Beyond this period, everything would depend on the department specifically devoted to "the extermination of the Jews" in the district administration. This was where they would decide whether or not to extend the period for another three months. Work resumed its daily rhythm. The Jewish police took special care to ensure that no one missed even a day's work, explaining that since this was a labor camp, you had to work non-stop. One morning we learned that the Gestapo had come by during the night and arrested anyone who had obtained Aryan papers. The manufacturer of false papers, CANT, had been taken into custody and had delivered the names of all those to whom he had provided false papers, as well as the names of those who had ordered them. Among the arrested were several policemen and their wives. All of them were taken to the Jewish cemetery and shot.

Registration for Palestine

One day after work we saw a poster asking all Jews with relatives in Palestine to come and declare themselves. This caused a new overflow feeling of joy. All ran to register. Who doesn't have a family in Palestine? It is said, that all Jews are brothers. A good half of the Jews therefore went to

register. The President and Spiegel took charge of the registrations. They looked each person in the eye to see if they were lying. Each one registered was noted separately. The first to sign up were the police, doctors and their families. Topping the list were, of course, the President himself, Spiegel, and their families. A few days later, we learned that the President had transmitted half of the registration list to the Gestapo. He had submitted those names according to his pleasure. It goes without saying, that the police and the doctors were at the top of the list. As for the President and his family, Geier and Thomas themselves had promised them that they would be given top priority. We convinced ourselves that the Jews of other countries had learned what was happening to us and had found the way to try to save the remaining Jews. Everyone on the list felt confident they would embark for Palestine shortly. For us, when we got together with friends to discuss this enrollment story, everything did not appear so clear. There was suspicion of a new deception by the Germans aimed at the few Jews they still had under their control. Taub scoffed, "Of course the President and the police deserve to go to Palestine because they've done their job. They obediently served the Germans and did much to help assassinate the Jews. It is right that they are now among those that Jewish communities in other countries are trying to rescue". And he added, "Me, I have more chances to leave. After all, I have a passport from Palestine, I only came for pleasure. And yet I do not believe it! I am convinced that this is another deception of the Germans. They keep deceiving the Jews, and the Jews have no choice but to swallow their lies". My friends, Kloski and Shklarz, whose parents actually lived in Palestine, went to register. They didn't agree with Taub. They were sure they could leave soon. My friend, Lemberger and his brother, had no family in Palestine, but they knew Spiegel and Birgental well. The latter recommended that they register, promising that they would leave among the first. Several days after the registration, the labor camp was surrounded by Ukrainians. As we did not know what was going on, we were afraid. We thought they were all going to deport us. But we noticed that they let some people leave to go to work. This reassured us a little. My cousin, Moyshe Pozitski, seeing the Ukrainians encircling the place, managed to leave with the workers and left without further delay for Bialogon. As we went our separate ways, I asked him to let me know anything he could learn about my brother-in-law, Dovid Bekierman. One day, I arrived too late to join my work group. A Jewish policeman put me in with other workers. They gave us shovels and took us to the Jewish cemetery. There we found that pits had already been dug and a barrel of lime was waiting next to the pits. That same morning, Geier and several German policemen entered the

labor camp and took President Herman Levi with his whole family. No one in the labor camp knew where. We were waiting in the cemetery near a grave when a car arrived. Geier got out, accompanied by some German policemen. Behind came the President and his family. Some of them were still in their sleepwear. Geier ordered them to undress. The President's son wore very tight boots and could not take them off. He was sick and lost consciousness. The President begged that he be killed then, while he was still unconscious. But no! This would not do! The President was forced to wake up his son and take off his boots. The entire family was then shot at the edge of the pit. In his final gesture, the President threw his hands up in the air, shouting "The world will not forgive you for the innocent blood you shed." As for us with the shovels, we were ordered to pour in the lime right away and cover the pit. The lime that we poured, was put on people still living. Almost all of them were still alive when we buried them. Following this, we, the workers, returned to the labor camp. The Jewish police, led by Spiegel, were waiting for us, to ask us what had happened to the President. We told them and Spiegel said with a nod, "Yes, yes, Geier and Thomas promised the President that he would be among the first to leave for Palestine". A Jewish Policeman, Plotshik, from Vienna had Polish friends in Kielce with whom he corresponded. But they could not write to him directly, because Poles were forbidden to correspond with Jews. To circumvent this, they used the address of a Polish man who lived just across the road from the labor camp. This policeman was on duty at the entrance gate to the labor camp when, one day he saw the postman enter the address of the Polish contact that he was using. He followed the postman and he did indeed find a letter addressed to him. However, a Ukrainian who was guarding the gate with him, noticed his strange movements and took the letter from him. The Jewish Policeman and several of his friends, who were also policemen, wanted to recover the letter. They tried to bribe the Ukrainian with a gold watch. The very next day, the Jewish policemen involved in the letter case, as well as their wives and children, were arrested. The children were shot dead immediately in the labor camp. Police Officer Plotshik's wife held a one-year-old child in her arms. One of the Gestapo officers asked her to let go of the child. The mother refused to let go. He snatched the baby out of her hands, grabbing the baby by one foot, upside down, pulled out his gun and shot the baby in the head before throwing the body to the ground. The hysterical mother was taken along, with all the other people arrested, to the Jewish cemetery where they were all shot. This is what happened to those, to whom Geier and Thomas had promised, they would be the first to leave for Palestine. The Ukrainians surrounded the camp for five days before leaving.

The labor camp continued to be run by Jewish Police under the leadership of Spiegel. Between December 27, 1942 and January 1, 1943, the last Jews concentrated in "privileged villages" were deported to Treblinka.

Henceforth, there were no more Jews in the entire General Government, except those in the labor camps, those of the HASAG, and perhaps those, few in number, who were able to live among the Polish population with Aryan papers. This meant that we were next on the list of candidates for extermination. Everything about the Germans plans was well calculated. Alas, of the entire Jewish community in Poland, of three and a half million Jews, there were only a few thousand left, struggling with the Angel of Death.

I have to say what this was. Their plan to exterminate the Jews of Europe was successful. They completed it without obstacles and exactly as planned on paper. It was carried out with the greatest savagery and the greatest cruelty in the history of mankind. What I found surprising about this was that there was never any question about resistance. There were very few suicides. I am struggling to understand and am looking for what made this all possible. Human instinct is such, that when we are faced with danger, in a difficult moment, we first try to save ourselves by whatever means. Even if we have to delude ourselves or give in to passivity. In the latter case, we readily invoke the "May I perish with the Philistines!" (Judges 16:30). We can see it, even in Samson, when he was standing in the "cave of the rock" (Judges 15: 8). In his defensive position at the end of the cliff, the Philistines promised him "No, we will not kill you" (Judges 15, 13). In fact, it was the men of Judah who make this promise. It was only when he found no other solution that Samson launched his "Perish with the Philistines!" All this is reported in the Book of Judges. "Then Samson called on the Lord "Deign to remember me and restore me, only once, my strength so that I can take vengeance upon the Philistines" (Judges 16, 28). When I saw a few German SS and a handful of Ukrainians leading perhaps a thousand Russian prisoners, who were dragging themselves with their heads bowed, I asked myself how was it possible that merely 10 or 15 Germans, even with machine guns, are able to overpower 1,000 Russian soldiers? I found only two explanations. Either the Russians clung to the belief that their passivity would save their lives. Or they had already been brutalized and beaten to such an extent that there was not a single spark of life left in them and they preferred death. A doctor once explained to me, that in medicine, you can take the most virulent germ and boil it to such a degree that it will lose all its harmful power. It can then be injected into the body of a healthy man and it

will no longer be capable of harming him in any way. It's the same with human beings. By systematically persecuting and torturing people, we can make them lose all their strength and vitality and their ability to resist. They become like this once virulent germ that now lost the ability to cause a reaction. These methods the Hitler regime applied to the Jews, followed a well-planned and systematic protocol to aid their ultimate goal, the extermination of all Jews. To justify their goal, they published in the German propaganda newspaper, *Das Reich*, the articles of the German propaganda minister, Goebbels, as well as those of the head of the Reich press, Dietrich, who stated "To establish a new order in Europe, we must crush four enemies, International Jewry, Communism, British Imperialism and, finally, American Capitalism. The first being International Jewry. This is the most dangerous because the Jews are the gray eminence (brains) behind the other three. Who are the leaders of communism? Doesn't Stalin have a Jewish wife? And isn't the Jew, Kaganovich, Stalin's right-hand man? What about the leaders of British imperialism? Nothing but Jews! Behind American capitalism, President Roosevelt is their leader, standing in front of Jews operating behind the scenes. We must first eliminate our first enemy". Over and over again, their newspapers propagandized that the war, was in truth, only waged against the Jews, and each opponent was given a Jewish connection. The propaganda was so powerful that it brainwashed the Polish population, who rejoiced at Hitler's extermination of the Jews. Polish people believed that on this front, the war would bring Poland a more dazzling victory than they could ever imagine, by ridding them of the Polish Jews. Unfortunately, we have to bow our heads and recognize that the Poles were right on this point, that Germany actually won the war (against the Jews). We Jews were unprepared for battle against such savage bandits. We had only our traditional defense, resignation.

January 10, 1943, a new entry for Palestine. The joy was no less this time either. Everyone clung to the hope that Jews in other countries kept trying to save the few remaining Jews from Poland. Perhaps they would succeed. Perhaps an exchange could be concluded with the Germans regarding Palestine. Geier even added, that if a Jew were to be arrested for some trifle issue, he would only have to say that he was registered for Palestine and that would facilitate his release. We have never known whether these announcements regarding Palestine were serious or were intended only to confound the spirit of the few Jews still here. Only one thing became clear. They have served no purpose as no one was able to leave. My cousin Moyshe Pozitski returned from Bialogon. He lived with a Pole named

Zavatski. He told us “this Pole had set up in his cellar, a clandestine tannery, in which I was able to work. I stayed there day and night. I had to give Zavatski everything I had. I even went home to pick up various things to give to him”. Pozitsky had no good news to share regarding my brother-in-law, Dovid Bekierman. According to Zavatski, Dovid had withdrawn all the gold and cash his parents had left behind and had joined his two Polish friends, Moniek Dadge and Markewicz. They took everything from him, killed him and threw him into the river. My brother-in-law Yiedl Bekierman nodded, "Yes, yes, it must be true, and I am sure, because these two friends came to see me a few days ago at the factory. They asked me if I knew where Dovid was. I told them that I had not seen him since his escape from Treblinka. They told me they knew he had been here, but they didn't know where to now find him. I understand better now that this was their way to dispel suspicion”. My cousin, Pozitski, stayed a few days, then returned to Zavatski's in Bialogon. We asked him to inquire if he would like to accommodate three more men. “He will be well paid. If he's okay with that, come back and tell us. My brother Yudl, my brother-in-law Yiedl and I will follow you, because we don't want to stay in this labor camp where our death will come sooner or later”.

Various anecdotes

- Antoine Klats, Gestapo chief for the Kielce district, ran the Jewish lime factories. He lived in the Zagayski factory. From the start he had struggled to find an accountant. He changed them almost every week. He took a German or a Pole, however he threw them out. Finally, he hired a Jew, Ravitsky, with whom he was very happy. One day Ravitsky was arrested and taken to Oswiecim (Auschwitz). So Klats went to Oswiecim and brought him back. All the Jews told each other this story “a man had been brought back from death!” But during the time of the deportations, Ravitsky ultimately was shipped to Treblinka. Klats continued to look for and change his accountants on a weekly basis. Eventually he found a Pole from Krakow, who satisfied him and who stayed on long enough. But one day, we learned that the Gestapo had arrested him, as well as his wife and child, and shot all of them. It was uncovered that they were a Jewish family from Lemberg with Christian identity papers.
- One day, a man named Goshinski fled from the Kielce labor camp. It was said that a very elegant Polish woman had waited for him outside the labor camp and they left together by train. Five weeks later, Goshinski returned to the labor camp in Kielce. This time illegally, since those who were not

working had to be declared to Geier. Goshinski came to see us from time to time. He had a brother-in-law in Lemberg, director of a government factory, who still employed several Jews, under cover of Aryan papers of course. He told us "My brother-in-law heard that I was here in the labor camp, and he dispatched this Pole who asked me to provide a photograph and he promised to come back next week with a pass for me, so that I will be able to accompany him. This is indeed how it all happened. "He brought the pass, and I followed him to Lemberg. My brother-in-law was able to point out a Pole with whom I could live with and who would take me on as an employee in his factory. My brother-in-law was arrested on his way home from the factory one day, and he never came back. The other Jewish workers, seeing that he was missing, were afraid to return to the factory and they fled. I found myself all alone, with no money. Of course, I have Christian papers, but that does not give me any guarantee because Polish secret agents approach all suspects in the street, drag them under a porch and lower their pants. This is how they see who is a Jew. Consequently, I decided to come back here to the camp. Upon arriving at Kielce station, I witnessed the arrest of a woman and her two children. They checked and found that they were Jewish. They were then dragged into a corner and shot to death".

The Germans did not distinguish Jews from Poles well, but the Poles recognized them perfectly. When those who had false papers were arrested, there was one among them, named Gotman, who managed to escape. He had a lot of money. So, when he went to a Pole that he knew, to was able to ask to hide him in his home in exchange for good remuneration. The Pole liked the idea, and Gotman was able to hide in his home for several days. He was able to make a hiding place inside, in case someone from outside entered. One day, a Polish policeman broke into this Pole's home and allegedly started searching the house. He found out about Gotman hiding and he pretended to want to take him in. The Pole intervened, suggesting that Gotman gives up all his money, in exchange for his freedom. Gotman, who wanted to save himself, gave up all he had. The policeman left, leaving him with the Pole, who then asked him to leave the area immediately, because the Polish police were now aware of him and he was afraid to keep him in his home. Gotman had no choice and had to leave penniless even though he understood that the Pole had made up the whole story with the Polish policeman and that they had certainly split his money. He wandered for a few days without money, unable to find any refuge. He was eventually found on a porch, freezing to death.

- Several Jews arrived in the labor camp illegally after escaping deportations from surrounding villages. A woman told me that as long as she had a little money, she was able to live with a Polish man in the village. When the Polish man noticed that her savings were running out, he took her to the woods, not far from his home, pulled out a knife and prepared to murder her. The woman said to him "This is it? You want to kill me? What use will I have of my remaining money? Instead, take it." She then slid her hand into the inner pitcher and took out a vial of vitriol and threw it in his eyes. While he began screaming, she had time to escape and was able to get here, to the labor camp. She said that whatever will happen to her will happen regardless and she will no longer place her trust in a Pole.

- Another woman, who arrived with two children, said that she lived in a village and had complete Christian papers. She worked there as a teacher. She had lived there for a while, but one evening a Polish neighbor came to tell her that it was rumored in the village that she was Jewish. She laughed this off and turned this warning into a joke. Nevertheless, that very evening she decided she couldn't risk staying any longer. She left without delay and joined the labor camp.

- A young girl, from Stashev, who had also escaped the deportations, arrived in the camp. She arrived with one of her uncles, Velvl Viner. One day, when everyone was at work and she was home alone, she saw a Gestapo man walk through the building she was in. The policeman did not come for her at all. But seeing her run away and hide, he followed her and questioned her. Based on her name and where she came from, she was arrested. When the workers returned from work, her uncle, Velvl Viner, was also arrested. Both were executed.

- One day, Geier walked past the "Ludwików Foundry" and saw three Jewish workers enter the small Polish store near the factory, in order to drink some water. Immediately he took them out into the yard and shot them.

- A man named Levkovitsh had some money hidden away with his parents in the first ghetto. One day, he learned that the janitor who worked in this building before the creation of the ghetto had resumed his position. As they had known each other for a long time, Levkovitsh offered him a nice sum of money to allow him to go inside and retrieve his money. The janitor accepted. When Levkovitsh managed to enter the apartment and retrieve his money, the janitor told him he wanted it all, otherwise he would notify the police. Levkovitsh refused to give him more than agreed upon. This resulted

in a fight in which the police arrived. As a result, the money was confiscated, and Levkovitsh was shot. Among our group of friends, we wondered how a Jew could trust a Pole. Even if you have enough money, the Pole may get bored of you or get scared. Then all he has to do is go to your bedside at night, kill you in your sleep, take all your money and then there would be no reason to worry. Who knows how many cases like this had happened without our knowledge? Only those who committed these deeds will ever know. It is true that we know nothing about those Jews who were able to hide with morally upright Poles and who will probably survive the war. We won't know that for sure until after.

Back from the dead

It was January 27, 1943. I didn't go to work because I had a doctor's waiver for a few days. I had cut my fingertip at the factory. At 8 a.m., I suddenly saw my cousin, Moyshe Pozitski and Dovid Bekierman, my brother-in-law, enter the apartment. Seeing Dovid, I was shocked, as if I had seen a ghost, a person we already mourned. I recalled the image in my mind of the two Poles murdering him and throwing him into the river. Now, there he was before me! With tears in our eyes, we hugged each other. Our joy at seeing each other was overflowing. It was as if he had come back from another world. We prepared something to eat and then we waited for nightfall for the workers to return. I waited by the front door for my brother-in-law, Yiedl, and my brother, Yudl, to tell them that Dovid was here. I was worried that when they suddenly saw them, they would be shocked like me. At night, all the friends who had heard the news came to share our joy at the good news.

When my brother-in-law, Dovid, spoke, and this is what he said:

“My dear friends, I have returned from Treblinka, but I am not going to tell you about Treblinka and what is going on there. I am sure that my cousin, Moyshe Pozitski, has already told you how, and by what barbarous methods, they murdered our fathers, our mothers, our sisters, our brothers, our wives and our children. I don't have the strength to describe it all. I will limit myself to telling you everything that has happened between my escape from Treblinka and the present moment. I am sure it will also interest you. We were a group of workers assigned to going from Treblinka to Malkinia every day. This is where we worked. We were provided with no food nor a place to sleep. Every day a few of us were shot. I worked along with 12 men, including 3 of my friends from Bialogon. One day, on our way to work, I said to them: “There are 12 of us. I suggest that we all try to escape. There is

only one Ukrainian to guard us. If we were to all run away at the same time, he will shoot at us, but how many will he manage to kill? Two or three? The others will be able to escape and save themselves. It is unfortunate for those who will be killed!" But I failed to carry out my plan because some in our group did not want to run away. They preferred to be killed and rest in the places where their entire families were killed. This was the case, for example, with our brother-in-law, Pintshe. He wanted to remain there and meditate, as long as he remained alive, the barracks where his wife, his child and all our family had perished. These were his own words. Alas, we didn't have to wait long. With one of my friends, Bogós, we decided to escape. At one point I noticed that the Ukrainian seemed lost in thoughts. I signaled to Bogós and we started to run. After a while, I heard gunshots fired and saw my third friend from Bialogon, Khayml, running not far behind us. The shots from the Ukrainian had given the alert, and 4 other Ukrainians on horseback, armed with machine guns, rushed after us, firing continuously. We were running between the trees to the left of the tracks. To the right, the Bug flowed. The Ukrainians were chasing us on the rails, machine-gunning into the woods. It appeared that they were about to catch up with us. The trees were becoming scarcer as we went. It was not a good idea to keep running like this, because once we got out of the thicket we wouldn't be able to escape the bullets. I decided to stop suddenly, in the middle of my flight, to hide motionless under a tree. The Ukrainians walked past me, continuing to shoot in the direction of the other two. It was obvious that they did not see me as I stopped to hide behind a tree. When they passed me, I ran out from among the trees to cross the rails and head towards the Bug River. A Polish man was heading away from the river bank in a boat full of hay. I jumped into the water and swam straight for the boat. The Polish man hoisted me aboard, covered me with hay, took me across the Bug River. He even went a little further past the area, on purpose to drop me off, out of sight of the Ukrainians. Khayml was shot while running between the rails. Bogós was able to dive into the Bug River, but they continued to shoot at him. I don't know if they killed him or not. Bogós was a good swimmer. The Polish man dropped me off on the other side of the Bug River and pointed out the direction of Warsaw. I thanked him. I walked more than 30 kilometers before arriving in a village, not far from the Sadovnia station. I walked into a Polish house and asked if they could put me up for the night. I could no longer walk with my feet injured by the ill-fitting boots I had on. The Polish man told me to get permission from the mayor. This certainly was not a good idea. I had no money and was very hungry, so I walked up to another Polish house and offered to sell my boots. The Polish man only had 30

zlotys. I told him that I would be fine with that if he let me spend the night at his house, until the following morning train, when I would take the train to Warsaw. We came to an agreement. Obviously, he didn't know I was Jewish. He gave me the 30 zlotys and some food. The following morning, I took off my boots and he gave me a pair of old torn slippers. At the station, I was able to buy a ticket to Warsaw and got on the train. The train passed through a number of villages. In one of them, a Polish man got into my train car and stared at me. After a few moments, he approached me and whispered in my ear that he knew that I had fled from the village where the Jews were to be deported today and that I was going to Warsaw to try to join the Jews in the ghetto. He demanded money to buy a bottle of brandy or else he would call the police and report me. The situation was precarious, as I did not have any money. After giving it some thought, I decided to tell him the entire truth. I said to him "You claim that I am from this village? You're wrong. I ran away from Treblinka. I am from Bialogon, 5 kilometers after Kielce. I don't have any money with me, but we have left a great fortune behind. A lot of gold. If you agree to take this trip with me, you wouldn't miss any money. I could recover the gold and other goods and share them with you". He liked my proposal very much. He said to me, "It's better that we don't go to Warsaw Central Station because it is very tightly controlled so no Jews could enter. Besides, look how you look. They would stop you for sure. Instead, let's get off one station before Warsaw, at Rembertów. From there, we will reach Warsaw on foot, by roundabout paths, to prevent you from getting caught". We put his plan into action. He took me to his home. I was there Saturday, all day, and Sunday until the evening. He fed me well and gave me something to dress more decently. Sunday evening, we went to Zachodnia station. He bought two tickets, at his expense, and we got on the train. He sat down next to me, in order to hide me a bit. We haven't exchanged any words all the way. The train finally arrived in Kielce. We made another stop, as far as Slowik, because I had repeated to him what he had told me before we arrived in Warsaw, that Kielce is a big city, and in the station, the Gestapo carefully checked all papers. That's why it made more sense to travel to a station further on, such as Slowik. Besides, Slowik was much closer to Bialogon than Kielce. I told myself that in Slowik I was very familiar with everything, knowing every shrub in the area. I would have no trouble getting away. As planned, we got off the train at a small dark station, without lighting. We took the path leading to Bialogon. I took him, on purpose, down the road where I suspected we would meet the night patrol, so I would have my ruse to get away. Just as expected, near the fire station, we heard the patrol shout "Stop! Who's there?" I told him, "Go ahead and

approach them and I will hide behind a house. Otherwise, they would recognize me for sure. Everyone knows me here. They would definitely stop me". He did as I told him as I went to hide behind a wall. From there, I fled and went to sleep in the forest, where I spent the night. At dawn, being careful not to be seen by anyone, I went to Moyshe Krishtol's garden, which adjoined our house. I hid there and spent the day there. When it got dark, I found one of my hiding places where I was able to take \$50. I then went to see a young Polish girl (Halinia), a close acquaintance of mine, with whom I had spent a good amount of time before the deportations. There, I was finally able to wash properly, change clothes, and eat my fill. She said to me "All of Bialogon already knows that you are coming. Your Polish companion was arrested by the firemen who took him to the Polish police. He told them everything. The Polish police figured out that it was you that this was all about. The police commander ordered the Polish man to go home. Since the commander was a good friend of yours, he didn't want to hurt you, let alone me. He immediately came to see me. He said to me, "Everyone knows Dovid has returned home and we suspect that he will come and take refuge with you. I advise you to not let him stay here because you could both pay with your lives". I figured out for myself that I couldn't stay with Halinia, and so I went to my closest friend, Aupel. (I got along well with his entire family). I told him I needed to get a large amount of silver and gold. But since our house was constantly watched by the firemen (it was at our place that we hid all our valuables), I asked him to come up with an idea to help me retrieve the money. I told him he would be paid well and that we would share everything. Aupel came to our place straight away, and he got himself oriented to the area. The next night we went there. He served as the lookout as I went in and removed all the valuables. My pockets were full of money and gold as well as foreign currency. When we returned I paid Aupel well. I also paid him to search for a place where I could take refuge. I searched for two days.

No one wanted to hide me, but everyone was ready to steal my money. So, I went back to Aupel. But when I knocked on his door, he wouldn't let me in. He claimed that German policemen have come to Bialogon to take people to work in Germany. He told me to follow him and that he would hide me until the morning. He led me to a nearby empty house under construction. He led me into the house and closed the door. He was to pick me up the next day at dawn. I laid down on the floor and gave thought as to where I should go. I didn't think I should go to Kielce at all because Aupel told me there was not even a single Jew left there. While I was there thinking about my plans,

someone knocked on the door. I did not answer. Whoever was there, then tried to break down the door. I called out "Who is this?" Was it Aupel? But it wasn't his voice. When the door was forced open, two policemen entered. As it was very dark inside, they pointed a flashlight straight into my eyes. I recognized them. One of them was Algostinok, a policeman who has always been known for his anti-Semitism. The other was the commander of Bialogon. Algostinok tried to handcuff me, but I resisted his efforts. He then violently threw himself on me trying to subdue me. I fought with him while being thrown to the ground. Standing at a safe distance, the police captain said nothing. The policeman finally managed to handcuff me. He had to drag me away because I refused to walk. They took me to the station. On the way, the commander remained at a distance, so I couldn't speak to him. I imagined that Aupel, my best friend, had betrayed me and handed me over to the police. At the police station, they searched me and took everything I had away from me. All the money, gold and dollars. They knew exactly where to look for me and knew exactly how much I had because my friend Aupel had precisely informed them. After they took everything from me, they locked me up and started to deliberate as to what should be done with me. If the commander hadn't been there, I think Algostinok would have immediately shot me in the courtyard. In this way, he could have taken all the money without anyone knowing. But the commander felt that he couldn't do this to me because he was a good friend of our entire family. Algostinok moved to open the door and lead me out into the hallway. He said that he was going to take me to the German police in Kielce. I saw that the hallway door was wide open and faced the street. So, I made a dash for it and fled. He shouted an alarm for me to halt, but I continued to run into the woods to hide. What exactly were his plans to do with me? I don't believe he really wanted to take me to the German police in Kielce. Did he allow me to run away? Impossible to say. The only thing I know is that I was able to flee. I still had two Polish friends in Bialogon (Moniek Dare and Jacek Markewicz). I went to their homes to tell them how Aupel had betrayed me. In response, they went to see Aupel and asked him why he did this and demanded that he return the gold watch and the dollars I had given Aupel to sell. Aupel and the police became greatly concerned over this and allowed the rumor to spread that Moniek Dare and Jacek Markewicz took my money, killed me and threw me into the water. This rumor spread so fast that Moniek Dare and Jacek Markewicz actually considered handing me over to the German police themselves, to prove that they had not killed me. As a result, Aupel and the police took my money and released me. I could no longer stay in Bialogon. (p. 175) I walked to a village and ran into Jozek

Walszinski, one of our former tannery workers. He greeted me warmly and said that I could stay at his place. However, his concern was that he didn't even have enough to provide food for himself or feed his children. Nevertheless, he said we will share what we have. He didn't even have a potato to eat. It was very difficult for me to stay at his home. He lived with his wife and three children in a very small house with an adjoining stable. However, I could not stay in his house because his only neighbor was coming by his house all the time. That meant that I had to stay in the stable. I was very cold there and had nothing to eat. One day the neighbor spotted me and the whole village was told that Jozek Walszinski was sheltering a Jew. A few days later, Jozek's cousin, a Polish Policeman, came to tell him that the village was informed that there was a Jew in his house. His cousin, as a warning, also recounted that two Jews fleeing the deportations, arrived in the village of Prymnik, at the home of a Polish man, a former neighbor that they knew. The Polish man locked the two Jews in his home and went to recruit other Poles. Returning, they tied up the Jews and handed them over to the German police who immediately executed them. Jozek started to become frightened. He told me to leave for a few days and to come back when things calmed down a bit. That same very evening, I went to Bialogon. It was ten o'clock, and I turned into the street wondering where I could go. As I passed the Polish Zavatski's house, I gave thought to entering his home. Looking in the window, I saw that there was no one else around. I knocked on the door and entered. Zavatski made me quite welcome and invited me to sit down. He had heard that I was in the area, but also that I had been killed. Suddenly he shouted in a loud voice towards the other room, "Shviderski!" Shviderski! ". I became very afraid. I thought I had better find out immediately if he has a policeman in his house and plans to give me up. Instead, I was shocked to see here was Moyshe Pozitski coming out of the cellar! I could not believe my eyes. When I escaped from Treblinka, he was still there and I never expected to see him ever again. We hugged and Zavatski prepared something for us to eat. Moyshe told me that Moyshe-Meyer, his brother, Yudl and my brother, Yiedl were in the Kielce labor camp. We decided to go there in the morning.

When my brother-in-law, Dovid finished telling his story, the night was already late, and our friends returned home. Someone said, "Moyshe Pozitsky keeps traveling back and forth between Bialogon and here. If he has a place with a Pole who is willing to hide him, he should remain there because the path is dangerous. It is true that he looks like a Christian, but he

cannot take risks all the time". When they all left, Moyshe said that he told Zavatski about us. Zavatski was ready to hide us, however he wanted 50,000 zlotys in order to buy a house. If we agreed, we would have to send him the money in order to expand the cellar to fit five men and we could escape there. In the morning we had a meeting with my friend, Goldman. He said we had to try to get away at all costs. Everything about this plan pleased him, except the fact that the Polish man had a tannery in his cellar. Someone might come to get some leather and find the Jews there. But no one had any better idea. Dovid and Moyshe spent the next few days with us. In the meantime, we had to decide whether we wanted to do business with Zavatski. They, Dovid and Moyshe, gave him the money he asked for, and they returned to Bialogon. Zavatski came to see us every day and he took our things out of the labor camp to take them to his home. Moyshe and Dovid were working to prepare the cellar. When it would be ready, they would come and get us.

Henrykow

I worked with my brother, Yudl, in Henrykow, a factory which only made wooden objects, primarily sleighs, shipped to the Russian front. There were a lot of very complicated machines for cutting boards and making wooden wheels. My brother, Yudl, was a great machine specialist. He could take almost any one apart, fix it and put it back together. He was working on a very specialized machine, one that cannot be left to be repaired by anyone. Whenever there was a technical fault, the Polish technical director of the factory would immediately call on my brother to fix it. When the German manager, accompanied by the Polish technical manager, came to the factory to monitor the work in progress, they never failed to watch my brother work. I was a saddler. I repaired machine belts when they tore. It was a very good job, but the German manager didn't like me. He just couldn't stand me. When his gaze fell on me, I could already feel his rubber baton behind my back.

Workers for Starachowice

On March 5, 1943, Geier ordered Spiegel to select 200 men to send them to Starachowice. Spiegel immediately met with all the Jewish policemen in order to prepare a list. Of course, everyone gave the names of those who they disliked or those they wanted to get rid of in the labor camp. It all happened in secret. The next morning when the groups left for work, in the presence of a few Germans and Ukrainians, the list was read and those

selected were put aside. Spiegel had great sympathy for Simkhe-Bunem Goldman and sometimes sought his advice, for he was an intelligent man who had been the leader of the Jewish community in Kielce before the war. Simkhe-Bunem Goldman didn't try to interact too much with Spiegel, for it made him feel unclean and Goldman had nothing in common with Spiegel. But doesn't everyone want to save their own lives? Since Spiegel had such great trust in Goldman, he told him almost everything, including the preparation of the list. He was the one who warned me. All night long we have been thinking. There was no solution. If Geier and Spiegel wanted to send 200 men to Starachowice, that factory of the war industry which depends on Hermann Goering, they would. Impossible to prevent it. We didn't know if we were on the list or not. My brother Yudl told me, "I have an idea. If I'm on the list, I'll drop out and you will go to work. You will tell the Polish technical director that I was selected to be sent to Starachowice. If you're on the list, I'll still be the one to drop out. Who knows our first names here? Who knows which of the two of us is Moyshe-Meyer? On the list, there will be "Baum". I don't think we will both be on the list. I don't believe the technical director of the factory, or even the German manager, will agree to my leaving. But what if they allow it to happen? Then it is too bad. I still prefer that they send me rather than you". That was indeed what happened. At dawn, when all the workers lined up to go to work, we already felt that that something unusual was happening. Geier was present along with some German policemen and Ukrainians who surrounded the camp. Spiegel came up with a list, and he announced that anyone whose name he reads should step aside. He started to read. Arrived at the letter B, he shouted "Baum, Moyshe". My brother quickly stepped out of the line, taking my place. I went to work with my group. When I got to the factory, I reported to the Polish technical director that my brother had been chosen to be deported. He didn't hesitate too long before running into the office. A moment later, he told me that the German director had called the labor camp in order that he be held back. He himself would immediately go to pick up Baum from the labor camp. This was how he brought my brother and two other workers back. On his return, my brother told me that Geier had been called on the phone and as he was about to leave, he saw Geier whispering something in Spiegel's ear. Spiegel then shouted "Baum! Come here and stand on this side", as handed him to the German commander. Those waiting to be deported begged Spiegel to let them go home to get their belongings or any money they had. Indeed, when leaving for work, we left all that at home. But their words and prayers were in vain. On the list, they had put all the Jews who entered the camp illegally first, including Moyshe and Dovid, whom

they had noticed, had arrived from Bialogon just the day before. The police apprehended them the night before we left for work and told them not to worry. They were to be sent to the factory in Starachowice where they would become legal. At noon, several trucks driven by German police arrived. They took everyone to Starachowice. We were certain that Dovid and Moyshe would find a way to escape from there. Four days later, on the way home from work, we found Dovid lying in bed, bleeding with broken teeth. He didn't know where Moyshe was. Then he told us about his escape from Starachowice. He related "We were immediately put in a camp called Myalak 2, guarded by Ukrainians. Viltshik, the commander of the Jewish police came and ordered that we give up everything we have, all the gold and all the silver, because the Ukrainians will take it from you anyway. The Ukrainians were already running among us, telling us that if we gave them their money, they wouldn't beat us. Some handed over something in hope of being treated well. A Jew approached us right after. It seems he was the president of the Jewish community (I don't know his name). He told us that we should not give anything. For if you give your money, what will you live on? As for what Viltshik said about the Ukrainians, I will sort it out with the Ukrainian commander. Collect together 2,000 zlotys. You will give them to him and you will not be searched again. And that's how it turned out. We collected 2,000 zlotys which we gave to the Ukrainian commander, and we were no longer searched. We were taken into a shack with a freshly washed floor. We were told that, a few days earlier, the SturmFührer Mayer, responsible for all the Jewish camps, had 56 Jews, sick with typhus, shot there. They were all executed. On the third day, we were taken to the factory office for work registration. Viltshik approached several foremen of the factory, stating "Those who give me 50 zlotys will have an easier job. Of course, there were some willing to give. Then came the German factory manager who reviewed us and declared us fit for work. Viltshik told the director that there were sick people among us, who needed to be sent back to Kielce. The manager agreed to choose which ones to send. Viltshik then approached us, telling us that whoever gives him 2,000 zlotys can go back to Kielce. Thus 20 men prepared to return home. At the time of registration, we were assigned to Venglow. A Jewish commander, Tentser, a very honest man, led us there. Along the way, Moyshe and I decided to flee that very same day at the slightest opportunity. At night, when we were lined up in front of the kitchen to receive our meager food, we took advantage and we ran away. That night was very dark and we ran 7 kilometers. Near a village, we lay down in the bushes bordering a field. Several Poles passed by. When they got to where we were hiding, Moyshe moved away from me slightly.

They heard the noise and they lit a match. Moyshe decided to make a run for it. Meanwhile, they haven't noticed me at all. They chased Moyshe and caught him. I approached them in great silence, remaining hidden, to see what would happen to him. I heard two Poles declare him to be a Jew. They grabbed him and told him that they were taking him to the Mayor of the village. Moyshe begged them and pleaded that he was not a Jew. He even tried to offer them money. But all in vain. In order to take him away, they hit him and threw him on the ground. I saw them take the belt off his pants and tried to tie him up with it. I looked for a rock or a stick, but couldn't find anything. I charged into the Pole who was holding the belt. We hit the ground together, continuously rolling over each other as we kept fighting. Finally, I clamped down hard on two fingers of his hand in my mouth and bit his fingers off. Some of my teeth broke in the process while he passed out. I raised myself up and started kicking him in the face. He then regained conscience, freed himself, and fled while crying for help. Hearing his cries, Poles in nearby homes, barricaded themselves even better in their homes. They were afraid to go out. The second Pole was still holding onto Moyshe and was hitting him. I pulled him off and we quickly fled. But the Pole did not give up as he gave chase after us, armed with a stick. Moyshe couldn't run fast, as his beltless pants were coming down. I let Moyshe pass me by, to prevent the Pole from catching up with him. The Pole came up on me and struck me on the head with his stick. As I fell down, I shouted to Moyshe, to come here. But Moyshe didn't turn around and pay attention to my cry for help. His only immediate concern was of running away. Seeing me on the ground, the Pole tried to hit me again. I swiftly kicked him in the leg. Then I gathered all my strength, jumped up and snatched the stick out of his hands. I struck him hard with the stick and he quickly ran away also. I then called out to Moyshe several times, but I couldn't see or hear him. I continued to run for several miles without finding him. I rested a while in a grove. At dawn, I walked to Kielce. I think Moyshe must be in Bialogon by now. I don't believe he wanted to come here because he doesn't know what happened to me. He really betrayed me. I didn't want to leave him alone when he was captured. Yet as soon as he got a chance to run away, he ran".

We attentively listened to Dovid's story without commenting. Firstly, because we didn't want to add to the anger expressed in Dovid's account. Secondly, because we leave it to those who will survive to judge the veracity of such stories. Learning of Dovid's return and all that had happened to them, the two policemen who had arrested and deported them came to see him. One of them said "You are one of those men who do not let themselves

be crushed by the weight of Jewish misfortune, you deserve that we buy you a drink. Dovid responded to them that he had no interest in drinking with them, not now or ever. What he wanted, was for them to pay serious attention to what he wanted to say to them before leaving. With this warning, Dovid began to speak. "In Treblinka, I worked with a Jew from Warsaw who was a baker by trade. He owned a large house in the Warsaw ghetto. When he heard that the Jews were being caught and deported, he built a hiding place in his house. It was a hard hiding place to find and was in a cellar with a very difficult access. The baker had stored food reserves in this hiding place for an entire year. He stayed there with his wife and children for several weeks. One day he told his wife that he was going to take a look out the door to see what was going on outside. While at the door of his house, a Jewish policeman spotted him. He was detained and was forcibly taken away. He was put on a convoy heading to Treblinka. His wife and children did not know where he had gone and he no longer knew what had become of his wife and children. The man was a thousand times angrier with the Jewish policeman than with the German guards in Treblinka. Shortly after being taken to Treblinka, the baker recognized the same very policeman in Treblinka. He wanted to tell him that his revenge was now fulfilled, as he had lived long enough to see him in Treblinka also. But he was unable to, because the police officer was shot that very day in Treblinka. I want to tell you something else. There was in Lublin, a Jewish agent for the Gestapo, Shame Groyer, whom the Jews in Lublin feared even more than the Gestapo chief. He carried out the deportation of Lublin, and after that he was sent to Warsaw, where he also did all of Hitler's dirty work. He surely believed that his survival was assured. But the German rifle did not spare him. The same God who turned his back on all the Jews will certainly not let you get away. You will not escape your fate, even if you faithfully serve Hitlerism today". Ashamed, the two policemen left. The next day, Zavatski came to inquire about what had become of Dovid. Moyshe was already back at home. My brother-in-law, Dovid, stayed in the labor camp a few more days because he was badly injured, and he needed to rest.

On March 20, 1943, he went with his brother Yiedl to Zavatski's in Bialogon. My brother, Yudl, and I couldn't leave yet. We had our work cut out for us. We had little money and in order for 5 men to survive in a village with a Polish man, we needed much more money. Not to mention that Zavatski was greedy. We had to come up with an idea to gain access to my room in the house in the first ghetto and retrieve the gold that we had hidden there.

Jewish doctors are shot

March 21, 1943 was a Saturday. Coming home from work, we felt that something different was about to happen. In the camp there were two trucks with German policemen. Geier was seen with his gun in his hand. We soon learned that they had come to pick up the doctors and dentists, along their families. The Jewish policemen, led by Spiegel, were given an hour to bring them all together. They were scattered all over the place. The doctors were hurriedly packing their bags, each carrying a small luggage. It was not yet known where they were going to be sent. It was not yet the time when the trucks would leave the labor camp with the 36 people, comprising the doctors, dentists, their wives and children. We didn't know where they were being taken, but we saw the trucks heading towards the Jewish cemetery. A few hours later, we learned that they had indeed been taken there and were all executed. Seeing where they were being taken, the doctors screamed and tried to run in different directions. In response, the Germans didn't shoot them all right away. They responded by torturing them first and throwing them, half alive, into the pit before burying them. That same day, a similar fate was inflicted on all Jewish physicians throughout the General Government. A few days later, Poles told us that the Jews in the Warsaw ghetto refused to let their doctors go without responding in some manner. They stopped going to work, barricaded themselves in their ghetto and didn't let any Germans in. When a German entered the ghetto, they would attempt to shoot him. Of course, such resistance had to have been planned in advance because you cannot shoot bullets without weapons in hand. This went on for several weeks before this resistance came to an end. It was rumored that the Germans had killed all the Jews and that the ghetto no longer existed. The fate of the doctors seemed to indicate that they would soon wipe out all the other Jews in the labor camp as well. The next day, Sunday, the Jews were not working, and they found themselves plagued by the same question over and over again, "What are we going to do"? At five o'clock in the evening, when Geier came to take all the doctors and their families at the labor camp, everyone on the street quickly went into hiding in their homes. The Jewish workers who were ready to leave for the night shift also fled. The leader of their group, Helfan, was shouting to them, "Why are you running away? What are you afraid of? They will do nothing to those who work. They won't do anything to the Jewish doctors either. Surely, they are taking them to a hospital to work there. I would like my lot to be as enviable as that of these doctors". As usual, the leaders in the service of the Germans, expressed a fatalistic optimism. All the Jews with a brain, wanted

to run away from the labor camp. Even to go hide in the woods, as long as it's out of this Hell. Some were thinking of trying to get arms. They could serve as well against the Germans as against the Poles in a desperate situation. But unfortunately, people quickly give up. No one bought any guns. Not even one gun, because we just didn't know where to buy them. We had no connection with people who could have supplied them to us. If a Jew ventured into the streets, outside the labor camp, the abyss could open beneath his feet with each step. He had to be careful, not only with the German police, but even more careful with the Polish police and their secret agents. One had to remain even cautious with Polish children sent by their parents. When they spotted a Jew, who was unable to tear himself away from their clutches, they turned him over to the German police. Even if a Jew would have managed to go out without being noticed by anyone. Where could he possibly go? No one would allow any Jew to cross the threshold into their home. Anybody would have also been afraid to exchange even a word with a Jew. Even if there was a Pole who wanted to, he would have been afraid to even offer a piece of bread. How long can a man survive under these conditions without falling into the hands of the assassins? There really was no other way. No other way for the few remaining Jews to remain there, staring death in the eye. Now we are all left to cry and lament our fate. One could compare it to a prison where thousands of inmates are waiting to all be executed. This prison was not hermetically sealed. On the contrary, it was open on all four sides and whoever wants to flee has only to run. Yet, no one is running. There is nowhere to run. A few days later, I received a brief letter from my two brothers-in-laws, Yiedl and Dovid, via Zavatski's 12-year-old daughter. They had arrived without a hitch, and urged me to sort out the money difficulties, because without money our plans were hopeless. But first, I needed to buy a revolver. Thanks to Taub, I managed to get a Pole to bring one into the labor camp. It was a revolver with 5 cartridges. Impossible to try out, because everything had to be done with the greatest secrecy. Still, I paid a fair price for it. In the labor camp, I had to be very careful that no one found out that I had a gun, especially the Jewish police. But once outside the labor camp, the gun would no longer be a problem. Being a Jew, already was the greatest crime, worth a death sentence. Whether the Jew was armed or not, didn't make a difference.

Before the war, I lived in Kielce, in our own building, at number 20 Piotrkow, formerly Varsovie Street. Our building had another exit that opened onto the parallel street, at 14 Shelnits Street. The concierge was called Stanislav. When the first ghetto was created, the large one, our

building was included in it. But you could only enter and exit the building at 14 Shelnits. At that time Stanislav had to leave the building, since a Pole could not live in the ghetto. He had taken an apartment right across the street from Piotrkow, outside the ghetto. He returned right after the deportations, when the ghetto was empty. Naturally, he did not return to the apartment he once lived in, but chose the nicest apartment in the building. Zavatski, with whom Yiedl and Dovid already lived, knew one thing for certain, the money he wanted was with me. Almost every day he would ask when my brother Yudl and I would be coming to his place. I wrote to janitor Stanislav, asking him to come and see me at the labor camp to talk about important things. It was Zavatski who delivered the letter and that same evening Stanislav arrived. It was not so surprising how fast he arrived, when you consider that Zavatski told him that I had a lot of gold hidden and was trying to retrieve it. I told Stanislav that it's been over four weeks since I pointed out to him the hiding place under the floor of my house where I had stored rolls of soft leather. I told him that he had to sell them and bring me some zlotys so that I could live on. But until today, no news! He told me that he did take the rolls of leather, but he gave them to another Pole to sell. The other Pole allegedly told him that the Germans had confiscated everything. Consequently, he didn't have any money for us, but if I wanted to hide in his house, he would hide me. I replied, that's not what it is about now. We are five men, me, my brother, my two brothers-in-law and a cousin, and we want to stay together. I told him that I needed him because I hid a lot of gold in my room, and want to retrieve it. With this gold, we may be able to save our lives. He told me that my apartment was occupied by a VolkDeutsh and my room has been filled with wood and charcoal. He then asked me to tell him which side of the room I wanted to access. That way he will know to push the wood and charcoal to the other side during the day so that everything is ready when I come. I asked him to exit to the right of the entrance as a group of Jewish workers drop by on Monday at 7 p.m. for the night shift. I asked him to also wait for us at the entrance. My brother and I will be in the group. In front of the building, we will slip out of our row and enter. We'll go up to the room and bring out the gold. We will then spend the night with you, and at 6 am, when the group returns to the labor camp, we will slip back and return with them. You only need to prepare enough candles for us to see what we are doing. Stanislav agreed. Before returning home, he said he would prepare everything well.

Monday morning, my brother, Yudl and I returned to work. At the factory, my brother prepared some tools to break the cement. At 6 p.m, we reached

our home with our group and my brother ran into the house to get the gun. Then we took our places in the night shift, which had been agreed in advance with the group leader and with the policeman leading the group. Only this group worked for the firm, Shlive, and it was only this group that passed by Shelnitz Street, in front of our building. As we agreed, the concierge was waiting for us at the door. We quickly ran inside, and went straight up to my room, where we found the Stanislav had been busy working all day. He had indeed pushed all the wood and charcoal from right to left, but had also started digging. The hole was maybe a meter deep across the right side of the room. He had broken through the bricks and he had searched the uncovered area well. I immediately started working with Yudl. We removed all the wood and coal from the left side, and put it back on the right side. Then we dug in a corner until we reached the cement, under which the gold was hidden. Stanislav kept watch at the door. He understood that we had misled him when he saw us digging on the left side where the hiding place actually was. Breaking the cement was not easy. I held the candle, while my brother worked. We had to be careful not to bang too hard, lest the neighbors overhear. When the candle was almost extinguished, I asked Stanislav to bring in another candle. He went to his house and returned saying that he had run out of candles, as he had forgotten to prepare enough. He suggested us to come back another day and he would have everything ready. Yudl was very angry. He took the gun out of his pocket and threatened Stanislav, that if we don't get out of here alive, neither will he, his wife and children. We are going to tell the Gestapo ourselves that you stole some rolls of soft leather from under our floor that you intended to sell. You will have to tell them who you sold them to. That was all Yudl could try now. It was the only thing that could save their lives. Stanislav got scared. He entered his home again and returned with an ax and an acetylene lamp. My brother was able to continue working for a while, but he was only able to break open a part of the cement. He was afraid to make too much noise, which could be heard outside. Stanislav responded to my brother's concerns, saying "Leave it to me". Taking his place, he gave a few powerful blows with his ax, exposing a hole. He then reached into it and removed two small bundles which he handed to my brother. I also removed everything I had buried there. We filled our pockets, and we all went back to Stanislav's. In the packages, there were a few gold chains and a few gold rings. I gave it all to Stanislav. After this find, Stanislav returned with my brother to fill the hole and put all the wood and charcoal back. This effort was finally completed by 4 a.m. At half past five in the morning, we returned with the same work group, although with 300 pieces of twenty gold dollars. It goes

without saying, that the policeman and the group leader were also very well paid. On returning to the labor camp, we returned home straight away. My brother left everything and he ran off to join his group to go to work. I stayed. I waited until everyone was gone, in order to be alone to look for a hiding place for the money. We wanted to be sure that no one would know.

Typhus

On that very day, we learned that all 20 men who had returned from Starachowice, had contracted typhus. They were all taken to the hospital where the only surviving Jewish doctor, Reyter, remained. As he was the director of the hospital, his life was spared. I began to worry that Moyshe and Dovid, who had been to Starachowice and had slept in the same barracks, may have also caught typhus. It didn't take long before we found out. It was two days later, on March 27, 1943, we received a letter from my brother-in-law Yiedl. The letter was brought to me by Zavatski's daughter. The letter revealed that Dovid was not in good health. He has high fevers. The request was to send a thermometer and two lemons immediately. It appeared that he caught some kind of illness. He must have been infected with typhus in Starachowice. I immediately ran to Doctor Reyter to seek his advice. He told me it was a very serious illness. The first thing was to prevent others from getting infected. Since he was hiding in a cellar, a doctor wouldn't be able to see him. Without medical help, it was hard to imagine how he would survive. The only consolation now, was to be a Jew who died of natural causes. The doctor gave me a vial with some Coramine for the heart. It was the only thing he had that he could give him right now. I sent the medicine with the girl, along with a letter to Yiedl, saying that I knew Dovid has typhus, because everyone who came back from Starachowice had typhus. But don't be afraid. The doctor says that the disease does not strike everyone with the same severity. In any case, be careful to keep a safe distance from him and try to keep clean. Instructions were also sent regarding the Coramine and taking his temperature twice a day. My letter also requested that news be returned to us via the girl every day and the doctor will tell us further regarding what to do. I was very anxious and scared. Every day I eagerly looked for the letter and every day the news seemed worse. I was no longer going to work. The doctor provided me with medications to send to Dovid. On April 5, 1943, Yiedl wrote to me, "Moyshe-Meyer, I can't stand it anymore. I don't have the strength anymore. Dovid is terribly ill. He has fever over 40 C all the time. This is destroying me. Zavatski's wife doesn't even want to help by bringing some hot water down to the cellar. Yet, I am paying a premium price for everything. They

take our money, but do nothing for us. It is a daily struggle to get the girl to carry letters. For each letter I have to pay for additionally. Dovid is lying near death. He doesn't know what's happening to him. He has lost his mind and the fever makes him delirious. I don't believe he will survive. I have nothing left to feed him and Zavatski's wife doesn't even give me everything that you are sending. Moyshe-Meyer, have mercy, and do something to save me and Dovid. Moyshe Pozitski sleeps in the attic. He is also afraid for him. Dovid sleeps on the ground, on a little straw. I don't even have a place to lie down because I don't want to stay near him. In short, this escape is not worth the effort. I don't see how we will manage to survive in these conditions, even if we were healthy”.

Nevertheless, I still sent a few lemons, a few apples and a little sugar, along with my letters. I wrote "Yiedl, try to hold on, the worst of the disease will be soon past. According to the doctor, the fever should peak in a day or two. The fever is not the main problem if he has held up this long. With God's help, he will survive this. You wrote to me that leaving the ghetto was not worth it. But know one thing Yiedl. Here the ground is burning under our feet. You have to remain where you are. Don't concern yourself about the money. Give the girl what she asks, as long as she delivers our letters every day. In this way, I can keep writing to you and tell you what to do”.

I felt distressed as the doctor really didn't give me much hope. It seemed that it would be a miracle for this disease to pass without causing any serious damage. The next day, I waited impatiently for the girl delivering the letter. But the entire day went by without hearing anything. I was so nervous and my heart was pounding. I expected the worst. My friend, Goldman, who really helped me through so many rough times, said that probably nothing had happened and that I would certainly receive a letter the next day. But what am I to think when I did not receive any letters for the next several days? After four days without news, no doubt Dovid is dead and they don't know how to tell me. I was scared and I wondered if something even worse had happened to them. The fifth day had already passed with no news. Imagine my shock on the evening of the fifth day, when I saw the young girl arrive and ask me if I knew where they were. It's been four days since they left the Zavatski house and they had no idea where they went. I questioned her as to why did they leave her house and how was it possible for Dovid to be able to walk when he was so seriously ill? She responded by telling me "The last time I came to bring you a letter, Polish policemen entered our home at 11 in the evening. They said that they knew there were Jews in our house and asked that they be handed over to them to be taken to the forest

and executed. In this way the Police could claim that they had run into Jews in the forest, attempted to arrest them and were forced to shoot them as they attempted to flee. They proposed that scenario to protect us, because when Jews are discovered in a Polish home, we not only kill the Jews, but also the family who is hiding them. We denied their accusations and we said there were no Jews in our home. The police then began to inspect all the rooms, but they did not notice the cellar because the entrance was well masked. After they left, my dad opened the cellar and told them all that occurred. He asked them to leave. They were all extremely distraught as they dragged sick Dovid outside. He was unable to walk and he didn't even understand what was going on. They carried him on their shoulders and this was how the three of them dragged themselves into the woods. My father was scared that the police would come back and find the cellar. We still don't know where they are, so my dad sent me here to see if they managed to come back to you. I was stunned. I lost my temper and felt like a caged animal. "No, that is not true! I don't believe this entire story. Zavatski is looking for an excuse to be rid of them. How is it possible to take such a seriously ill man and bring him into the woods? Where have they been since? This whole story seems suspicious to me". I went to see my friend, Goldman, with my brother Yudl, and we told him everything. Goldman listened to us, nodding his head, without a word. I asked him, "What do you think Goldman?" Deep in thought, he said it was too early to form an opinion and be sure of what had happened. We needed to wait. But the days passed without any news. I had a very bad feeling and I had abandoned all plans for the future. On April 15 at 6:00 am, having just come home from work with the night shift, I laid down exhausted and tried to get some sleep. My brother Yudl said to me, "Moyshe-Meyer, they must be dead. All plans are messed up. We have to think about what we are going to do. We need to hurry. Maybe we can work something out with the janitor in your building, Stanislav? Did he ever offer to hide you? " I didn't answer. I still kept in mind the words of my friend Goldman, "We must wait, we must wait". While deliberating our situation, we heard a knock on the door. To our great shock, it was Moyshe Pozitski! I was speechless. He immediately reassured us by telling us that they were all alive. Moyshe began to relate to us "But no one can imagine what we went through. Our salvation had come, for me to be able to tell all this while still free. At midnight on April 5, Zavatski opened the cellar door and told us to leave immediately because the police had come looking for Jews. We hadn't heard anything but what were we to do? Zavatski started to scream at us. We were shaking with fear and we were in a cold sweat. We wanted to get Dovid up, but he couldn't move. He lay near death, with over 40 degrees

fever. We dragged him out of the cellar. I carried him under one arm and Yiedl carried him under the other. This proved to be impossible and a terrible wind added to the difficulties. There was no way we could make any forward progress. We told Zavatski that we were going to try to make it to the nearby woods. We asked him to come and check us during the day and bring us even a little hot water for the patient. We stumbled slowly, one shaky step at a time. The wind and rain were lashing our faces and we were soaked to the bone. When we finally entered the woods, it was two in the morning. The howling of the wind in the trees filled us with such dread, that tears flowed from our eyes as if it were rain falling from the clouds. We cried out bitterly and lamented our fate. Why did we survive? Were we not better off dead, along with our loved ones? Dovid didn't know where he was. He was as drenched as we were and we were afraid he would catch a chill. We laid him down and took off our clothes to help cover him better. I lied down next to him on one side and Yudl moved to the other side to warm him with our body heat. We stayed like that until the morning. In the morning, the rain stopped, the wind calmed down and a glimmer of sunshine appeared. We left Dovid lying in the sun to warm up. However, we stayed close to keep watch over him. Most of the day has passed like this. Zavatski did not come and we had nothing to feed Dovid. Yiedl took a piece of lemon, dipped it in sugar for Dovid, as we still had some of what you sent us. All day long we have been thinking about how to return to the labor camp. We had no other idea than to return to you. Staying in the sun all day was good for Dovid. He has regained his senses a little. Yiedl asked him, "Dovid, do you know where you are?" He answered yes, asking why Zavatski had chased them away. On hearing this response from Dovid, we rejoiced beyond anything imaginable. We discussed what we were going to do. We told him that we were thinking of going back to the labor camp in Kielce. But Dovid didn't want to return to Kielce. He asked us to take him to Jozek's. The problem was, we didn't know where Jozek lived or how to get there. Dovid said he would show us the way. We decided to go to Jozek Walszinski's at night. In the evening it started to rain again and a stormy wind picked up a little later in the evening. We were in the woods, with the rain lashing at us and the wind making it impossible to open our eyes. The night was growing darker. We set off, once again supporting Dovid; me on one side and Yiedl on the other. We traveled more than 8 kilometers, thinking all the while that this may be for nothing. Will he let us in? Who knows what's going on at his home? It had been a long time since he had asked us to leave his home for a few days, because he was scared of what his cousin, the Polish policeman, reported to him about suspicion in the village

that he was hiding a Jew. We arrived at Jozek's late at night. We knocked on the door. Jozek opened and when he saw that Dovid was with us, he was overjoyed. Having not seen Dovid return after a few days as promised, he feared that he was dead.

Jozek has a wife and three children, but in his house, there was only one bed. The woman and two of the children were sleeping in the bed and the eldest daughter, aged 9, was on the floor. Jozek ordered them to leave the bed to Dovid. We told Jozek that he had typhus and he could infect them. Jozek ignored this warning and told us to put him to bed. The next day we went up to the attic. Dovid stayed in the bed. When a neighbor entered, they covered him with blankets. We told him that you were in Kielce, at the labor camp, and he immediately told me to go get you. But Yiedl decided that we should wait a few days for Dovid to feel better. We made a temporary hiding place, thinking that when you joined us, we would dig a good cellar". On hearing this story, we decided that my brother, Yudl, would go with Moyshe right away. He would no longer go to work. They packed a few important things before they left. This was no small feat, as the main entrance was still guarded by the police. But on the railway side there was almost always one or two planks of the fence torn off. You could enter and exit over there. Moyshe held onto the gun we bought. I couldn't leave yet. I still had several things to deal with. I was promised another gun in two days, which I absolutely wanted. A few days later, I got it. I had paid dearly for it and the entire labor camp knew about it. I was hoping Moyshe would come soon, because the fact that they were talking about this gun could cause problems. He picked me up on April 21, 1943. It was just the first day of Passover and my friends demanded that I wait until the next day to leave. Right after the Passover celebration they had organized. Doctor Reyter and Birgental who attended the celebration, asked me if I could send Jozek from time to time, so that they could write me what was happening in the labor camp. We said farewell to our friends that night.

The next day at 5 o'clock in the evening, I went out with my group which was on the night shift. Moyshe had to exit through the fence and we had to meet at the level crossing. I left the group, and I walked there. When I saw that the barrier was lowered because a train was coming, I ran to the other side. I was afraid to wait and I remained still. Without stopping to look around, I walked very slowly so that Moyshe could see me. Moyshe was nowhere to be seen. I walked again, still no Moyshe. I was wondering what to do. My heart was beating faster. I was afraid to draw attention to myself by looking for him. When I got to the end of the street, I turned around and

still no Moyshe. The panic was growing within me. I needed time to stop and think. As I walked slowly, I decided to continue into the woods and wait there. Maybe Moyshe would arrive? I didn't want to turn back, because the most dangerous thing for a Jew was to cross the city. I passed through a village. There was Poles on both sides of the street, with their donkeys. Seeing them in conversation with each other, I feared that they would discover that I was a Jew. I accelerated my pace and I was able to reach the woods. Once in the woods, I laid down a bit, wondering what could have happened to Moyshe. I began to wonder whether he got caught. He had a gun with him, but that might not be much help to a Jew. Revolver or not, just because he's a Jew he was marked for death. I didn't know where to go. I didn't even know exactly where Zavatski lived in Bialogon, but decided that at night, I would try to look for him. If I found him, he would surely let me spend the night with him. Maybe Moyshe figured out that I could only find shelter at his place and come and look for me there. If he doesn't arrive there by the next day, something probably happened to him. I would then be forced to return to the Kielce labor camp. But it was still broad daylight, so I stayed in the woods, waiting for night to fall. In the forest, I saw Poles walking around collecting firewood. For them, this was a casual activity of a peaceful life. They were free. I recalled our own family outings in the woods during the summer. I recalled there were also Poles, back in those days, picking up branches. But today it was war. All of us had our share of victims. But all human beings and ethnic groups have the right to live. Only the Jews were selected to such a bitter fate. We have been completely erased. We have been torn away with our roots, just because we bear the name "Jews".

I entered Bialogon at night, heading towards where I believed Zavatski's house to be, according to Moyshe's accounts. A dog barked as I walked past the last house, and a Polish person came out. I recognized Zavatski's wife. She approached asking, "Who are you?" It was very dark and she chased me away. When she opened the door to her house, I noticed that someone else was there. I thought perhaps, she feared showing me in, in front of this stranger. I laid down in the yard, hoping the dog would stop barking and waiting for the stranger to leave. When the light went out, I realized there was no intention to let me in. They were about to go to sleep. I walked over to the window and tapped on the pane. She asked me what I wanted. I pleaded with her "If you open the door for me and let me in, we can talk". She opened the door and began by telling me what had happened to her the day before. She told me that, "Yesterday morning, German policemen came

and they searched the house. They discovered the cellar and took all the leather we had put there. They put my husband in jail". She added, "You see how fortunate it was that we chased them out of our house. If they had been here, surely, they would have been discovered. I confirmed this by nodding. I told her that I lost Moyshe on the way and that I didn't know what happened to him. I asked her if I could stay here until tomorrow night. I told her that I believe he might come and get me. I also did not know of anywhere else to go. She did not want to let me stay there, but when I offered her 500 zlotys for only one day, she agreed. I wrote a letter to my friends, asking where Moyshe might be and gave her another 200 zlotys for her daughter to carry my letter to the labor camp in Kielce the next day and bring me an answer. She took the letter and the money and opened the cellar, allowing me in. While standing in the cellar, I thought, what a miserable place! To think that this was our hiding place! It was dark, damp, water was seeping from the walls and there was no room to even turn around. I found some room to lie down on a piece of damp straw. I was cold and I couldn't fall asleep because of all the rats running around. Lying in the cellar, my heart was aching. I had seen that Zavatsky's wife had a gold chain around her neck that belonged to my wife. She was also wearing my wife's nightgown now. It made me feel bitter. These items were among the first things we had stored with them for safe keeping. Memories came flooding back. I saw myself coming home after a day of work. The brightly illuminated and heated house, the radio playing music. It was such good times! My brothers, my brothers-in-law and my sisters-in-law, were always in our home. There were always a few friends in my house and we all enjoyed each other's company and having a good time. We enjoyed discussions about everything. Rukhtshe, my wife was such a gracious hostess and she always joined in all our conversations sharing her wisdom and common sense. When Rukhtshe spoke, she was listened to with respect and admiration. She exuded loyalty, devotion and was considerate of everyone she met. She always gave of herself and was a faithful mother, not only for her children, but for the entire family. Her warmth and generosity even extended to all who approached her. We lived 12 wonderful years together and we never needed to raise our voices in anger. This was not to my credit at all, but to my wife's. In perfect honesty, I felt that I was the happiest of men. This was why I felt myself to be the most miserable now. Another memory prevailed, in which I see my child, Yentl, little Yole, hugging both of us. Hugging me with one hand and her mother with the other, while kissing us. This child was so beautiful and so advanced for her age, that strangers would stop when they saw her in the street, to say a few

words to her. She was so thin you could tell she was Rukhtshe's daughter. (p.198) Now only a memory. I also remember in the midst of all this wonderful life of ours, I have a vision of my eldest daughter, Sara, called Tseshe, ten years old at the time of the evacuation. I remember her sitting at the table in another room, seriously and silently studying her lessons. I was so very proud of her. She had the common sense of an intelligent adult. Strangers admired her for her quick and analytical mind. I remember the times I walked past her and gently stroked her silky hair. She understood what that caress meant. Her teacher told us that we had no idea what a precious gift we had. Her teacher always spoke of her with admiration. With this child, a simple glance replaced words. I truly believed that I was a happy man, especially because I was raising a generation that represented the future, mine, and that of the world. Then my thoughts wandered elsewhere, to my in-laws, where I always found good humor, warmth and generosity. My thoughts led me from one warm image to another. Images of one brother to another, from one sister to another, from one acquaintance to another, from one Jewish village to another. I thought how quickly it all disappeared. Like a dream. It was really hard to convince myself that all of this once existed. This was all such a beautiful reality and now it all vanished so quickly! Like you suddenly wake up from a dream. This only happened because we were "Jews".

I dozed off a bit. But mice and rats wouldn't let me sleep. In the dark, my watch indicated 4 am. I couldn't lie like this anymore. I was very cold. I got up thinking how enjoyable those few minutes of sleep were, during which I had a brief escape from my thoughts and all the suffering I have been through. No doubt after death, one no longer has to endure any suffering. So why do we fiercely cling to life? Why are we so afraid of death? This is how I lamented my fate. Although I was alive, I was envious of the dead. Standing alone in the cellar, I was crying over the catastrophic fate of all the Jewish people. At noon, the cellar door opened. I thought they were going to offer me something to eat. But I was wrong. She only ordered me to bring her a bag of potatoes. I asked her if her daughter had taken my letter to Kielce. She told me that her daughter had been to Kielce on an errand for her father, but she had forgotten to take the letter. Without any further explanation, she immediately closed the cellar door. My heart felt heavy. I had thought by now, the daughter would soon be coming back with information on Moyshe. But since she hadn't taken my letter, I wouldn't know anything. I stayed up in the dark cellar until ten o'clock in the evening, while considering different possibilities for the future. At 10 a.m. Moyshe

opened the cellar and told me to get out immediately because we were leaving immediately. It was finally then when I saw him, that my spirit began to feel a little lighter. Zavatski's wife didn't even bother to make any excuses, that in 24 hours she hadn't even brought me any water in the cellar. It was almost 11 o'clock and we had 8 kilometers to travel. Moyshe took only roundabout paths avoiding being seen. While on our journey, he told me what had happened to him. "When I walked through the fence of the labor camp, and walked towards the level crossing, I found it closed. I saw you on the other side while I stood behind the closed gate. A moment later, a Polish policeman came out of the gatehouse (at each barrier that the train crosses, there was one where Polish or German policemen stand guard). The Polish policeman silently approached me and ordered me to follow him inside. I had no choice but to obey, as he put his gun to my head and threatened to shoot me on the spot. I realized that he saw me come out of the labor camp. He took me into the gatehouse, where we were alone, and he ordered me to empty my pockets. I took out some papers, some money, and then the gun and put them on the table. I tried bluffing him by saying "Outside, I have a lot of armed friends. If anything happens to me, you won't get out of here alive". The policeman got frightened by these words, as this was the time when resistance groups were starting to form. He nervously responded to me, telling me to take it all and go. I believe he was also afraid of seeing other policeman or Germans arrive. I took the path where we had decided to meet, however I did not see you. I was worried, so I went straight to Józek's house and told them what had happened to me and that I had lost you and had no idea where you could have gone. They were all very upset and they immediately urged me to go back and find you. At night I returned to the labor camp in Kielce, but it was already late and I couldn't see any of your friends. Those I saw, told me they didn't know anything and that you haven't come back since they saw you leave with me the day before. They urged me to stay the night so that they could learn all the details and find out if anyone knew anything further. I did stay the night however, no one knew anything further. I wondered where you could possibly be. I realized you could only be at Zavatski's. Since I did not want to enter Bialogon in broad daylight, it was only then that I could come and find you. We must now reassure our friends. We finally arrived at Józek's. Moyshe opened the barn and we went up to the attic. The five of us were all grateful to finally be together again. We had our temporary home now in the attic (barn loft). We witnessed through the cracks in the barn, Poles working in the fields. For them, life went on, while the world had collapsed for us. Every day, after work, Józek would come up to us in the attic loft and share with us any

news. When he came to see us, we tried to read his mood, by his eyes, to see if he was upset. This was so important, because our life now depended on him. If he had to tell us that we had to leave, we wouldn't have any place to go. (p. 200) He made it clear to us that he would like to have a suit. We told him that we would provide him with a suit and that we would also give him 20 gold dollars every week, but he had to decide if he was ready to accept the responsibility of hiding us for a long time. If this be the case, we had to think about installing a better hiding place. For two reasons. Firstly, if a neighbor should suddenly come, we wouldn't be able to move at all and we would have to hold our breath the entire time. Secondly, in winter it would be very cold. Józek agreed with everything we said. My brother Yudl offered to go to the labor camp and find him a suit.

I wrote a letter to our friends:

“May 10, 1943

Dear friends,

Unfortunately, until today I have not been able to send you any news or show sign of life. It's not hard to see why. We must not be seen by anyone and we cannot move around whenever we want. We were, last week all five of us were in Bialogon, to try to find a place for ourselves and also to go to the Pole, Zavatski, who was holding all our valuables that we had sent him. He is now in prison and his wife refused to return anything to us. In the interim, we went to several Poles, asking if they wanted to hide Jews for good remuneration. We believed we could escape if we could find a place to hide. But, dear friends, even the Poles whom we believed we could trust enough to enter their homes, did not even let us cross their doorway. They responded by chasing us away and shouting that they did not want to ever see us again. I cannot tell you our deep disappointment and grief. We were ashamed of ourselves because they were people with whom we had lived with, on good terms, for years. I don't know what words to write on this miserable piece of paper, to say how humiliated and ashamed one feels. Since we were in Bialogon, we went to the grave of my sister-in-law, Elke. We have a little time before we return to Józek. My dear friends, my brother Yudl will give you more details about our situation when he meets you in person. Greetings from your friend who still hopes to see you all once free. Moyshe-Meyer”.

My brother Yudl returned from the labor camp on May 13, 1943 at midnight. He was exhausted by his journey back and also by his visit to the

labor camp. He did bring a suit for Józsek. He had found the mood of the Jews in the labor camp to be appalling. They were expecting the camp to be liquidated overnight. He also gave me several letters from our friends, which I transcribed here verbatim:

“Praise be to God, my dear friend Moyshe-Meyer, I don't write to you, because writing and speaking are not always sincere. Only the silent tongue of the heart is always sincere. My heart tells me that you will not forget me. But you need to know that every day and even every hour matters. So far you have hesitated and now you must not waste a single hour to arrange a little hideout for me. Cordially greet everyone. I am waiting for a solution soon. Your comrade and sincere friend, Simkhe-Bunem Goldman”.

“Dear family, I finally got a first message from you. I hope we will be able to stay in touch from now on. You will learn from Yudl how things are going here with us. He will tell you everything. Moyshe-Meyer, remember that you promised me, before you left, to think of me. I don't need to describe my situation to you. People say to me, “You are very lucky, you are one of a thousand to have such opportunities. While you are staying there Moyshe-Meyer, Yiedl, Dovid, think about my situation. I am the only one in the family to remain. If you can help me, then you must. There are five of you there, and I believe your arrangements allow for a sixth. You no longer have a family left. So, I demand that you do your duty. You can see what the situation looks like here. You should know that the killers p. (p.202) don't want to wait any longer either. But if you don't have a chance to take me, it is unfortunate. I will unfortunately have to share the fate of the thousands of other Jews. You never know where good luck may appear. But the point is that everyone tries to seek out and explore every possibility. So, I ask you all, Moyshe-Meyer, Yiedl, Dovid, to consider carefully. Decide what you are able to do and send me a response. Greetings to you all, and good health. Leybl Goldsheyd”.

“Dear friends, We have been together for 8 months and we lived like brothers. We shared our suffering and we never blamed each other. Your departure was like a second deportation for me and I felt left on my own. I couldn't make up my mind whether to impose myself on you. I thought you would suggest it yourself to me. Since no offer came from you, I decided to hold off temporarily from raising the issue. Unfortunately, the situation has now become so tense that I am forced to appeal to you as a friend. The ground is burning beneath our feet and we must try to save ourselves. I am pleading with you, Moyshe-Meyer and Yudl, as brothers. If only I could

escape from here, because I have the firm belief that our labor camp is going to be liquidated overnight. I would like to do what I said, when you were still here. To escape and like yourself, save my life. When one shares about their suffering to others, one feels that others will understand and sympathize. I firmly believe that by speaking to you at this time, you will show me consideration, as we have been friends for a long time. I have no intention to be dependent on you. I will sell everything I have, in order to get some zlotys. I hope I can be with you again until our suffering is finally over. The political situation is now ripe, with everything indicating that our misfortunes will end. While waiting for a favorable response to my request, I greet you and your loved ones. Best of health to Dovid. May God help us that we all be together. Your friend, Shmuel Liberman”

“Dear Moyshe-Meyer, We received your letter and it made a great impression on us. Moyshe-Meyer, hold strong. Stand firm and do not lose faith. Hope for better days which are drawing near to us in leaps and bounds. Certainly, we will forever remain broken beings. But I think we will find some consolation in revenge anyway. The political situation in the world, i.e., the military situation and the internal situation of the country demonstrate that the day of their defeat is near. The British and the Americans have already set foot on European soil, and I believe they will advance. In our country, the situation is more and more ripe for a revolution, a bloody revolt against the barbaric oppressor. The Jews of Warsaw are still resisting. Now Moyshe-Meyer, as the watch already shows 11:30 p.m., I have to put everything else aside, and move on to personal matters. Realize that for us, time is running out and the ground is burning under our feet. That is why I ask you to do your utmost to save me and Yekl. In doing this, you will know that you have thus saved two Jewish souls from certain death. Financially, you know very well that we will not be a burden to you. My capital in cash amounts to 30 thousand zlotys. If in addition to us, you can take two more people related to me, the economic considerations will not really be a problem anymore because they are people who have, perhaps two million zlotys. We are also working on buying a gun and we will surely get it. If you can take a fifth person, I'm thinking of the Hasag group leader. Dear Moyshe-Meyer, please know that I have already prepared for almost everything and that I am ready to go. I'm just waiting for your decision. I finish my letter, and I appeal once again to you to do all you can to get me out of here and thus allow me to escape certain death. I greet you and kiss you, and greet everyone, Yisroel Lemberger. Yekl is on the night shift. When he arrives, he'll probably write you a few more lines”.

“My very dear friend Moyshe-Meyer, We thank you very much for your letter. Yisroel has already, more or less, informed you of our situation and your brother, Yudl, will also tell you verbally how things are. I won't write much, because after all, the time is not for soul-searching. At this moment, we must neither cry nor laugh, but to understand. Moyshe-Meyer, you are now our only hope and we urge you to do everything to save us and as soon as possible. I greet you and kiss you. Greetings to your brothers-in-law, Yekl Lemberger”.

We read the letters. Our friends were asking us for help. But alas, we didn't even have the possibility or the means to consider it, because we ourselves were struggling every day on how to survive. We gave the suit to Józek, in addition to some money. But we warned him to be careful with his behavior. If his neighbors, or anyone in the village, noticed that he had more money today than he did yesterday, they might suspect him of hiding Jews. He assured us that everything would be fine and that he knew what he had to do. But we knew that all of these changes in behavior would eventually draw attention in the eyes of the neighbors and we had no solution for this kind of problem. Life in the attic loft was most difficult for us. Sometimes food could not even be brought into the barn because there were strangers in the house. There were times we had to lie in bed all day. We couldn't get up because we might be noticed by someone through the attic windows. There were many times that we were not even allowed to speak, let alone cough or sneeze. We had to remain in bed in silence, so that no one passing by would notice our presence. We didn't know what was going on with the war anymore, as we didn't have any newspapers. We didn't want Józek to buy us any, because the whole village knew he couldn't read. It would definitely draw suspicion. You really had to have strong nerves, composure and unfailing patience to remain like this, without being able to talk to each other. All the time waiting for the English and Americans to invade Europe and snatch us from murderous hands. Lying in this attic, we were trying to kill time, day after day. We felt that help was not coming for a long time. Every now and then, Dovid, who wasn't so nerve-racked, would creep down into the barn to stretch his body and move his bones. He would spend a few hours in the barn almost every day. A door led from the barn to the house. Strangers would never pass by that way. Only the people of the house came to the barn to feed the horse, cow and calf, or to milk the cow. Dovid sometimes stood behind the door of the house and he listened to what was being said inside. If there were no strangers present, he would sometimes

venture inside and chat with the family of the house. In the attic loft, we were worried sick when we realized that Dovid entered the house. We admonished him all the time to not do that. Our concern was that there would inevitably be a stranger present in the house and we would no longer have a choice but to disappear from here, with no place to go. It would be like throwing oneself into the mouth of the wolf alive. We didn't have to wait long for our fears to come true. One day, the neighbor's daughter, Inwentory, an 8-year-old girl entered the house. She played very quietly with the children of the house. Dovid was behind the door. Hearing nothing, he figured that there were no strangers inside. Thus, he opened the door and entered. The neighbor's daughter stared at him without saying a word. She continued to play with the children. Seeing her, Dovid tried to justify his presence there. He started talking with Józek about a horse, loud enough for the little girl to hear what was being said. Dovid ended by saying loudly, "Today I have no money, but I will come back another day with money. Goodbye". Then Dovid left and returned to the barn. He had said that to Józek, in hope that the little girl would think he was just another Polish man interested in buying the horse. But to believe that was stupid and ridiculous for two reasons. First, even a child knew this man couldn't go out on the street dressed as he was. Secondly, he went out to the barn, which only the family did. As for Józek's children, they were so disciplined that no one could have learned anything from them. As soon as Dovid returned to the attic, we knew something was wrong. Dovid, pale and visibly distraught, told us in a low voice that the Inn's daughter had caught him in the house. Our blood froze. At the time, we were gripped with fear. We saw no solution and we felt such anger over our situation. We questioned why we were still alive. We were also very angry with Dovid, for he had not listened to us. We couldn't talk to each other, but each of us felt bitterness towards each other. We asked ourselves, what were we going to do now? Where would we go? We had nowhere to go, so we might as well stay here and await our fate. Whatever come what may, we did not have any choice. But our situation now also depended on Józek. Perhaps, he would no longer want to keep us, for fear of the neighbors? A few hours later, Józek came up to see us. We looked him in the eye, trying to discern his feelings. But Józek began to laugh. He was laughing at us, saying that she was just a little girl and that she certainly hadn't paid any attention to Dovid. He tried to give us a little courage, even though we didn't believe his assurances. We felt that he underestimated the whole thing by saying that the girl hadn't paid attention. We took this situation seriously and we felt the little girl would definitely tell her parents about this. A few days later, looking through the cracks in

wall of the attic, we saw children arguing, while bringing the cows back from the meadow. When they approached, the children of the neighbor, Inwentory, and those of the other neighbor, Chojnacki, were shouting to the children of Józek, "You stink like the Jews! You will be shot too, like those scabby Jews. You have money from the Jews!". And the children started throwing stones at each other. Some of the parents noticed this and responded by scolding their children and making them return home. For us, this children's fight was like a thunderclap. Our blood began to boil upon hearing this hateful attack. We knew the children only repeated what they heard their parents say. Undoubtedly, all the neighbors already knew that there were Jews at Józek's home. We could no longer hide and we had to now look for any idea on what we should do. We were anxiously waiting for Józek to come up to us and hear what he had to say now. Józek finally came, his face very pale. He was frightened and he spoke very quietly, saying "I am not afraid of my neighbor, Inwentory. He wouldn't do anything because we were on good terms. The second neighbor, Chojnacki, wouldn't do anything either because he was afraid of me. I can hurt him. I know that he hid 10 guns. When the fleeing Polish soldiers passed through the village, 10 soldiers entered his home and changed their clothes. They left all their uniforms and guns. I know he burned the uniforms and kept the guns. The only thing we have to fear is that Freiwowa will find out. The Freiwowa family were Volksdeutshen (Poles of German origin) who live near me. The Freiwowa woman no longer has a husband, but she has several sons-in-law, also Volksdeutshen, who served in the German police. The eldest, named Fridek, is a warden at the Kielce prison. He is a real Hitlerite and he is an anti-Semite. She also has several smaller children, and they take the cows to graze along with the others". Józek told us that we should remain here. So far, nothing had happened and hopefully nothing would happen. But the situation was starting to become untenable. We had to figure out a second place to have somewhere to go, in case we needed to leave here in a rush. It was becoming clear that we wouldn't be able to stay long. We decided that the same very night that Moyshe would go to the village of Dobromierz, which is not far from here. It was only 6 kilometers away, near Bialogon. A little outside the village lived the Polish man, Litvin. He had previously worked as a guard in our tannery. Perhaps he will be willing to host us. He has no neighbors and his house is practically in the forest. He probably doesn't have an adequate income to live on. Perhaps, if we promise him a lot of money, he will agree to hide us. We also asked Moyshe to stop on the way to see the woman, Smiechowa. Her house was also quite isolated and without neighbors. This house was surrounded by woods. Maybe she will

also agree to hide us for a large sum of money? She has no husband and lived alone with three children. Her financial situation was also bleak. At night, Moyshe said goodbye to us and left. We decided not to tell Józek where he was going, because if we could ever find a second place, it wouldn't be good for someone to have such information. If we ever left Józek's place, it would be better if he didn't know where we were. We also asked Józek to tell his children not to argue with other children in the village when they are together grazing the cows, even if they see that the neighbor's cow is coming to their field. We suggested how important it was today to get along, not to argue, but to live in peace with everyone. We also asked him to report to us, without omission, anything he would hear said in the village. The next day, May 31, 1943, after the children returned from the meadow, Józek came up to see us in the attic. It was with great sorrow in his voice that he informed us that Freis knew about it too. In the meadow, their children had yelled out to Józek's children, "We are going to burn you, there are Jews in your home!" Józek said it was getting dangerous and that he thought we should best leave today for a few days. He was shaking with fear and we had to calm him down by telling him that we would be leaving that very night. We also told him that since he had lived on good terms with Freiwia for so many years without any conflicts, he could go to her house and ask her why her children were shouting things like that in the meadow. Józek followed our advice. He went to see her and told her that her children were screaming that his family were going to be burned for hiding Jews. He told her that such words could bring a terrible misfortune and that he had nothing to do with any Jews. Ms. Freiwia immediately called her children and scolded them. She sternly told them that such a thing was to never happen again. Then she said to Józek, "Are you really afraid of me? Are you afraid that I will hurt you? Yet we have been neighbors for so many years and we get along so well. Am I going to hurt you now? Already this past winter, I heard in the village that there was a Jew in your house. Did it matter to me or am I interested? As far as I'm concerned, you can have as many Jews as you want. I have nothing against the Jews. The Jews never hurt me either". Józek told her that he didn't know where these rumors were coming from. He thanked her and left. In the meantime, we had everything we needed ready to leave, even though we had no idea where to. Moyshe had not yet returned. He was not to come home until sometime after dark. Józek came back from Freiwia in a much better mood. He told us about their conversation and he said, "Now that you see what the situation is, do as you think best. If you think it's not that dangerous and you decide to stay, I'm fine with your decision". We replied, "No, we are getting ready to leave

and we will be leaving tonight for a few days. If in a few days everything is calm here, we will come back". Moyshe came home at ten at night. Litvin consented to take only three men, while the Smiechowa woman, who also was asked, said to return in two weeks. She had to think about it. We told Moyshe about what transpired this past day and told him that we had decided that it would be best to leave this day. It was already midnight. Józek came out of the house to see if there was anyone around, so we could leave without being noticed. Everything was very calm and the night was dark. Józek watched us as we left. As we said goodbye to him, we felt he was feeling terrible over this separation. (p. 211) He walked with us a short distance and said with tears in his eyes, "You are now going into the dark night without knowing where you are going. But if you are unable to find any shelter or if you find yourself, unfortunately led to wander in the woods, you can come back to my place right away, without giving it any further thought. For my part, I am ready to sacrifice myself. I want to link my fate to yours". We thanked him for his heartfelt solidarity with us and we said goodbye as we departed into the forest. The night was really dark, and the fields had a fresh smell. We walked slowly and watched our steps carefully while breathing that fresh air that was forbidden for us to enjoy as Jews. Moyshe led us to the grave of a young Jewish man who had been shot there. We sat down and Moyshe told us about him. "He lived in the Kielce ghetto with his whole family, his father who was a tailor, his mother, and several younger brothers and sisters. Since the father did not earn enough to feed his children, they sold everything they had. In the village of Szczukowice lived Kozel, a Polish tailor who knew the entire family. One day, Kozel went to the Kielce ghetto to buy the Jewish tailor's sewing machine. Since he did not have all the necessary funds with him, he had asked to be given credit for ZL 200. He said he would come back the following day to settle his debt. Since then, a long time had passed. The Polish tailor was not coming back. Driven by hunger, the son of the Jewish tailor, a young man of 28, decided to run the risk of leaving the ghetto to find the Polish tailor and claim the 200 zlotys owed. The Polish tailor told him that he did not have the money yet and asked him to return a few days later. He was convinced that the Jew would not repeat this hazardous trip. But the young man had found a clever solution to avoid having to go back and forth. He had gone to another Polish man that he knew in the same village. He told him his predicament and asked him if he could provide food and shelter for him for a few days, in exchange for clothes he could make for him during that time. This arrangement was accepted and he was able to stay with this Polish man. But Kozel soon learned that the young Jew had not left and that he was waiting

in the vicinity for the money owed. Kozel decided to report the Jew to the German police, but without saying where he was hiding because the German police would possibly shoot the entire family. Consequently, the German police ordered several local inhabitants of the village to find the Jew. Hearing this news, the young man fled. He ran to the forest where he took refuge by climbing up a tree. The Poles were unable to find him. Realizing that he had successfully escaped, they sat down for a moment on the edge of the woods to chat. Among them was Frankowski, the Polish man who had taken the properties of all the Jews of Piekoszów. He was the one who most regretted their failure to catch up with the fugitive. He believed that if there was a single Jew left in Poland, there was a risk that one day they might come and take back those lands from him. For the time being, he considered himself the true heir to Jewish property. The young Jew, believing the time was finally safe, climbed down from the tree in order to return to Kielce. But as he came out of the woods, he suddenly came upon his pursuers who started to chase him and finally were able to grab him. The Jew begged them to let him go. He promised them to never return to their village again, but nothing helped. Frankowski was the first to tie him up and call for the German police to be notified of his capture. Perhaps, one of these Poles would have taken pity on this Jew and let him go, but the fear of Frankowski prevailed. So, they tied him up and waited for the police. A German agent finally joined them in the woods. He shot the Jew, and ordered that he be buried there". It was getting very late in the night, as we discussed what we should do. We decided that my brother Yudle and me, along with Moyshe, go to Litvin's home, while my two brothers-in-law, Yiedl and Dovid, should go and try to hide elsewhere. After all, they knew the area well and had many contacts among Poles. We had agreed that whatever happened, whether we found a place to hide or not, we would all meet again on the following Sunday, after dark at Józek's. They took a gun and some money with them and we went our separate ways. They came out of the woods on one side and us on a completely different area. My brother Yudl and I didn't know the area at all, but Moyshe led the way. We walked through fields, taking roundabouts and deserted paths, although it was rare to encounter anyone at night. The policemen, whether German or Polish, were apprehensive about taking these kinds of paths at night without guides or without express orders. But we knew that in every village, there were night watchmen who made their rounds. But we were armed and ready this time. Dovid and Moyshe, on their escape from Starachowice, had learned the hard way that you should not go out at night without a weapon in order to put up fierce resistance, if necessary. It was best to take all precautions to avoid any

encounter. This was why we chose to take these paths that virtually no one ever takes. Once we got to the grove near Litvin's home, we hid for a while, to see if the surrounding area was safe and quiet. The night was still very dark. Moyshe crept over to a window and tapped it several times. Litvin immediately opened the door and gave him the key to the barn. It was through the barn that we went up to the attic loft. The attic ceiling was very low, you couldn't stand in it. There was straw everywhere on the floor. The noise of mice and rats made these new surroundings very unpleasant. We didn't want to light a candle, as the light could possibly be noticed from a distance. We waited until dawn broke before we laid out some straw and finally laid down. Later during the day came, we waited impatiently for Litvin to arrive so we could start to discuss what kind of hiding place should be made. My brother Yudl had already devised a plan to dig an excavation. He felt that this place was well suited for this. We heard the barn door lock click. We thought it was Litvin who was coming to see us, but it was his wife who entered the barn. She carried in fodder to feed the cows. She looked scared and was trembling like a leaf. We kept staring at her and wanted to greet her, but she did not give us the slightest glance. She was even afraid to turn her head in our direction. After she picked up some chopped straw, she immediately left the barn. My brother Yudl cracked a joke by saying that this lady was not his kind of woman at all. He wondered if she could satisfy anyone. A little later, Litvin came in to see us. He greeted us warmly. We tried to introduce the idea of a hiding place into the conversation, but he dodged the topic and told us his wife was frightened (they had no children). She hadn't been able to sleep all night. We took out 500 zlotys and gave it to him. This money gave him some courage and he said he was going to discuss it again with his wife, in hope that she might agree. He quickly came back to bring us something to eat. We hoped that he had spoken with his wife and that he would give us an answer. But this was not to be. The money pocketed, he went on a trip for two days and left us there without making any decision. At night, Moyshe came down to see the woman and try to explain to her how many benefits she could get from our presence. She wouldn't lack for anything. We would provide her with adequate money and we would dig our own hiding place, completely hidden from everyone. But she kept saying, "I'm afraid! I'm afraid!". Moyshe reported his conversation with her. It was clear to us that this arrangement was not going to work out. We decided that we would need to stay, at least until Sunday evening, because we had agreed to meet at Józek's at that time. Moyshe had some serious thoughts to share. He said "When Litvin returns, we'll tell him that we want to stay at least until Monday night. I am greatly

concerned over our Sunday night agreed date. The woman, Freiwia, receives her sons-in-law and her son, Fridek, on Sunday. The children will surely speak. Perhaps, they will not want to carry out a search themselves, but they will report their suspicions on Sunday to the Kielce police, who will not be able to come until the next day, Monday. That's why I'm suggesting that we not go there until Monday evening". I replied, "No. I understand your reasons, but we decided with Yiedl and Dovid to meet again on Sunday. So, it has to be Sunday". Moyshe insisted, "Even if we have agreed on Sunday, it won't be a big deal if we don't arrive until Monday. After all, I doubt that they were able to find a place to hide. They probably wandered an entire day in the forest and then they, most likely, returned to Józek. Finding a place to welcome Jews is not that easy". So, we finally decided to go there on Monday evening, even though this was against my will. Generally speaking, when it came to making choices or making a decision, I always tried to avoid being obstinate, preferring to being agreeable with what others said. As our lives were in continual danger, I didn't want to take on such a great responsibility. When it comes to such matters, you can't feel smarter than another. You never know which choice is good and which bad. On Tuesday morning, Litvin came to see us. We told him we would be leaving on Monday night. He was agreeable with our decision. On Sunday at 3:00 p.m., lying in the attic, we were looking through a slit in the wall where the sunlight entered our attic. We saw Litvin's wife rushing home. We quickly understood that something was wrong. She suddenly opened the barn door lock, shouting, "Quick, get out! The police are coming to search!" We all started shaking with the terrible fear that gripped us. We jumped out of the attic, trying to determine which direction to take so as not to run into the police in our flight. We hurriedly tore off a plank from the back wall of the barn and slipped into the already tall wheat fields. We laid in the wheat fields for several hours without knowing our next move. Several hours later Litvin came to meet us in the field and told us it was a false alarm. His wife had seen two police officers in the village and thought that they were on their way to her house. We pointed out to him that this sort of false alarm could cause the worst disasters. At nightfall we returned to the attic. I once again offered to travel and meet on our agreed date that evening. But Moyshe insisted that we didn't go out until the next day. Monday night, when it was already dark, we left on our return journey. On the way, we saw rocket flares launched by a night patrol, strongly illuminating the surroundings. We thought it was very close to us, but in reality, it was quite far away. As we approached the forest, we saw at a certain distance away, two men coming out of the woods. We were very scared and we prepared

ourselves for a possible fight. Frightened but determined, we approached them.

How was this week for Yiedl and Dovid

When we parted in the forest, they had gone towards the grove in the village of Padge. Once in the woods, they laid down and waited for daylight. In the meantime, they thought about where they should venture. They decided to go to Tshorniv, a nearby village. At daybreak, they went to the village of Padge to see a Polish worker who worked in our tannery before the war. They went to his house but he wasn't there. His wife told them that he had just left for the forest and that he would not return until nightfall. They didn't tell her why they had come, but she certainly knew she was talking with Jews. She did look frightened and she received them very politely. They told her that they intended to visit other villagers, but she did not rush them. She was sure that if anyone saw them, they would be caught and handed over to the police. They decided that they wouldn't wait for her husband to return home. They had already given up, for various reasons, to consider making this place their refuge. This house was not suitable for hiding and it was located in the middle of the village. The woman had also told them that she was constantly being visited by her neighbors. Before they left her, they begged her to greet her husband for them. Then they returned to the grove in Padge. Once there, they laid down and hopelessly tried to figure out what to do. They ate an old piece of bread they had with them. While chewing the bread, they saw in the distance a Polish man walking through the woods. When the man got a little closer, they recognized Mildcasz, one of their former Polish neighbors in Bialogon. They didn't want to be seen, so they hid behind a tree. But as he passed by, he was able to notice them nevertheless. He suddenly froze and was frightened as if he had seen ghosts. We heard him exclaim, "My God! who do I see! What are you doing here?" He hugged us both and said, "Of course I heard stories in Bialogon that you were alive and hiding somewhere, but I couldn't believe it. May God help you stay alive!" The Polish man would have liked to chat with us a little longer, but he was trembling with fear. He was in the grips, such as the fear of one who may be caught committing the worst crime. He bade them farewell with tears in his eyes, repeating, "May God help you to hold out and stay alive". It was said with such sincerity that tears came to their eyes. In the evening, they decided to return to see Ms. Smiechowa, even though she had told Moyshe not to come back for, at least, two weeks. They figured that by going there and talking to her, maybe she would agree to welcome them that same day. At nightfall, they left the forest and headed for Mrs.

Smiechowa's house. After verifying that no one was observing them, they approached and knocked on the door. The lady asked through the door, "Who is this?" They answered her in a whisper, "We are the Bekiermans of Bialogon". In her fear, she hesitated in opening the door to them. She asked them to approach the window. She wanted to see them. Granted, she didn't know them by sight, but she wanted to see if they at least looked like Jews. They approached the window where they must have exchanged a few more words with her before she finally opened the door. After the greetings, she apologized to them for not allowing them in right away. She told them that, two weeks earlier, several Poles had come knocking at her door at night. Without thought, she opened the door for them and they quickly grabbed all of her valuables, beat her and ran away. She hadn't been able to recognize any of these thugs. From that day on, she had been terrified and feared opening her door at night. Especially, since she was alone with her three children and without a husband. She asked them to sit down and apologized again, as she had to go to the barn to milk her cow. They observed the room which was very nicely arranged. The table was covered with a white tablecloth. The children were very well dressed. They looked more like city children than the children seen in the country. Overall, this house made a good impression. The eldest daughter, Bogda, who was 14, introduced them to her 10-year-old younger sister, Wanda, and 5-year-old little brother, Ignac. Their father had died during the first year of the war. Before the war, they lived in Pionki, where he was a policeman. Immediately after his death, they came to settle there, where they owned 6 acres of land. Ms. Smiechowa soon returned. She sat down with a very sympathetic smile and asked Dovid what they expected from her. Dovid told her, "We are looking for a place where we can hide from the German brigands until the end of the war. We know of enough places where we would be welcomed, but we don't want to stay long in any place, because it is often difficult to stay somewhere without being noticed by someone. We like your house here and the surrounding land looks good. We have heard that you are a very kind lady. So, we would love to be able to stay here. We have enough money. It goes without saying that, if God comes to our aid and we are able to see the end of the war, we will reward the person who hid us, in such a way that their wellbeing will be assured until the end of their days". She replied, "I would really need some money, because my 6 acres of land are not enough to live on and I do not have a man to bring in money for us either. But I'm afraid of what might happen if they unfortunately find you in our home. What would happen to all of us then?" Dovid responded by asking her, "Have any Germans ever come to your home, looking for anything in the past three

years of this war?" No, she replied. Dovid continued, "I believe we can assume that a good time will pass without anyone coming. In addition, it is possible to set up a secure hiding place here, so that no one will be able to find us". "You are looking for a place," she continued, "with someone honest. You don't want to go anywhere because you have to risk placing your lives in the hands of whomever you are staying with. But on the other hand, you have to be honest also. Indeed, what can a Polish person do, who decides to welcome Jews into their home and, if after a few days the hiding place is threatened by discovery, to the point that it is absolutely necessary to abandon it, and what if the Jews, not knowing where to go, refuse to go? The Polish person would then be in danger along with her entire family". "You need not worry about this," Dovid told him. "You don't have to agree to keep us until the end of the war. Let's make a weekly arrangement. We will give you 40 gold dollars every week, which is a considerable amount. Furthermore, as soon as you ask us to leave, we will, even in broad daylight". Mrs. Smiechowa paused to think this over. 40 gold dollars a week and also Dovid appeared to be a young fine fellow. She turned to her children, "So, my children, what do you say? Do we accept that they stay with us?" The children responded without hesitation, "Yes! It would be wonderful." (p 218) Mrs. Smiechowa stood up with a smile on her face and said, "It would be a shame to put two decent young men out in the middle of the night. Although I haven't decided to accept you here yet, you can still spend the night here". Dovid replied, "If we are to stay here, there will have to be three of us because we have a brother-in-law who must be with us. There are 5 of us all together, but 3 of us had to hide in another place. They know we are here and we know where they are. We were unable to make up our mind, for different reasons, regarding our hiding ourselves all in one place. Furthermore, we are armed". Dovid proceeded to show her the gun he carried. Ms. Smiechowa opined, "It's good that you have a gun and the fact that you have another hideout location, is even better. Indeed, if one day you are forced to leave a place for a while, you better have somewhere else available to go to". She opened the door to the second room and told them that this might be the best place to hide. The room was not finished. The windows and the door to the courtyard were boarded up with planks. There was no floor, no ceiling either. Just the four walls and the roof. Dovid had some further questions that he needed to ask, "What about the neighbors? What kind of people come to visit you?" She replied, "Whole weeks can go by without any visit. I don't usually deal with strangers, nor do I have any acquaintances around here. As for the neighbors, I don't have any living nearby. My house is in the middle of the forest. But there is a mill about 300

meters from here, which the police sometimes used to visit. Near the mill, there is a tavern whose owner knows the Germans well. German police officers often came from Kielce to spend the night there drinking. Not far from here, still about 300 meters away, there is a large building that the priest of Bialogon had built before the war, to host a seminary. During the first year of the German occupation, German soldiers lived there. Now the building remains empty". Ms. Smiechowa took them up to the attic and brought them a pile of straw, telling them that they could lie down. Then she revealed to them a hole in the attic. She explained to them that in case something happened or if someone came knocking at night, they would have to hide in this hole. They passed several days stretched out in the attic. She came every day to spend some time with them chatting, however, without being quite determined to keep them. On Sunday, they made their preparations to go on the road. They told her that they were leaving that night in order to find us. She wanted to know when they were planning to return and they told her that they would be back on Monday night.

When they arrived at Józek's home Sunday evening, he was very happy to see them. He told them that, at his house, the week had passed quite peacefully. But they were upset that they didn't see us and didn't know what to think. They decided to go back to Smiechowa on Monday evening even if we did not show up at Józek's house. On Monday evening, when they left Józek's place, they left Józek a letter for us. Along the way, they were very careful to keep a lookout for us and hopefully meet. When they got to the forest and saw three people from afar, they immediately knew it was us. They walked over and let out our identifying cry. We, on our side, when we realized it was Yiedl and Dovid, we felt very relieved. We sat together in the forest for a while. We told them how our week went, and they told us everything they experienced. This is where we decided that Moyshe and my brother Yudl, would go to Józek and build a hideout there, in case a search would ever take place. My brother, Yudl, already had an idea in mind, to dig a cellar with a camouflage entrance. As for me, I had to accompany my two brothers-in-law to Mrs. Smiechowa and stay there with them. We decided, that if everything remained calm in the two places where we were going to settle, and if there were no need for us to visit each other, we should avoid the risk of traveling so often. Indeed, on the roads we were always in danger. It would be best for us to remain hidden without moving. Anyway, we had to. If all went well until that time, we would meet up at Józek's house after two months. My brother Yudl and Moyshe took some money, along with their things and said goodbye to us before separating in the forest. As for us,

we traveled through the woods on the other side and took the path that led to Mrs. Smiechowa's house. We had decided on the way, to go first to Bialogon and see Miss Halinia, in order to pick up the blanket we had left at her house and so we would have something to cover ourselves. But the day would soon dawn and we would arrive at Mrs. Smiechowa's house at a time that might be hazardous. Better for us to get the blanket later. We got to the house and knocked. As soon as Ms. Smiechowa opened the door, we felt there was something terribly wrong. She was all shaking, not knowing what to do and whether to let us in or not. "You don't know what happened?" she cried. Frightened, we replied, "No, we didn't hear anything". She was trying to begin to tell us what it was about, but fear made it extremely difficult for her to speak to us. She started, "In Bialogon today, in broad daylight, the tannery commissioner, Heine, was assassinated. The people of Bialogon know what the Germans do, when one of their own is killed. They take 10 local Poles and shoot them at the exact spot where the German was killed. This is why, almost all the inhabitants of Bialogon left their home place today. Of course, I didn't let any of them into my house. But if the German police should come to look for these fugitives, they will surely come to my house too". Without her eldest daughter, Bogda, who insisted that she let us in, she would not have even allowed us into her home. Shaken, we went up to the attic, but we did not go to bed. We stayed up to listen and be ready to hide at the slightest noise. The next day everything seemed calm. The commissioner's body had been transported to Kielce and the inhabitants of Bialogon had slowly and hesitantly returned to their homes. We, therefore, a few days later, went to Bialogon in order to see Miss Halinia and recover the blanket. At the same time, we tried to glean details on what had happened to the commissioner. On a pitch-black night, at midnight sharp, we knocked on Miss Halinia's door. She lived alone. Dovid walked in by himself, as my brother-in-law Yiedl and I stood guard outside in case someone came by. Halinia greeted Dovid and told him straight away, "I'm not happy that you came. The fact that you came to see me can cost us both our lives. Don't you know what's going on here in Bialogon? How do you know that I am not constantly monitored? Because they might know you're planning to come to my house and they want to capture you at all costs. You probably already know about the assassination of Commissioner Heine at the Tannery. At around 2 in the afternoon, two men entered the commissioner's house and shot him. Then they left, heading in the direction of Kielce. This incident caused a huge stir among the inhabitants of Bialogon. Many of them fled for fear of the German police. The mayor and several Poles who live near the tannery, when they realized that they may be in trouble, found a trick to

clear themselves. When the German police arrived, the mayor and a few other Poles told them that, when neighbors of the Commissary heard several shots fired, they rushed outside to see what was happening and they saw Dovid Bekierman run out of the Commissary's house and flee in the direction of Kielce. They added that they had heard that the Bekiermans had escaped from the Kielce labor camp and that they were in the area. The German police officers took note of everything and warned the mayor, as well as his staff, that they had to ensure that the Jews in question were captured at all costs. All of Bialogon believed this story and were convinced that this was the plain truth, that it was you who killed the commissioner. Almost all Poles want to capture you and hand you over to the German police. Dovid, you have to be very careful. You don't have to come to Bialogon at all. Can you imagine how many enemies you have there? We have reached such a crisis situation among the Polish population. Every Pole who has been able to seize any possessions that belonged to Jews, or find any valuables that a Jewish family hid on their property before the deportations, or who occupied homes and land abandoned by Jews, has a great interest in ensuring that Jews do not survive and return. God forbid, even if only one Jew, there is the fear that they will have to return all this after the war. These Poles are already convinced that they will inherit the Jewish homes, fields and factories. If a Pole lives in a house that once belonged to a Jew, he takes care to find out and verify that no one in the owner's family is still alive. You may come across Poles who you believe are your friends, when in reality, they will only have in mind to hand you over to the Germans. You, Dovid, you must not forget that Aupel (Jonas Chase shared info with me regarding Aupel) and all his family know very well that if you remain alive you will want revenge on them. If they ever find out where you are, they'll be sure to call the police. All this leads me to repeat to you, that I am firmly against your visits to Bialogon, and that I formally ask you not to come to me anymore. In leaving, Dovid took the blanket and said goodbye to Halinia, promising her not to return. On the way back, we concluded that everyone would believe that it was us who killed the commissioner. Even Hauptmann Geier, the German police chief, would be convinced of our guilt. It was clear that he must have received a note several weeks ago from Spiegel, the commander of the Jewish Police, that we had escaped from the labor camp. We have resolved not to tell Ms. Smiechowa anything. We went back to the attic where we laid down to sleep. Lying in the attic, we counted the hours and passed the days. Each day seemed to last an eternity for us and it was much for us to endure. It felt like each day was created for us, to make our blood run cold in a new way and

make us sick of living. The sun was shining, people were walking in the streets, in the fields and enjoying these beautiful summer days. But for us, those days were dark, filled with melancholy. We were like one who wades through the water and sees, wherever he looks, only this endless expanse of water. We were unable to vision an end in sight to our troubles. We didn't know what was to come, or have any clue that would give us an idea how long this was going to last, or whether we would be able to endure. Mrs Smiechowa came up to see us several times a day, repeatedly saying that she had not yet decided to keep us. She told us every day about the dreams she had, which she believed with religious faith. Every night she saw in a dream, how they were about to shoot us all and burn down her house. We explained to her that she should not believe in dreams and that everyone has dreams at night related to their thoughts during the day. Feeling that we were ridiculing her, she got angry. She claimed that everything she saw in a dream came true. She had incontestable proof of that. She told us, as proof, that the first year after her marriage, when the doctor found that her husband had a frail heart, she had dreamed that very night that her husband had died. She claimed that is what had happened. We pointed out that he actually died 12 years later. At that, we could not help bursting out laughter. But she didn't want to hear what we had to say. She stuck firmly to her beliefs and continued to badger us about her dreams. Gradually, she got used to her fears and became less and less afraid. Nevertheless, she came up more frequently to see us and chat with us. We understood her. She was lonely for a man in her life. She no longer had a husband, but she had three young men hiding in her attic. Three men who had lost everything in their lives and who no longer had families. Perhaps it would be possible for her to find among one of the three, the man that, after the war, could fulfill the role of being a husband. We thought about and discussed the situation that we were in. It would be a good idea if we had some way to ensure that we can remain in our current hideout in her house besides giving her money. It would not be long before she has taken most of our money from us and she could tell us to leave. We, who had suffered so much misfortune refused to try to understand her thoughts and failed to see the hints she sometimes gave. But Dovid, who was the youngest of us and who never had a wife or children or whose heart was ever broken, realized what was required and accepted the mission. He started to come down to see her a little bit every day. At first, it surprised her to see Dovid come down, for he was 22, when she was already 39. She thought someone older would have better suited her. But this was how it was. From that time on, she and Dovid spent intimate moments together.

On July 15, 1943, we read in the German newspaper that the Russian offensive had started and that heavy fighting was taking place near Orel, Bryansk and Kharkov. In addition, the English and the Americans had landed in Sicily. Reading this news in the newspaper, gave us hope, even though the German press would not reveal much. German propaganda reported everything as a victory for Germany. For example, they wrote that the English and the Americans had lost half of their armies in Sicily. They also wrote that although the British and the Americans were constantly bombarding Germany, the former suffered the greatest losses. They claimed that every day 100 bombers with 1,000 pilots were shot down. The German press also claimed that the Bolsheviks suffered major disasters during their offensive and that in every town they captured, everything was destroyed and Bolshevik losses were immense, over 400 tanks a day! But we understood all of this in a very different way. First of all, it was good for us that Sicily was already in British and American hands. As for their losses, we had complete confidence in their armies. We were happy to read that 100 bombers were shot down every day, because if 100 bombers were shot down, that would mean that probably there were 1,000 bombers in the air. And if 1,000 bombers were flying over Germany, it was certainly a critical situation for the Germans. We thought it was good that the Russian offensive was advancing in leaps and bounds, city after city. We weren't very worried reading about their alleged losses. Our joy was even greater, when we read a few days later, that Mussolini had resigned and that the Fascist party had been dissolved in Italy, although the Italian people were continuing to fight on the side with Germany. We deduced from this, that there had certainly been a complete turnaround in Italy and that it was not unlikely that, like what happened in the First World War, the Italians would turn their rifle fire at the Germans. All these events rekindled our hope. We certainly thought that this was a start and that there was a chance that our hopes would come true. Maybe we could hold out until the end of the war and then we could witness with our own eyes the German people being crushed.

The hiding place we had in the attic was of little practical value. It only served, as they say, to deceive ourselves. It was merely a big hole in the wall and for three people to fit in it was not practical. We couldn't close the hole ourselves. Mrs. Smiechowa had to come up and close it for us. In addition, we couldn't stay there long, an hour at most, because there was no air. It would have been impossible for us to hide ourselves there quickly. This hiding place only served to provide false assurances for Ms. Smiechowa. But we weren't relying too much on this hideout. Rather, we trusted our fate and

believed that if three years of war had already passed, without anyone ever coming here to search, the probability was good that we would be well on our way. However, we were concerned that the money we gave Ms. Smiechowa would ultimately betray us. All her neighbors and villagers were aware of her financial situation. They knew full well that she had no income. But now, having received a large amount of money from us, she was spending it in the village. Her lifestyle appeared to be much better than before. People would certainly begin to wonder why. Another problem was that we gave Mrs Smiechowa 40 gold dollars every week and she would go and spend it in Kielce. She never bothered to tell us where she spent the money. She never gave this any thought and this made us lose sleep.

On July 30, 1943, a number of Ukrainians moved into the red building that the priest of Bialogon had built to establish a seminary. They were dressed in German uniforms and were armed. They were, without a doubt, former Russian prisoners who had sworn loyalty to Hitler and now were serving in the army, fighting against their own brethren. Among them were several crippled soldiers who said that they had been mutilated on the Russian front while they were fighting against the Bolsheviks. Every day their numbers increased throughout the village. They were gaining residence in almost every house. They also came knocking on our door and asked to enter. But Ms. Smiechowa refused. However, their knocking on the door frightened us because they were always walking around with their guns. Unfortunately, we were painfully aware of what the Ukrainians were like.

On August 28, 1943, at 11 p.m., when Yiedl and I were already sleeping in the attic and Dovid was still downstairs chatting with Mrs. Smiechowa, we heard footsteps approaching the house. We guessed it was Ukrainians. Loud knocks were heard at the door. Ms. Smiechowa shouted through the closed door, that she would not open to soldiers at night. They replied that they had a search order. They kept knocking and threatening to break down the door. Ms. Smiechowa refused to open. She quickly went up with Dovid to the attic. Dovid told us in a whisper that they were coming for a search. We quickly slipped into the hole to hide. However, the hasty retreat to the attic and our efforts to hide had been so sudden and noisy that the Ukrainians had surely heard it and understood that something was going on upstairs. It was very dark and we were shaking with fear. The three of us squeezed into the hole with great difficulty and Mrs. Smiechowa covered the entrance. In the meantime, the Ukrainians had broken a window and looked inside. Seeing no one, they left. After an undurable hour, Mrs. Smiechowa came to let us out so that we could breathe a little. But we did not come out of the hole,

fearing their imminent return. They might have gone to get reinforcements. They had certainly heard the noise coming from the attic and they heard her refuse to open the door to them. Perhaps they had been afraid to enter her home alone to carry out this search. We were curious as to what they were looking for. Especially if this intended search was only targeted at this home or whether they had also searched other homes in the village. It was only when daylight finally arrived that we emerged from our hiding place. Ms. Smiechowa told us that they had searched the entire village. They were looking for two Ukrainians, who had fled with their weapons. From this incident, we realized that the presence of these Ukrainians in the area would only cause problems and that we should not underestimate this. Such searches could happen more frequently and we could not rely well on our hiding place in the attic because it was worthless. I suggested digging a hiding place under the floor of the second room, where no one ever entered and the windows were sealed by planks. Mainly because if one were to hear a noise coming from this room at night, it would probably arouse less suspicious than a noise coming from the attic. If Ms. Smiechowa did not agree to this plan, we would be forced to leave her. We discussed it with her. We tried to make her understand that the hiding place in the attic was worthless. She agreed to have this digging done. I told her, "To dig such a hiding place, we must first get in contact where my brother Yudl is. Indeed, such a hiding place must have a camouflaged entrance, in order that we can lock ourselves in from the inside. The real specialist for this construction was my brother Yudl. When we come back, if all goes well, we'll start digging".

So, we prepared to leave the following evening and on August 30, 1943, at midnight, we arrived at Józek's home. Józek opened the door and cheerfully greeted us. We asked him why he looked so bad and if he was ill. He told us that he was not in bad health, thank goodness, but it was the fact that he couldn't see when this war might end. That was what was so demoralizing for him. We went up to the attic where my brother, Yudl, and Moyshe were lying. They had heard us come in. We greeted each other in the dim light and laid down. We couldn't speak in a normal voice in the attic because we were afraid someone might come by and overhear us. My brother, Yudl, told us very gently that he had constructed a sort of cellar which had been very successfully designed by him, and that in the morning, we could all go down there and be able to talk.

The following early morning, Yudl and Moyshe said they were going to go down to the cellar. We were to try to see if we could find them a few

minutes later. They wanted to see if we could find the entrance to the hideout. We were unable to find it, until they opened the door and waved us in. We told them everything that had happened with us so far and then asked them how things were working out for them and why Józek looked so ill. They replied, "What Józek means for us is impossible to describe. He is simply an angel. He takes care of us more than his own children. It should come as no surprise that he looks so ill. All the inhabitants of the village make him feel miserable. He is threatened by their conversations that he is hiding Jews. He used to go every Sunday to the village of Szczukowice, to see his friends. But he always came back, feeling sick from what the villagers told him. They told him that the Germans are not the only ones killing Jews and that the Polish Jedrusie Party (that's the nickname given to Polish partisans and is also the diminutive of the first name Andrzej) also searched for hidden Jews in order to kill them. They were continually telling many such stories, like that of Jews hiding with a Christian in a village. The Jedrusies would learn of this and would demand that the Polish person deliver the Jew to them. When refused, they would set his house on fire. Also, this story was frequently mentioned, when in another village, two brothers worked at the town hall. They had Polish passports. The Jedrusies learned that these two brothers were Jews. They went to take them from the town hall and executed them". Every Sunday, Józek reported these stories to us. (p. 229) Because everyone continually threatened him so much, saying that he was hiding Jews, he completely stopped going to the village on Sundays. It was the same every Sunday, when he came back from church. Whenever he had to deal with fellow Poles, he felt demoralized and his day was destroyed. As a result, he also stopped going to church on Sunday. He still does not want to share everything with us. He carried the burden of all these painful situations upon himself. But there is one scene we witnessed personally. One fine day a Polish man walking past his door greeted Józek, "Hello," and continued, "Józek, why are you looking so ill?" Józek replied that he was sick and was told that he had to eat better, but now everything had become so expensive. The other burst out laughing, saying, "What? Don't you have any money! You who have Jews in your home, this is not what you should miss out!" Józek sometimes came up to see us and talk. He could not comprehend what was happening to the Jews. The Germans exterminate the Jews, but they also kill Poles. The Poles should therefore be standing in solidarity with the few Jews who managed to escape and who try to remain in hiding. They should come to the aid of these Jews in every way. But the Poles are also massacring the few Jews who are still alive in Poland. "I thought that, if with God's help, you survived the war, I would be

considered a hero for hiding you. But it now appears that this will have to be kept a secret even after the war because, in the eyes of the Poles, I will have committed the greatest crime”.

We decided to stay with Józek for a few days before we returned to Mrs. Smiechowa to begin to dig a cellar at her place as well. We also decided to send a letter, through Józek, to our friends at the labor camp, to find out how things were going there.

The impression the Jedrusies made on us

We heard that a party (or more precisely a group of supporters) had formed an organization called Jedrusie. That's what they were called in the village, while some referred to them as AK for Armia Krajowa (“National Army”). This was an underground resistance movement, active throughout Poland from its creation in Autumn 1939 until its dissolution in January 1945. We thought that the advent of such a party would be a good thing and important to Jews, regardless of ideological influences. Whether under the control of the British army or the Russian Communist command, we Jews could join in their common goal. We had high hopes that they could join the fight against barbaric Hitlerism. We thought that whatever the name of that party, we could join it. This is what our common sense told us. But we did not foresee that the members of this organization could also become major enemies to the Jews. In some situations, we could understand and partially justify why they did not want Jews in their party. Indeed, it is difficult to rely on people who are condemned to death, people who cannot show themselves outside in the free world, who have no place to eat or sleep and who are compromised everywhere by their very presence. But the tragic truth was that we were seen by members of this organization as the very vermin described by barbaric Hitlerism and this we could not understand. I will only report one event that we ourselves personally witnessed. In the village of Szczukowice, where Józek lived, there was a Jewish family of 3. Of course, they had Polish papers, which allowed them to pass for Poles. He was a hatter. All Poles called him Czapnik. He lived in peace with all his neighbors and was even on very good terms with the mayor. Every Sunday, he went to church with his wife and their 11-year-old son. Along the way, he greeted everyone affably. As they passed by in front of Józek's house, Czapnik was pointed out and we were told that in the village, it became known that they were a Jewish family. On September 10, 1943, the Jedrusies entered their home and shot all three of them, leaving a message on the table that read, “We inquired and established that this family was Jewish. We have therefore accomplished

our mission and our duty”. They didn't take anything from the house. They even left the money that was on the table. The Polish neighbors buried the entire family in the woods. This story literally shattered us, physically and morally. We were fed so many horrific stories that we felt that we really didn't deserve to live on this earth.

The cave

My brother, Yudl, started to explain to us how they had dug this cellar. First, they dug a hole from the barn to under Józek's house. The hole was 2.20 m wide, 2.20 m long, and 1.80 m high. They couldn't dig any deeper because water was starting to come in. As Yudl explained, “We put a post in each corner, and then we put boards on the posts. Between these planks and the floor at Józek's, we left a space of 35 cm that we filled up with earth, sand and clay, so that the ground should remain firm and soundproof at Józek's, so no one could hear us when we speak in our cellar. The walls were made of clay and they held up well, but remained very damp. We couldn't stand in there because there was only a total height of 1.50 m. We therefore had planks on the floor, so that we could lie down. We lined all 4 walls with sheets”.

The entrance to the cellar

The hole in the barn was 55cm by 60cm. Yudl had made a little food bin that you could push into the cellar to open the hole, or push back from the inside into the barn to close the opening. This bin was constantly filled with food and straw for the calf. When closing the hole, it was impossible to notice anything. It looked like it was a crate of calf food. Józek had carried the sand and dirt into the forest that had to be removed in order to dig the hole. This way there would be no evidence of any digging. We all stayed together for several days in this cellar. Every now and then one or both of us would go up to the attic to get some fresh air. In the cellar, the little air we breathed came in from the bin that opened up to the barn. But the 5 of us could not go up to the attic together because we would always run the risk of having to rush back to the cellar. And that would have been impossible because it was not so easy to get inside. This required that everyone lie down in turn and push each other with their feet to get inside.

What we ate

Every morning, Józek brought us zalewejka (sorrel soup) and a few pieces of bread. In the evening it was grated potatoes and soup. The calf has got into

the habit of lying down on the opening that was the entrance to our cellar. Whenever Józek came with the food, he was forced to kick the calf away, but the calf flatly refused to move. While trying to get the calf to move, Józek often spilled the soup. In general, it was difficult for him to bring food to us. Yudl, my brother, told us one day that he had a good idea about resolving this issue. He took a stick and attached a pin to the end of the stick. When Józek entered the barn to bring us food, Yudl struck the calf with the pin, which quickly got the calf to move away from the entrance. Józek, seeing that the calf was standing up when it arrived, chuckled and said out loud, "God of heaven! I see now that God is protecting you, since even the calf understands that you need to eat".

My description of events

In the attic, we had neither a table nor a chair. I was writing on my knees. But at least we could see there and we could breathe. Whereas now, in the cellar, conditions were much worse. It was totally dark. We only had a small kerosene lamp that barely burned. We didn't want to turn up the flame because we didn't have enough air. The oil stank. Yet, I continued to write, just blindly. Unfortunately, I was unable to read what I wrote. Writing meant a great deal to me and I cared very much about writing about everything we experienced. I hoped that, if we didn't survive all of this, my writings would survive. I thought that if my diary should be found, people would read it and at least our names would be remembered.

On September 20, 1943, Józek returned from the Kielce labor camp and brought us several letters from our friends. All 5 of us decided to leave and go to Ms. Smiechowa and construct a similar cellar at her place. We thought we should tell Józek where we were going because we had complete confidence in him. We also felt we had to explain to him that it was better for us to have two hiding places, in case we had to give up one for a while. However, Ms. Smiechowa was not to know anything about Józek, or where he lived, or what his name was. She only had to know one thing, that we had a second place, that the person there knew we were at her place and that this person was looking out for us. On September 21, we were back at Mrs. Smiechowa's house, ready to dig our cellar. My brother Yudl, carefully observed all the details to successfully carry out his plans. It was almost the same plan as with Józek's, but a little smaller. This time the work was much more difficult because that we had to carry every handful of soil ourselves, at night, far into the forest. On October 1, 1943, our cellar hideout was finally completed. Moyshe and my brother Yudl returned to Józek's place,

while my brothers-in-law, Yiedl and Dovid and I stayed in the cellar at Mrs. Smiechowa's.

In the cellar, I started writing once again.

I am copying here verbatim the letters we received, through Józek, from our friends in the Kielce labor camp during these years of the occupation:

“Dear Moyshe-Meyer, I received your letter. My joy was boundless, you can't imagine. We thought we lost you. We couldn't explain your silence any other way. My dear Moyshe-Meyer, unfortunately I cannot satisfy your request for a detailed letter, in which I am able to tell you everything that has happened to us, since your departure until now. I am not able to describe all of this, so I'll just summarize it for you: It was the night of [Saturday] May 29-30. The labor camp was surrounded by police and more Ukrainians than at the time of the general deportations. The children, the old and the sick were grouped apart, to shoot them of course. The workers from the Ludwików foundry were gathered in a separate group and the other workers into a separate group. Among the first, 420 men were selected. The rest were put with the other workers. Some of them were sent to Blizyn, and the rest to Pionki with no mention at any time of being illegal or not. Spiegel and Birgental, along with their wives, as well as all the active Jewish policemen remained. They continue to be our leaders. Yes, it is not easy to get rid of the leeches that have taken hold of our bodies and draw the last drop of blood from us. We have been placed in barracks in Henryków, built especially for this purpose. Your cousin, Leybush Goldsheyd is in Pionki. He asks all the time in his letters, if I hear from you. They shot all the children. How can one imagine this! You are very lucky not to have seen this. The chilling cries of the children still ring in my ears. Moyshe Meyer, the conditions here are such that I cannot tell anyone that I am in contact with you. If someone was ever suspected of having links with someone outside, it would be assumed that person was on the verge of escaping and would immediately be taken from Kielce to another labor camp. Dear friends, I turn now to the essential point. Looking at the situation, even from the point of view of the German press, it is clear that the war is moving in leaps and bounds towards its end. That is why I ask you, once again, and appeal to your conscience to save me, my brother Yekl and my two friends. Please pull us from the clutches of the angel of death. Realize that, the day before yesterday, we had a visit from a Gestapo commissioner from Radom and this morning from Geier himself. You can imagine how our hearts were beating. We thought they were coming to shoot us. I stop writing now. Receive my best wishes and stay

healthy. Your friend, who will never forget you and who hopes to see you again in freedom, Yisroel Lemberger”.

Dear friends, The feeling that I had when I heard from you, no one can imagine it, unless it is felt under the same conditions. Certainly, speaking with Lemberger every day, I understood that you are surely alive, but that is something else when there is evidence of it. Leybush Goldsheyd has written to me several times asking if I have heard from you. It has been difficult for me to write about you so far. Likewise, with regard to your request to send your greetings to various friends, I am unable to meet your request you at this moment because of the harsh measures that are taken against people who have contact with outsiders. As far as I'm concerned, nothing has changed, except that the circle of people I am still able to talk with has shrunk. You can't imagine how much we would have the need to talk about today. Times are so tense that unimaginable things can be expected every day. I have little time now because I write during my lunch break. I will try to write a letter to you at the next opportunity. God grant that next time we are all reunited. Anyway, I am very happy to hear from you. No matter how my life ends, I am confident that some friends will survive and present our excruciating suffering to the world as the end draws near. You remember the phrase "This game won't last long" (from a very popular song by Mr. Gebirtig:" Avreml the Thief). As for our living conditions so far, I will tell you about it next time. Hello and kisses to all. I look forward to more good news from you. Shmuel Liberman”.

“Dear Moyshe-Meyer, We welcomed the fact that you have communicated with us and view this as a remarkable event. You must understand that your silence caused us great concern. We could not understand, unless some misfortune had occurred that forced you to get in touch with us. When I received your letter, my eyes welled up with tears. So, there are still people thinking of us somewhere! Should I thank you? Do I need to express our gratitude to you? No, that's not necessary. This is not what I am suggesting. Moyshe-Meyer, since that memorable Passover night when we parted, it seems to me that an eternity has passed. So much misery and suffering have happened to us since then. The days go by quickly, one after the other, but each day begins with a new misfortune for us and comes to make our lives unbearable. A considerable part in the poisoning and destruction of our lives are due to our co-religionists, our friends and even more so by all our Jewish leaders. They stand faithfully in the service of Hitlerism. Barbarity! It is impossible to describe to you, even a minutest fraction of what we have had to endure and still endure. I believe, I am even convinced, that we will be

allowed to share our experiences with you in personally in the future. Moyshe-Meyer, there is one thing we are forced to admit. The Jewish people have been betrayed by God. Indeed, we do not see in anyone, the slightest spark of pity for the Jewish people. Be well and accept your friend's salvation, Yekl Lemberger”.

We read these letters with deep sorrow and with tear filled eyes. We cried over our own misfortunes and theirs. But it was not possible for us to help them. I found myself absorbed in my thoughts. My God, you have eyes that see everything that is happening on this earth, and you are a God of mercy; you saw how infants were torn from the hands of their mothers and thrown while still alive in the toilet! Where is your pity? Didn't you see how the Germans and Ukrainians entered the labor camp with trucks to take away the last children? The graves were already prepared in the Jewish cemetery. The children, understanding what was going to happen to them, started running away in fear as the Ukrainians chased them and smashed them to the ground with their rifle butts. Consequently, it was their own mothers who caught them and put them in the truck in order to prevent their further suffering while they were still alive. We have witnessed all this! In the cemetery, the children, for fear of being beaten, were forced to undress on their own while standing in front of the grave that was dug for them. Trembling at the thought of being savagely beaten again, they climbed down into their grave on their own. The Ukrainians followed up by firing a few rifle shots. While most of the children were still alive, they sprinkled the caustic lime on them and filled the pit with sand. And you, God of mercy, observed all this! In Treblinka, the young and old, men, women and children undressed themselves quickly and lined up to enter the gas chambers, all to avoid receiving blows. They had no choice, even though many could see where they were going. And you, God of mercy, contemplated all this! This was Treblinka. In each convoy, they selected a few Jews, who were needed to work in sorting all the clothes, belonging to those who had gone to the gas chambers. Once their work was completed, these Jews were taken to a grove near the extermination camp and there they were all shot. But murderers would not simply let these Jews go into the woods empty-handed. They made them line up and they killed one out of every two Jews. Thus, every living man had to carry a dead man on his back and carry the body all the way to the burial site. There they were forced to dig pits and lie in them beside the dead. They were all then shot. We accepted all this, for the sole purpose of not having to endure the beatings and the pain and not to be killed with a shovel smashing our head. All of this, Merciful God, you have

observed perfectly. These were not isolated cases but thousands, hundreds of thousands, millions of people, young and old, men, women and children, each with worse fates than the next. And you, God, you stayed looking at it all without moving. God, it is you who created the universe as well as man. You have endowed man with understanding and the faculty of thinking. So, I would like to understand the reason why you created the Jewish people. My God, I remember the Passover services, when we gathered our entire family, to read the Haggadah. When we came to the “shfoyk khamoskho al hagoyim” (pour out your anger on the people), we opened the door to its full width. It was “lezeykher shehi leyl-shimurim”, a symbol of freedom, a sign that you, God, protect us, “veeyn masirn mishum dover” and we have nothing to fear from anyone. Now, God, I promise you that if I ever have the opportunity to celebrate Pesach and participate in a service by reading the Haggadah, when it comes to “shfoyk khamoskho al hagoyim”, I will go open the door wide and ask you to kindly leave us alone and go and pick on the goyim. (p.238)

The rest of our stay in our cellars

The cellar we had made at Mrs. Smiechowa's was almost the same size as the one at Józek's. We had dug it up in the unfinished room, under the floor of the first room. We made it very deep, so that above our cellar, under the floor, there was a thickness of soil, a good half a meter deep. That way, the floor didn't sound hollow and in the event that someone had planted a spike into the floor, all that they would strike would be dirt. The most important thing in all of this, was to camouflage the entrance, which consisted of a crate filled with sand, which opened up from the inside. As soon as we sensed something wrong or that soldiers were approaching, we would shut ourselves inside while Mrs. Smiechowa sprinkled some more sand to level it with the ground. We felt it was not possible to notice anything amiss. We only reacted this way when we saw soldiers coming or when we heard that searches were going on. But for simple neighbors or acquaintances who dropped in or passing by, we did not move the crate, because once the entrance was closed, there was very little air available in our cellar. Even our little oil lamp could no longer stay on. We solved this predicament by planning to purchase a few white rabbits to justify making a small feeder that was filled with food for the rabbits. If a neighbor or acquaintance entered, even though we knew Mrs. Smiechowa wouldn't let anyone pass into the next room, we would go into our cellar and just place the feeder over the entrance opening. The rabbits were able to eat while the feeder still allowed some air into the cellar. We bought 4 rabbits. Needless to say, after

a relatively short time, instead of 4 rabbits we had a whole bunch of rabbits. Thanks to this, we were able to have rabbits at lunch every Sunday. This is how we spent the first few days there. All the days we were confined to the darkness of the unfinished room, while staring out through the slits in the planks that closed the window. As soon as we saw someone, we went immediately into our cellar and we locked ourselves in. But after a while, when we observed that entire days and weeks go by without anyone ever attempting to enter our room, we started to relax and stopped descending into our cellar hideout every time a stranger showed up. We would always stand behind the door listening to the conversations. This habit went so far, that even when we saw soldiers or Ukrainians who resided in the red building come regularly to sit with rifle in hand at the well which stood in front of our window, and chat with Mrs. Smiechowa and her children. We were able to watch and listen to their conversations through the slits in our window. Things happened exactly the opposite of what we feared would happen. We feared that the children would share a story or let something slip by mistake. After the soldiers had left, we heard Bogda, Wanda and even little Ignac, warn their mother by asking her not to chat so much with the soldiers. They told her to chat less with them and they might not come here so often. The children felt scared and it appeared that they were better at keeping secrets. Weeks have passed like this. In the room we were in, we were not allowed to speak, let alone cough or sneeze. We had to tiptoe around so that no one, God forbid, was able to hear outside that there were people in the second room. We had to make do with what we could before heading back to our cellar. Listening regularly to the conversations of passing Poles, one thing struck us and we never ceased to be astonished. We have heard conversations about everything imaginable, but never a word was said about the Jews. We never heard one word about what was happening to the Jews. This seemed characteristic. These people were living such a dark page of history, which one could even say, was the darkest page in the history of the world, where they were able to witness their fellow citizens, neighbors and friends taken from almost every town and village, to exterminate them in such a dreadful manner. How is it possible that among all those who are called " Poles" there is no mention of this misfortune nor regrets about their former neighbors and friends who were Jewish? We heard discussions covering everything the Germans had done in Poland, but no one seemed to recall what the Germans had done to the Jews. It was as if such things never happened or as if these events happened at least 100 years ago. For us who were cut off from the world, separated from the rest of humanity, since it was very rare that we saw a newspaper, it was very interesting to

hear these conversations between people who were free and enjoyed the possibility of knowing what was going on. Perhaps, we could still just hear a word that would give us some comfort. Perhaps, we could just hear the words that we were so impatiently waiting for. We who had gone through so many gloomy weeks, now found ourselves at a dead end. In fact, our thoughts, our hopes were no longer felt that we would be to be able to hold out until the end of the war and witness the defeat of Hitlerism. Just thinking about these things, we realized was just a fantasy, a dream. The Russian Red Army was still very far from us, even though, after the battles of Orel, Bryansk and Kharkov, it had fully taken over the initiative. Nevertheless, the Germans still controlled all of Europe.

Mrs Smiechowa asks us to leave

This happened at the beginning of November 1943. The days had become very cold and tree leaves were strewn all over the ground. The Poles of the village had finished all their work in the fields. Some of them had already started to insulate their wooden houses with fir branches so that the wind would not blow inside. You could see and feel winter approaching. Ms. Smiechowa had also started to prepare for winter. Along with her children, she brought back branches from the forest to better seal her house. She had also bought some firewood to keep warm during the winter. We put the wood in the attic. We were talking among ourselves, saying that winter here at Mrs. Smiechowa's house shouldn't be too bad for us. Indeed, few people were moving around, especially at night, so we would be able to stay longer inside her home to warm up. It would certainly be much more painful for Moyshe and Yudl, who were staying at Józek's. In winter, they could not stay in the attic and they could not enter Józek's house, even for a minute, because his neighbors spent the entire day there, until late at night. They had no choice but to stay in their cellar all the time. Because of the cold and the rain, there were days that Mrs. Smiechowa was not able to lead the cattle to the meadow. She no longer took out the cow with her calf, nor the pig. This meant that she had to prepare a little chopped straw every day to feed the animals. It was very painful for her because she didn't have a chopper for the straw. She had to carry the straw to a neighbor's house every day, and that's where she chopped the straw before bringing it back home. One day, she told us that she was going to buy a chopper, because she found it too difficult to have to carry the straw to her neighbor every day. In past days, she got by like this, but now that she could afford it, she didn't see why she should have to concern herself about this. We couldn't tell her not to buy one, even though we didn't think this would be a good idea. It was clear to us

that it be best for us, if she did not buy anything that might reveal her financial situation to her neighbors. That very evening, after Mrs. Smiechowa returned from the village, we noticed her face very pale and nervously walking in circles without saying a word. Obviously, a new problem had arisen. We asked her if she had bought a chopper. She replied in an irritated, angry voice, "Yes, I bought it! It will be delivered to me in a few days". She added, "But I have to tell you something really tragic. I believe you have to go this very day". The shock of these words made us suddenly shake and turn pale. We asked her what had happened. She told us that the entire situation was not yet clear, but there was a rumor in the village that there was a whole gang hiding in her home. To some folks, they were robbers, to others they were Jews. However, she hadn't been told exactly what people were saying. One of her brothers-in-law had only secretly whispered in her ear, that she should be careful because the whole village was talking about her. She continued to say that, someone must have been over and heard voices through the wall in the other room. We replied that it was impossible, since we absolutely never spoke in that room. On the contrary, we felt that the neighbors must have noticed that she had a lot of money in order to be constantly buying herself all kinds of things, when they knew very well that she had no income. They must certainly have theorized explanations for this wealth. As she had stated that we had to leave that very day, we started to make our preparations, even though we thought that the situation was not yet so bad. We felt that there was no need to leave so quickly. It was never clarified, nor did we know exactly what was said and where this information came from. We knew that if we responded to her that it was not yet necessary to leave or that we would not leave that very day but another day, that would only antagonize her. She might begin to get nervous and believe to feel trapped in a risky business that is hard to get out of. We felt that this could turn out a lot worse for us if she started to feel paranoid. Indeed, she might well agree to allow us to remain, but it would be in fear. There might come a time when it would be really dangerous to be in her house and she would probably take every opportunity to get rid of us. The same situation existed for Józek. He knew we had a second place to hide. So, in case of danger, he believed that we could quite easily relocate. We believe we had really found a good way to extend our stays as much as possible. We had done this to make sure that none of them came up with the thought of wanting to take our money some other way, while getting rid of us. We have heard many stories about many Poles who killed Jews themselves, in order to get their money without having to endure fear and worry. Mrs. Smiechowa told us about an incident that had happened two days earlier.

Her eldest daughter, Bogda, was in the street with friends from the village. Her friends mentioned during their conversation, that in a village near Kielce, some Jews were staying with Poles. One of her friends, Jarowski, then cried out, "Why are you surprised about the Poles over there, when we have the same thing here at home!" Bogda felt targeted, even though she wasn't sure who Jarowski was talking about exactly. Bogda was able to divert the conversation to something else and everyone soon separated. Mrs. Smiechowa noticed that we were getting ready to depart. It got her thinking about what to do. Keep us or not. I imagine she thought to herself, that if we left and if everything remained quiet in the neighborhood, she would permanently lose a valuable source of income. I felt this was the case, as she told us not to leave just yet. We should wait a few days to see what exactly these rumors were.

Shots in the wood

This took place on November 9, 1943, 5 days after Mrs. Smiechowa asked us to leave. We were sitting in the dark while in the second room, when suddenly gunshots rang out from the grove, known as the "Jarowski Grove". This was only, approximately 50 meters away from us. We rushed over to the slits in the wall and we saw 4 Ukrainians coming out of the woods, rifles in hand, looking around as if searching for someone. Barely a moment later, they were in front of our house, each stationed in a corner to make sure no one came out. At that very moment, the Polish man with the chopper arrived at the door. When Ms. Smiechowa opened the door for him, one of the Ukrainians was able to sneak inside. He went straight to the door to the second room. Hearing his footsteps inside the house, I immediately jumped down into the basement while Dovid rushed for the door. He put on the chain while blocking the door with his foot. The Ukrainian knocked and pushed against his side of the door, while Dovid held it back on the other side. Yiedl, who hadn't fully realized what was going on, believed when hearing a knock on the door, that it was Mrs. Smiechowa who wanted to enter in order to cover the entrance to our cellar with sand. So, he removed the chain from the door. Seeing this, Dovid applied firm pressure with his foot blocking the door, while motioning for Yiedl to descend into the hiding place. It was impossible for him to even whisper because the Ukrainian would have heard him. The Ukrainian, seeing that the door would not open, despite his pressure on the door, was overcome with anger. He ran over to talk to Ms. Smiechowa. As soon as we heard through the door that he was away from the door, Dovid removed the chain, jumped into the hiding place and covered our entrance with the rabbit feeder back in place. The Ukrainian

who had gone to see Ms. Smiechowa, shouted at her who was hiding in the other room. She replied, frightened, that there was no one there. He continued to yell at her, saying that he heard a noise there. She responded by telling him that he must have heard the noise made by the rabbits that she kept in the room. And why was the door locked? She quickly pointed out that it is not locked, but gets blocked sometimes and is then difficult to open. Her response only made the Ukrainian more upset. He shouted at her to hurry and open the door immediately. In the meantime, two more Ukrainians ran to the windows with the intention of ripping off the planks, but they were unable to. I believe Mrs. Smiechowa understood that the door would not be closed anymore and that we would be in our cellar. She entered the house, followed by two of the Ukrainians, who forcefully threw open the door. One of the Ukrainians was visibly surprised that the door opened quite easily this time. As they rushed into the room with guns in hand, they found no one there. They turned the whole room apart with their guns, searching in every corner. They walked over to the feeder where the rabbits were eating and stood there a few moments watching them. Finding no one, they went out and searched the stable and the attic again. Finally, they left without saying a word. Ms. Smiechowa remained very frightened. She did not know whether they had left for good or whether they had gone to recruit more Ukrainians in order to carry out a more thorough search. We, in the cellar, were also deathly afraid. We couldn't stop our limbs from shaking. Dovid clenched his teeth. He was angry with his brother, Yiedl and warned him, "If you can't control your nerves at the critical moments, you cannot be in the room. You will have to stay in the cellar all the time". Dovid told me that it was our good fortune, that just as Yiedl removed the chain from the door, the Ukrainian stopped pushing for those few moments. Otherwise, he would have been able to open and we would no longer be alive. We remained in our cellar for 5 more hours, until the evening. During this time, we didn't know what was going on in the house. Were the Ukrainians gone or still here? We were seriously regretting not having left 5 days earlier, when Mrs. Smiechowa asked us. In the evening, she opened the entrance to the cellar. She had prepared something for us to eat. We could see that she was still very frightened. She told us right away that there was no way that we can stay here any longer. If we wanted to stay, we must commit to spending all the time in the hiding place. We immediately told her that we were leaving this very day and that we very much regretted not leaving earlier. Anyway, the condition that she imposed on us, to stay in our cellar all the time, was impossible to accept and forced our decision to leave immediately. We had already experienced struggling without air, these last 5 hours in the cellar.

We prepared to leave. It was already dark when we started to leave. As we were about to walk out, she asked us again if we were going to come back to her house. We told her Dovid would come in two weeks to share any news. Mrs. Smiechowa then went out with her children to look around, to make sure no one was around to see us as we left.

At Józek

The night was very beautiful. A cool breeze dried the damp earth beneath our feet. It wasn't that dark either. The fresh air gave us great pleasure. So, we were going slowly, step by step. We were chatting among ourselves in low voices. Dovid said to me, "You obviously forgot to take back the 20 gold dollars you gave Mrs. Smiechowa the day before yesterday to exchange them for zlotys". I replied, "No, I haven't forgotten, but I preferred not to take them back so that she would see that we want to keep our contact with her. Taking back the money would mean breaking all ties". As we walked, our eyes teared. We felt bitter because we had prepared this place all summer, in anticipation that we had a better place for the winter than at Józek's place. Now, as winter was approaching, we were forced to leave. Our journey to Józek's appeared safe. We only feared passing by the railway line because it was sometimes guarded by Ukrainians. Once past the rails, we could see Józek's house which was not far from there, maybe 300 meters in all. As we approached, we no longer recognized the house. It was covered on all sides with fir branches for the winter. The door and the windows could hardly be distinguished now. Even their doghouse was carpeted. We were jealous of the dog, as even this dog was ensured the right to live. Her master has already prepared a warm kennel for her for the winter, while we don't even have a kennel like this. We went to the little back window that looked out onto the courtyard. Knocking on this window was our sign of recognition. Józek immediately opened the door for us and greeted us with a smile. Yudl and Moyshe were, at the moment, sitting in a corner during dinner. Seeing us, they looked surprised and a little frightened. They knew something was wrong. After greeting us, my brother Yudl asked me, what's going on. I told him nothing happened, we just decided to come. I didn't want to tell them while inside the house where Józek would be able to hear us. We didn't want to tell Józek everything. This answer was not acceptable to Yudl, who told us, "You tell us right now while having our dinner here because we are going to sleep in our cellar tonight. So far, we have spent all of our time in the attic, but it is getting too cold. It's no longer possible to stay in the attic. We have prepared the cellar so that we can stay there permanently. But we designed it for up to five people, figuring you might be

joining us. It's good that you will have a place to lie down. It's a remarkable coincidence, that just as we finish our cellar and got ready to go downstairs to sleep, you appear!" I was very curious to see how this cellar was constructed. I cannot imagine it. We stayed in the house for a little while, chatting about a number of things with Józek. He didn't ask us why we came or if we intended to stay. It was always like that with Józek. He never interfered with our decisions. Whether we were leaving or returning, these decisions were all left up to us.

Sleep in the cellar

Moyshe and Yudl lit a lamp and led us into the barn. Yudl pushed aside the calf that was eating and lifted the feeder. He threw himself on the ground and crawled under the manger. Moyshe handed him the lantern and also crawled into the cellar. On entering, we got ourselves soiled with calf dung. This entry was much worse than the one in our previous cellar, which also was wet with animal urine. Little air entered, except through the opening under the feed trough of the small barn which housed a cow, heifer, calf, in addition to a horse and a few chickens. Their excrement was never cleaned up. The smell was constantly permeating our cellar. Once we all got into the cellar, we moved the feeder in place, making it impossible to notice our cellar entrance. Inside, we were delighted when we saw that we would have a place to lay down and not have to sleep outside in the open. The cellar was 2 meters long, 160 cm wide and 130 high. You couldn't stand-up inside, but you could sit. The walls were lined with straw to keep out the cold and humidity. There were also a few shelves in case you wanted to place something there. They had made a box spring to lie on, out of planks and of straw. Other boards were already planned to enlarge this sleeping area in case we came. At night, we covered the entire length of the cellar with these boards and we spread the straw out. We were all able to lie down. But we all had to position ourselves in the same direction. If anyone wanted to turn around during the night, we all had to turn around at the same time. During the day we would undo one half of the bed and move the straw and planks to the other half. In this way, we had a place to sit. We hardly slept the first night. We shared with each other the vicissitudes we all had to go through. We were especially happy with this cellar, because we saw that our major problem for the winter, which was freezing to death, was practically solved. Every morning we would go up to the barn to relieve ourselves on the manure heap. We splashed a few drops of water on our faces and then returned to the cellar. Józek brought us a large bowl of soup twice a day. Steam from the hot contents of the bowl would plunge our cubicle into

darkness. We were unable to see each other anymore, let alone see what we were eating. It has happened more than once, that we mistook the worms or flies that fell from the boards into the bowl, for barley kernels or chunks of onion. My brother Yudl joked, "Everything is going really great now. We still see a little bit of what we put in our mouths. It was a lot worse when we were in the attic." At 4 a.m. it was dark and cold so we went back to sleep. After 5 or 6 hours of sleep, we thought the day was going to break sooner or later. It was then that Cilka, Józef's 10-year-old daughter, would go up to the attic with the food bowl, and shout, "Hey, hey, hey!, Put the bowl down and scramble back down". Half asleep, we groped for the bowl and we ate in the dark. More than once we had to spit out worms or remove mice from our bowl."

In the cellar

Very quickly, the cellar would heat up. Our lamp sometimes even refused to light, as we were so short of air. The bread that we kept on the shelves stayed dry, as did the straw on the walls. But where it was in contact with the wall, the moisture collected and the straw began to rot and smell badly. The worms and fleas began to proliferate. We made a trap for the mice that came from the barn. And when a rat entered our little domain, the rat never fared well, as it did not come out alive. We suffered the most from worms and fleas. At night, while we were sleeping, worms kept falling onto our faces and we felt as if they were devouring us. In this way, day after day passed, without our knowing whether it was day or night or even whether it was winter or summer. We tried to find something to do, to avoid the painful boredom and not get so fed up with life. We had made a game of chess, and we were playing it often. We spent entire days commenting on our terrible fate and what had happened to us. We continually remembered our children, our loved ones and mourned them. On a few occasions, we got into serious fights over issues we couldn't agree on. Each of us behaved according to our own character, according to what our own reasons dictated and we refused to be conciliatory towards each other. That's why we sometimes found ourselves hurting each other. It's truly remarkable. Five men who are locked together in a cellar with no one having anything more to their name than any of the others. No one has a more loving wife than the others, no brighter children, no more flourishing business. We were all consigned to suffer the same misfortune, all mourning the loss of our families. We were all threatened at every moment with the same death. We suffered the seemingly unending wait together in this cellar, with the same hope, the same goal, and yet we could not come together. The nature of man is such, since the world

was created, that men have never been able to get along. It appeared to be impossible to share these close quarters in peaceful harmony. It was a challenge for us to maintain the necessary balance to act accordingly and avoid doing things that were irritating to each other.

The Jedrusies with us permanently

Józek, seeing that we were staying in our cellar all the time, was very happy. He finally felt able to relax a bit. When we were in the attic, he was a little frightened and had to be careful. But now, he no longer felt that he had to take extraordinary precautions. He felt that he was able to drop his protective wing almost entirely. He began to behave as though he had taken no risks in hiding Jews in his home. Edek, his cousin, a young man of twenty-something, began to visit him from time to time. He belonged to the Jedrusi party (AK) and carried a gun in his pocket. Although being an armed Jedrusi, he still had to make a living. This was accomplished with several other party friends, who every night would go out with their guns to a different village to rob the local cooperatives, or sometimes, the wealthier farmers. They would return with sacks full of flour, sugar, brandy, pig meat and they would bring it all to Józek's. This is where they shared the spoils of the evening. Each took their share. Of course, they also gave Józek something. The rest of the evening was spent with a whole night of drinking and partying. These kinds of nightly operations became a routine activity. They were done on their own initiative, without any authorization of the party. We didn't like any of this kind of activity at all. We were angry at Józek for involving himself in this kind of thing without even telling us about it. Whenever one of these gatherings took place, we would stay holed up in our cellar, very scared and very upset with Józek. We also noticed that these parties were getting bigger and bigger. We decided that I would go up to Józek's one night, to talk about it and ask him if it was possible to resolve this troubling matter. We felt compelled to let him know that we didn't agree with what was going on and we felt that he had to make a choice. Jews and Jedrusi were not morally equivalent. Would he choose Jedrusies over Jews? Józek had sensed that all of this activity was not to our liking. He understood immediately what I wanted to talk to him about and he told me straight away, "I'm not afraid of them. You can be rest assured that they won't know anything about your presence". I replied, "No, Józek. We don't like this business at all. We waited and carefully considered what to do. This is what we have decided to tell you. You have to make a choice. If you want to deal with the Jedrusies, then we can't stay here. But in turn, consider carefully what you can hope to get from them and what you can receive from us. On

their part, it may happen that you have to pay with your life for a kilo of sugar or flour. While on our part, if God protects you and allows us to come out alive, you will be assured of a happy future". Józek promised me everything and that he would now be wise and disciplined, but in practice, very little changed until the day we found ourselves in great danger, all because of this.

One Sunday night, the gang got together and they got down to drinking and having a wedding. While in the cellar, our lamp was having difficulty staying lit. Yudl and Moyshe took the bottle of petroleum in order to add more fuel, thus rekindle the flame. But being very tense, they knocked over the bottle. Quickly trying to grab the bottle, Yudl dropped the lamp and it broke. The oil, mixed with gasoline, ignited. In an instant, the fire quickly spread. The chaff of the straw walls quickly ignited. In one brief moment we were caught in a terrible fire. We felt hopeless in our cellar, not knowing what to do to extinguish the fire. We couldn't scream or rush up out of our cellar because of the Jedrusies. We managed to grab our clothes and the pillow and threw ourselves into trying to smother the flames. Finally, we managed to put out the fire. Smoke billowed from under the manger and entered the barn. As for us, we were badly burned and were on the verge of suffocation. Inside the house, Józek smelled smoke and realized that something must have happened in the cellar. He made the Jedrusies leave quickly. This allowed us to finally emerge from the cellar. Józek realized that he bore a heavy responsibility in this matter and he promised us that he would not let them come back.

Dovid goes to Ms. Smiechowa

On December 15, 1943, after five weeks in the cellar, we started to run out of money. We sent Dovid to Mrs. Smiechowa to bring back the money she had to get for us, in exchange for the \$ 20 we gave her. At the same time, he needed to inquire more generally about her state of affairs. A few days later, Dovid returned and successfully with the money, as well as news from Ms. Smiechowa. Since our sudden departure, she went to great pains to clarify the reason for the searches conducted by the Ukrainians. The Ukrainians tried to give her a story that someone had shot at them while in the forest and that they were looking for the perpetrators. But this story was obviously false. No one had shot them. They themselves had fired several times, to have a pretext for their searches. All this, apparently because a few days earlier, bandits had broken into the tavern not far from Mrs Smiechowa's house and had stolen a heifer and a pig. The owners of this tavern suspected

that Mrs. Smiechowa was hiding suspicious people. So, the owners must have concluded that it could well have been these bandits that took the heifer and the pig. As the Ukrainians spent all their time in this tavern, they too learned of this story. Perhaps it was the owners who urged the Ukrainians to search at Mrs. Smiechowa's. In any case, Mrs Smiechowa, who wanted to prove to the whole neighborhood, and more generally to all those who slandered her, that no one was hiding in her home, she began to receive the Ukrainians in her home. Every day a few came to her house to drink and sing. Now everyone knew it was impossible for her to have any suspicious people in her house.

One of those who started to visit her regularly, was the Ukrainian Commander, Kardanov, a man of about 38 years old. He was very well received by Mrs. Smiechowa. He told her that he had a brother in Germany, who wrote the newspaper, published in Russian, for Ukrainians, and he also told her that he came from a very wealthy Caucasian family. Their father was, allegedly, murdered by the Bolsheviks in 1920. In revenge, they had joined Hitler to fight against the Bolsheviks. The Commander, as a guest in her home, prevented the ordinary soldiers from coming to Ms. Smiechowa's house. He came there every day to spend 4 or 5 hours. All the town residents became aware that the Ukrainian Commander was dating Ms Smiechowa. Ms Smiechowa told Dovid that now it wouldn't occur to anyone that there might be others hiding in her house. She felt that she could hide two men at her home, provided that at times when the Commander was there, they stayed hidden in the cellar". Dovid added, "I didn't know what to say to that. So, I told her that I wanted to talk to you about it first". Right now, I had no intention of going anywhere. Each place had its faults. Going back there would definitely put us within range of their guns!

Water in the cellar

Sometimes we pray that something will happen and think it is going to be very beneficial. In practice, it later appears that this thing is in fact a disaster. When you pray for that sort of thing, then that's for sure, so God will answer it right away. Winter was approaching and we realized that we could not spend it in a house. Our biggest problem was to find a way not to, God forbid, die from freezing. Our first prayer was therefore that the winter be at least mild. God answered us, as the winter was very mild. There was no frost at all. It rained more than it snowed. The trouble was that our cellar was dug in loamy soil that was not very absorbent and water started to seep from the walls. One morning, we noticed that the planks that laid on the floor, serving

as our floor, were floating. On the first day, we didn't pay much attention to it. We simply lifted the planks and propped them up with pebbles. But the next day the boards were floating again. It started to worry us a bit. We waited until nightfall and set about emptying the water. We carried out 20 buckets, but despite our efforts, the water level was rising day by day. Every night we carried out more water. We almost had to spend our entire nights bailing water. But the water problem had proven to be overwhelming for us. It was coming in faster than we were able to empty it. Seeing that we weren't getting anywhere, we just gave up. We would wait to see how high the water would go. We couldn't undo our bed to sit down anymore because under the planks there was now a large puddle. There was so much water, we could have bathed there. Only in the mornings we briefly went out into the barn to relieve ourselves. Then we immediately returned to our cellar where we lied flat on the planks, as if we were inside a bread oven. We spent several days continually lying down. We were actually hoping there would still be some frost and it would stop raining. The water could, hopefully begin to flow out. But instead of the expected frost, it started to rain harder. The water was actually starting to lift our bed. When I felt the bed swaying on the water at night, I realized that things were very bad. The water would drive us out of our cellar. I was very worried, especially because my legs were getting stiff and in pain from lying so long in bed. I was worried that the sciatica pain in my leg, that I had suffered in the past, would return. While lying down, I came up with a plan. I thought that I should go to Mrs. Smiechowa and ask her if she would allow us to prepare her cellar so we could stay at her place. Due to the sandy nature of the soil by her, there would be no risk of water entering it. In such a cellar we could spend the entire day and we would have less to fear from the Commander who came regularly to visit her. In the morning, I shared my plan with everyone. I was ready to travel there and Dovid would be with me. When it was time to leave, I said to my brother Yudl, "If in 8 days I haven't come back, that will be a sign that Mrs. Smiechowa has agreed to allow us to move into her cellar. In the meantime, we should be able to gather all that we will need to do this work. You will then come and begin to prepare this cellar. If Ms. Smiechowa doesn't agree, I'll be back right away. We will then have to find another solution. "

I go back to Mrs. Smiechowa

It was January 29, 1944. Outside, a strong west wind was blowing. The wet snow that had fallen in small amounts earlier in the day had already melted. Dovid walked some distance in front of me, guiding the way and help me

avoid deep puddles. But I had trouble standing on my feet. As soon as I got outside, my head felt dizzy, like getting up after a terrible illness. Those three months spent lying in the cellar had ruined me physically. I no longer felt like a 36-year-old man, but like an old man who was already past 70 or 80 years. At Mrs. Smiechowa's, we had an agreed signal. If the window curtain was fully drawn, we could be assured that there were no strangers there and that we could knock. Mrs. Smiechowa made us feel very welcome and was delighted to have us there. The children were sitting around the table playing cards. Ignac immediately told us that the Commander had just left and left them cards. After dinner I told her that I would like to discuss something. She sat down next to me, her face smiling, and told me that I looked very bad. She pointed out that when I left her, I looked much better. No wonder. Our living conditions were getting worse by the day, I responded. Mrs. Smiechowa responded with some heartening news. She told us that we may soon be saved. The Russians were already marching on Poland. The Ukrainian Commander told her today that radio reports indicated that the Russians have taken Luck and Rovno (now: Rivne). He himself claimed that the Germans lost the war. He had already alluded, more than once, to the fact that if the Russians come any closer, he would need to retreat. He would hide, then try to get false Russian papers. He also expressed that he would like to move in with Mrs. Smiechowa. I asked her if she accepted his proposition. Her response to his plans were negative. She told him right away that it was not reasonable because it would be very difficult to hide someone. Especially since no one knew how long the war could last. In truth, she continued, it would be much more difficult to hide him than hide you Jews. She felt that nothing obliged her to keep us until the end of the war. If at any point the situation turned risky, we could leave at a moment notice, as we had a place where we could go to. Whereas with the Commander, she stated, from the moment that she let him enter her home, she would be obliged to keep him, no matter what the risks, until the war was over. There was no way she could agree to that. With regard to us, she expressed no problem to hiding us. She felt that hiding us was even better now. With these frequent visits from the Ukrainian, it won't occur to anyone that she was hiding anyone. But I remained puzzled. How could we stay here when the Commander spends so many hours here every day? How would we be able to hide from someone in the house and not be noticed? He's bound to notice something and then we would be lost. She, shook her head after a thoughtful silence. "Yes, it is true that it is a rather difficult situation to spend all of your time fearing that you could all get caught at any moment, but if you want to survive and are able to keep your wits about you, you will

be able to get out of a situation like this". I told her that we would like to come and hide here, but things were so different than before. To be sometimes in the other room or in this one and spending all our time on the lookout for the Ukrainians or the Commander to suddenly show up, was way too risky. But I had a plan that I was now ready to present to her. We could enlarge the cellar hideout, in order that we would all be able to stay there the entire time, including sleeping there. She, shook her head in response to my proposal. She doubted that she could accept this. Expanding the cellar was no small feat. The Commander might take notice and he would surely want to know what these strangers are doing there. In addition, she felt it wouldn't be a good deal for us to invest so much effort and money on this. There will now always be soldiers here. There may be another incident, necessitating that we leave at a moment notice. Nevertheless, she felt that if we wanted to stay here for a while, it was possible under current conditions. I didn't respond right away. I thought to myself, "This Commander feels already attached to her. He has shared intimate moments and conversations with her. His motivation and frequent visits are understandable. And she, being a widow for some time now, why wouldn't she take advantage of the war to find a man?" One big problem that wouldn't stop gnawing in my mind was, "Can I trust her in general? She could sell us out to the Ukrainians herself. It remains confusing. She wants us to stay here, but as soon as I talk to her about improving our security arrangements, she refuses. The opposite response would appear to be more logical. If we were to ask to be allowed to sleep in a room, because in a room, even on the floor, would be more comfortable than in a cellar, it would make perfect sense for her to refuse our request". Mrs. Smiechowa couldn't help but notice my serious frown while pondering this enigma. She asked me what was bothering me. I decided to frankly confront her with my growing concerns. "Because this Commander comes here so often, it occurred to me, that perhaps we could no longer trust you". This remark stung her deeply and she was very visibly upset. With tears in her eyes, she cried that she never hurt anyone in her life and never intends to ever hurt anyone. She added, that her words honestly reflected what was in her heart and mind. Nevertheless, I insisted that whether we stay here or not, the choice was in her hands. But if she wanted us to stay, she must make up her mind to accept our proposal that we expand the cellar, in order that we are able to have a permanent hideout and be able to sleep there. As for the construction cost, we would take care of that. If we were forced to leave as soon as the cellar was finished, that would be our misfortune. During the construction, we would take care not to leave any trace of our work. The Commander will not be able to notice anything. If

you don't agree, we'll leave tomorrow. We would not be able to hide here in the current state of conditions. The next day, Mrs. Smiechowa asked me what she needed to prepare for the cellar. I gave her some money and asked her to buy 15 wooden slabs and some planks. The posts were to be taken directly from the forest.

My brother, Yudl, returned with me and we began the job. It turned out to be more difficult than anticipated. During the day, there was absolutely nothing we could do. We had to stay in the cellar the entire time because the Commander was walking around the house. He also was accompanied by a few soldiers who joined him for the day. He ordered one to cut straw, another to thresh grain, a third to chop wood. He didn't let Ms. Smiechowa do any work. He brought in soldiers every day to do her job. Therefore, we could only work at night. We had to be careful not to leave even the slightest trace that could bring any attention to us. The worst work was due to the sand. We had to take it ourselves in bags far out into the fields. Mrs. Smiechowa was not making it easy for us. With every bag she would shout at us, that she warned us from the start that all this effort was useless and was going to get us caught. During this back breaking labor, we felt like we wanted to die. But the cellar was finally completed. Mrs. Smiechowa was still very happy when she saw that we managed to stay there all the time and even sleep there. More than once, she finally admitted that, without this cellar construction, there would have been no way we would have been able to make a permanent hideout.

A few days later, Moyshe and my brother-in-law, Yiedl, came to join us, but Mrs. Smiechowa did not want to have 5 people in her house. After a few days, they (Moyshe and Yiedl) had to return to Józek's, while the three of us remained. So far, everything was fine. In the house, Ukrainians spent entire days drinking, dancing and singing, as we laid in the basement waiting for them to die.

Kardanov leaves for France

On March 15, 1944, the Commander arrived early in the morning and reported that he and 9 other men had been ordered to prepare to leave. They were leaving for France. He was very distraught and was talking to Ms. Smiechowa in a low voice. Ms. Smiechowa was also very confused and upset. She was really in a difficult situation. She felt incapable of making decisions. The time had come to act on the plan she and the Commander had devised. Their plan was that he would desert the military and flee when they

wanted to send him elsewhere. She would hide with him and after the war they would get married. But in the meantime, as long as he was stationed in the red building, he was able to spend his days at her house. They had decided that he would only desert if they planned to send him elsewhere. They knew full well, that if he had tried to run away earlier, they would have known immediately that he was hiding in her house and they would have come looking for him. Indeed, all the Ukrainians, even the chief commander, a German, knew where he spent his days. So, they decided he would go with the rest of his unit, and on the way, he would make his escape and return to her here. When it came time to part, he took her aside and repeated his instructions to her, with regard to what she must do to him. We, hiding in the cellar, knew absolutely nothing about their plans. When we heard that the Commander was being sent elsewhere, we rejoiced and congratulated ourselves that we were finally able to be rid of him. From the moment he left, we did indeed feel a little more at ease. The Ukrainians no longer roamed the area. We could finally breathe a little and sleep more peacefully at night. Ms Smiechowa, on the other hand, started showing signs of nervousness immediately after his leaving. At night, she couldn't sleep. She was always listening for a noise, announcing the arrival of Kardanov. The question of what she would do in case he did arrive tormented her relentlessly. Perhaps she thought, that maybe she could put them together with her hidden Jews? He would stay with us in the cellar. I think she would realize how absurd that was. She probably figured that, once in the cellar, we would kill him. Perhaps, she might ask us to leave before he comes back? But what if he doesn't come back? She couldn't sleep and we imagined that she was constantly in a state of confusion as to what to do. She ultimately chose to update us on the situation by dropping a few hints. She tried to get us to believe that he may come back someday. If he happened to show up, it shouldn't be such a big surprise to us. On the night of March 20, while we were sitting in the house for a while, she turned the conversation to Kardanov, by saying that he was causing her pain. She asked us what we thought. After all, he was a supporter of Hitler. He also wanted to save his own skin. He is a man like everyone else. When he was taken prisoner by the Germans, the latter executed all Russian prisoners. Since he wanted to stay alive, he swore loyalty to Hitler. Now he realizes that the war is lost for Hitler. She told us that he did not want to have to leave for Germany because if there were to be any reversal of the situation in Germany, it would be very bad for him. On the other hand, he feared falling back into Russian hands. Clearly, he wouldn't be greeted with a hug after spending all this time serving Hitler. She told us that he complained all the time that he and his

comrades had lost everything and that they had no way out. I didn't want to offend her feelings. I could see how deeply she felt about this Ukrainian who had found himself in this "tragic" situation. So, I politely nodded and expressed my compassion, thinking to myself, how he deserved this. He must have murdered more than one Jew. She continued by telling us, that he asked her, that when the time came for him to leave, would she be willing to hide him here. If so, he would desert and come back to hide in her house. Through his Russian contacts, he would try to get false papers and perhaps, even stay with her here after the war. I asked her how she responded to him. She answered that it was not possible. How could she hide a soldier in her house until the end of the war? Who knows how long the war will last? If it had been a month or two, it would have been different. But without a precise duration, such a thing was impossible. But she added that, if he should show up, she wouldn't kick him out. Does that mean we should expect him to reappear around here? I questioned. She confidently responded that if he didn't come today, he would not come again. I asked her if she knew what the consequences were for her, if Kardanov deserted and tried to come back here? He'd be picked up before he even had time to reach your home. Didn't everyone know he always came to your house? They could also put you in jail for trying to hide him. In the middle of our discussion, we were startled by a noise outside near the house. We heard words shouted in German and Ukrainian. We had not yet made it down to the cellar when we heard loud knocking on the door and shouting "Aufmachen!" Aufmachen! (Open!). We were very deathly afraid. As we rushed into the cellar, it was clear to us that the house was surrounded on all sides by Ukrainians. Mrs. Smiechowa quickly covered our hideout entrance with sand and immediately went to open the door. German police quickly barged into the house and began to search everywhere. They turned everything upside down, looked under the beds and in every corner. In the other room they carefully looked around, scanning every corner with their flashlights. In the attic, in the stable, in the barn, they even scattered all the straw. Without saying a further word, they left the house. What we were just talking about, had come true. Kardanov must have fled and they were already looking for him here. Ms. Smiechowa also realized that Kardanov would certainly show up soon. She opened the cellar and told us, that she didn't know what they were looking for, but it would be best if we left today. We were very much annoyed by her. Because of her selfish interests, we could have lost our lives today. We quickly prepared to leave. After bidding her farewell, we left. During our journey it rained quite heavy. The darkness that enveloped us was such that there was no way we were able to see where we were walking. We stepped through

mud and deep puddles. We struggled walking slowly in the rain, with our feet slipping unsteadily in the mud with each step. When we reached the forest, we went to site of the Jewish tomb for a brief rest. We felt too exhausted to continue any further. We were soaked to the bone and the rain kept falling hard and lashing my face. Near the grave, we were taken by surprise to find another fresh and bigger grave right next to it. We had not yet taken the time to get a closer look at this grave, when we heard two people approaching. They were crawling through the waters that flooded the field at the edge of the grove. Frightened, we returned to the forest and laid there. We could not understand who would, so late at night in the pouring rain, take this little path leading to the grove.

Sunday morning, Józek went to church. (p.266) There he sat among the faithful, while the Czapnik incident, the killing of the Jewish family, was on the agenda. Everyone knew him well. He himself, came every Sunday. There were some who expressed that the Jews should not be killed. Others felt that it wasn't that bad if you killed one anyway. Since they were all talking about Jews, Józek was interested. He spoke up to express his feelings, that for Poles it would be the greatest mark of infamy to have helped Hitler in exterminating the Jews. But such a discussion could not be concluded without a dispute. And the argument escalated to Józek being accused out loud that he was hiding Jews. Some of the congregants shouted that they were going to shoot him along with them. Józek came home from church very angry. But he didn't say anything. Yiedl and Moyshe immediately noticed that Józek was angry because he usually came home from church to share with them any news. Sometimes he even brought them a newspaper. But this time he was pacing back and forth, very annoyed, but not saying one word. In the afternoon, Józek went for a walk to Szczukowice where his stepfather lived. Of course, all of the residents of Szczukowice spoke only of the Czapnik Jew. Everyone was also saying that Józek was also hiding Jews. Some of Józek's good friends took him aside and whispered in his ear, "They say you have Jews in your home too. Make sure you get in good standing." (turn them in to the Jedrusies). Józek came home that evening very worried. After such a day, he started to have a throbbing headache. He also suffered from stomach pains. He went to lie down, still not able to say anything. In the middle of the night, in complete darkness and in the pouring rain, a neighbor came knocking at their door and asked his wife, where was Józek? He had something very important to tell him. Józek's wife replied that Józek was sleeping. The neighbor then left without a word. Yiedl and Moyshe heard what the neighbor said. It upset them to the

point where they came out of the cellar and entered the house to ask Józek, why he did not care to learn what was so important. If the neighbor has come this far in such a rain, then it must certainly be of great interest to all of us. Józek waved it aside, dismissing it all. He shrugged his shoulders, then told us that he already knew what his neighbor wanted to tell him. He had a son in the Polish police. Perhaps they received a complaint there against him, that there were Jews in his house and he came to warn him. Yiedl and Moyshe were beside themselves. What! Doesn't that matter? Should we not know this, they cried in shock. Józek finally revealed to them all the terrible experiences of his day. He added that he didn't want to talk to them about it today because he was thinking, where would they go now? In such darkness and in such a downpour. They would be wading through mud and water up to their necks. Hearing all this, it took only five minutes before Yiedl and Moyshe fled from Józek's place. They trudged across flooded fields in the driving rain. As they fled from Józek's house, they could already hear the sound of a group of Jedrusies about to surround the house in search of the Jews. It appeared impossible to walk through the flooded fields. They knew they had to also cross two raging streams. The night was pitch black and the driving rain united the two streams into a raging river that had covered the fields. Nevertheless, they managed to traverse the deep waters that were up to their necks. Finally, they reached the grove and sat down on the cool grave for a while. Yiedl whispered, "God of heaven! Maybe it will be time for us too. Is there no limit to what we have to endure?" Lying in the grove, we now were able to discern Yiedl and Moyshe. What a surprise! When we rushed over to join them, we were speechless. Our tears mingled with the rain. In our present situation with no place to go, we envied the dead that found their final resting place in this recent tomb. It was clear that we could no longer return to Józek's place. That left only the option of going back to Mrs. Smiechowa. If the Commander wasn't there yet, she'd hopefully let us in.

Arriving there, we knocked on her door, which she quickly opened. She understood that something had to be wrong, as all five of us appeared together at her door. She didn't say a word, but I know she thought of the irony of putting out 3 and now getting 5. We all went down into the cellar, took off our soaked clothes, and finally got to lie down. We had to admit to ourselves that spending our time in a cellar is terrible, but the alternative of not having any place to hide was worse. This night of March 20, 1944 is a night that will always be present in our memories for as long as we live. The next morning, Ms. Smiechowa came over to talk to us. A Ukrainian she

knew, told her that the day before, as they were leaving her house after the search, that they had just captured Commander Kardanov. The Kielce police immediately arrested him. He claimed that his intention was to just come and say farewell to Ms. Smiechowa. After Mrs. Smiechowa told us this, we thought, she might expect us to explain why we were all here. We only told her that we could no longer stay in our second hiding place because the water had flooded our cellar hideout.

(This is where this narration ends, but not the twists and turns, since Kielce was not liberated by the Red Army until January 16, 1945).

The first pages of the story were written in the Summer, probably 1943.

Mein Leben

Reflections of a Jew from Kielce

by Moshe Mayer Baum

(final chapter translated by Philip Ravski and edited by Manny Bekier)

Liberation

It was January 14, 1945 when we finally saw the first Russian tanks which rolled through side roads in order to surround Ehenstohoff. When we came out of the cellar, we did not see a single person in the street, other than Russian soldiers who were marching in the direction of Ehenstohoff.

Here we were, five liberated Jews, who for almost two years have not seen daylight. We immediately decided that we would go in the direction of Bialogon, which was five kilometers from Kielce. This was where we had our tannery, and where we lived with our families for the longest time.

The Poles, whom we met upon entering the village of Bialogon, knew us very well. When they saw us, they were shocked. We were greeted with cold stares. It was apparent to us, that for them this was an unpleasant surprise, as was evident on their faces. There was not one expression of warmth in our contact with them after so many years. While we stood in the street, some of the Poles gathered around us menacingly. As we tried to make inquiries about the village, a Russian officer suddenly appeared and intervened by asking us who we were. He looked at us with keen interest. When we told him that we were Jews, he surprised us by immediately speaking Yiddish with us. The officer invited us to visit him. He asked us what we needed, and at the same time, he warned us that we should be careful with regard to the people that lived here. He explicitly warned us not to go into any of the homes of the Poles. He then suggested that we should be under the protection of one of his soldiers. He further warned us that, not until Kielce is completely rid of its Germans, should we venture into our city of Kielce.

Despite his warning, we decided to go to Kielce on the following day, and on January 15, 1945 we reached Kielce. When we arrived in the city, we immediately encountered several Jews, who just like ourselves, wandered around aimlessly in the streets looking for Jewish faces. Like us, these were Jews who were successful in finding hideouts in cellars, attics, barns and woods. Jewish partisans also arrived. These were inhabitants of Kielce who survived by living and fighting in the woods. As soon as they heard that Kielce was liberated, each one of them was eager to return to the city where they once lived. They all had homes in Kielce, and now all those homes were occupied by Poles. Our common experience when we returned to our former homes was the tense angry stares on the faces of the Polish people living there now. They were angry because they knew that these were our homes and our belongings that were in their possession.

In Kielce we found a small apartment, and there we gathered together and discussed our situation. We decided that none of us should try to return to our former homes, because this would present a dangerous situation. We felt that the Poles would never forgive us for surviving, and that they would like to kill us.

We were able to find an apartment house at # 7 Plante Street which was vacant, and we quickly moved in. Several days passed and more Jews started to arrive in Kielce from various surrounding areas. They all gathered at the house at # 7 Plante Street. Within a short time, I felt something wonderful happen. We formed a committee, and Dr. Kahane was elected president. For vice president Shveesharshic was elected. I was also elected as one of the members of this committee. Every one of us on the committee took upon ourselves a particular function.

From the Polish government we were able to get some money and some clothes, and with that we were able to form a public kitchen in which we employed several women and girls who were liberated from the work camp of Chantohof. These women came to us in tattered clothes and filled with great pain. We took them immediately to the clothes storage area, and there they selected for themselves suitable clothing. Little by little these women

began to recover. They started to look better, and with time their personal dispositions began to improve.

One day, I noticed a young girl among the group of women. She had on torn clothes and a pair of wooden shoes. Her shabby clothes could not hide her shapely legs. She was standing on the side, in a dark corner, away from the frenzied activity of the storage area. She quietly looked on as all the others there picked up clothing and measured themselves for it. It appeared to me that she was very sad and bashful on top of that. The deep sadness and bashfulness revealed itself in her expression. My heart went out to her. Her simple and quiet beauty, all of a sudden became an inspiration to me. How could such beauty have survived the horrors and atrocities of the camp. I tried to imagine the pains that she had to silently endure, and how her survival did not erode her pleasant disposition. Her sparkling eyes appeared to me as if they were projecting a radiance of their very own. I cannot explain the profound effect that this woman had on my heart at that moment. God had made her so beautiful, and I thanked God for having done so. I became transfixed looking at her. Her pale smooth skin, her fine face, all her features chiseled by, I imagine, a great artist. All this was so apparent to me, despite the torn and shabby clothes she wore. The words of King Solomon's love song Shir HaSharim (Song of Songs) came back to me, and filled my empty heart. At the same time, my heart ached for the sadness she was obviously feeling. I wanted to give her some reassuring and consoling words, but I couldn't find them.

I plainly asked her why she didn't take some of the clothes that were available here. She looked at me with deep melancholic eyes and said, "I think something will remain for me too". She then looked away, her mind very much preoccupied, as if in deep prayer. She did not look like she was ready for any conversation. However, I could not move away from her, and neither could I stop gazing upon her sad face. I felt that if I were to speak then, my voice would tremble, revealing my strong feelings for her. I couldn't find any words to console her, but I felt that I should remain by her side.

I felt that she was somehow different from the other survivors that I had recently met. She didn't seem to be able to adjust well to the circumstances in which she found herself. That is an ability you probably have to be born

with, I thought to myself. It was sometime later, that I found out from her about her hard life in the camp. I learned that it was more difficult for her than for most other inmates. She was not able to fend well for herself, and, consequently, was always starving.

Finally, all the women finished selecting all their dresses and blouses, and she, by default, was next. She bent down and quickly selected just a small dress. Shocked, I pleaded with her to take a pair of shoes. She blushed at that and proceeded to show me that she had a pair of shoes, although they had holes in the bottom. She told me that she would be quite content if these shoes could be fixed. I noticed a sigh of resignation in her voice, whereupon I immediately promised her that I would go with her to find a shoemaker. She looked into my eyes and nodded her head, agreeing to going with me.

Walking on the street, our conversation became warmer and more relaxed. I knew she was in a better frame of mind when she asked me my name. She told me her name is Sarah Leah Karash, but at home they called her Surcha. The words now began to flow. She told me about her parents, and that she was one of six children, three brothers and sisters. She was the youngest, born on May 13, 1924.

When the war started, Surcha was a girl of fifteen. She suffered through all the pains of Hell in the ghetto. On March 10, 1942, the Nazis caught her in the street and sent her to work in the Skarchisk camp. Several months later, she met her brother there. He was also grabbed in the street and sent to the same camp.

It wasn't long before her brother contracted typhus. In addition to this, he was not able to tolerate the gnawing daily hunger. At one time, he came to her crying, begging her for a piece of bread. This was too much for her to take. It literally cut her heart out, because she had no bread at all to give him. She saw him quickly deteriorate from hunger. He had absolutely no strength left the day they took him out and shot him. Surcha began to cry hysterically upon relating these tragic events. This scene will forever be in front of her eyes, she sobbed.

Surcha was imprisoned in Skarchisk until July 15, 1944, when the news reached them that the Russians were getting closer to Warsaw. The panic was noticeable among the Germans, but the murder machine grinded

on. Surcha was transferred, with all the other Jews, to Chanstahof, where she worked in a munitions factory. This place constantly became the site of bloody acts of terror against the Jews. In this place the foremen and the administrative staff would beat and torture the Jews as much as they pleased. There were also some German women who served as foremen. These women did not fall far behind their male counterparts in creating terror. There were times these German women outdid the male foremen with their bestiality.

After finishing a hard long day of work, the guards would come into the barracks and mercilessly beat the Jews. Surcha also witnessed guards taking shots at them through the windows of the women's barracks.

Surcha also painfully relayed to me how they often had selections there, in which there were thousands of victims. The unfortunate ones were first thrown into dark dungeons which were located in a place they called a colony. Later on, the victim's hands were tied and then they were thrown onto the back of trucks. The Germans would often violently strike the unfortunate ones over the head with hammers in order to numb them. This was the way they transferred the Jews to the cemetery, which was their place of execution. The transported Jews were all executed there.

Despite the selections, Hell did not end. Surcha conveyed to me how each day in this Hell on Earth brought new victims. None of the murderers had to ever give any kind of accounting of what they did. It was apparent that Jewish blood flowed freely and was not protected in any way. It was hardly surprising that in the camps there were also suicides. One had to be strong in character, in order not to break down morally. It is just such a strong character that I saw Surcha possessed. This young girl did not give in till the moment she was liberated. I believe that she did not break down because of her fine character, although it was apparent to me that she was less adjusted than most to fight for her existence in these hellish circumstances.

While relating all this, she was unable to hold back the tears. It was very difficult for me to console her, however, I tried my best. From this day forward, I said to myself, she will never be left alone. She will always be able to turn to me for help whenever she needed it.

From that moment on, we met every day, and slowly we began to feel bound to each other. She got so close to me that I felt as if I knew her for many

years. I admitted to myself that I loved her dearly. Finally, the day came when it became clear that we should be united in matrimony.

During this time, my brother, Yudel, got to know a girl from Kielce who survived the Nazi camps. This girl, Sala Rosenblum, just like Surcha, went through the camps of Skarchisk and Chanstahoff. Sala, also like Surcha, was the only survivor of her entire family, and was the only one living to carry in her heart the holy memory of her parents.

Sala and Yudel were soon married. They planned to leave Kielce and go to Lodz, in order to open up a small factory manufacturing underwear. My wife, Surcha, was against such a move for us. She had strong feeling regarding staying Poland. On this matter, she was resolute in her decision to leave the cursed earth in which so much innocent Jewish blood was spilled. The wounds in her heart were not healing at all yet. They were bleeding with reminders of the past inhumanities that we went through. My wife was unwavering in her desire to leave Poland. What my wife said touched me deeply, and I made all the preparations to quickly leave Poland.

While I was preparing to leave Poland, a shocking tragedy occurred. This tragedy befell my brother-in-law's younger brother, David Bekierman. David Bekierman was with us when we all went to Bialygon. While he stayed there, he went one day to reclaim something from his family's tannery. For this he was attacked by Poles who viciously killed him. David Bekierman's murder was a great shock to us. How tragically ironic; David Bekierman, who was successful in escaping from Treblinka and managed to survive the war, was murdered after the war by Poles for trying to take what was rightfully his. The truth is, that it is not so easy to part with Poland. Many generations of Polish Jewry lived in this land. From all the possessions and treasures that we have had over the years, all that we are left with now, one could easily put into a knapsack and carry easily on their back. We felt as if we were isolated in God's world. It seems to be our history to once again take up the wandering stick and journey out alone to unknown destinations. The question for us was where to go. What is waiting for us in this cold, uncaring world?

The world was indeed strange to us, cold and impassive. What kind of interest would the world have in the destiny of the oppressed Jews? The tens of thousands of Jews who managed to escape the fire, did not have any relatives or concerned individuals to turn to now. We felt truly alone. A new tragic chapter was beginning for us, the surviving remnant.

There was more and more heartbreak and pain for us. Our own historic Jewish homeland, Israel, continued to be shut off from the Jewish homeless in the years 1946 and 1947. This was the justice of the British Mandate in the days of Bevin. There on the beaches of the Mediterranean Sea, historic and barbaric scenes were played out, as half broken down boats with the heroes arrived. Israel was shut off at a time when she could have provided consolation for the surviving remnant of Jews.

We knew at that time that the majority of survivors settled in the D.P. camps where they were sentenced to a life of vegetation. Since the beginning of the Shoah (the Holocaust), they were continuing to live their lives as refugees, dependent now on American goods. Many of these survivors felt that they had no future or anything to which to look forward.

My wife was determined to find any way possible, legal as well as illegal, to leave this cursed land. Her eyes were always looking towards the promised land of Israel. She knew that she was not alone in her dream of reaching Israel. At that time masses of Jews did not give up in their attempts to reach Israel. Jews had to have hope (Hatikvah). Toward that end, the Bricha (Jewish underground) worked tirelessly smuggling Jews. The culmination of their efforts was the poignant episode of the ship "Exodus". The Jewish cry could be heard to the heavens. Jews demanded justice from the uncaring world. The world, that was silent while the chimneys of the German crematoria were active day and night in Poland, now remained passive when the survivors stretched out their hands for help.

My wife became more adamant in leaving this cursed land. With increased speed, we began to make preparations to leave. The day finally arrived when we left Kielce, and started on our way toward lower Silesia, which was closer to the border. We stopped off in the Stehtl Hernoff, which was adjacent to Liegnitz.

On the second day, we received the very disturbing news about the pogrom in Kielce. The Poles murdered all the Jews who lived in the apartment house of # 7 Plante Street (64 Jews were murdered that day by their Polish neighbors, while the local Police looked aside). Words cannot express the horror and outrage of such an act committed by the Polish people, one and a half years after liberation from the Nazis. With all that has happened to us, we were again feeling that divine intervention had spared our lives. Had we been late in our departure, just two days, we would have been among the victims of the Polish massacre. My wife, Surcha, proved herself to be quite accurate in her premonition, and in insisting that we leave this cursed land. We felt Poland would forever be the land of Jewish tears and the Jewish conflagration. When I think about my life and all the travails I have experienced, I feel grateful to my wife Surcha, to whom I owe my life.

We resettled for the time being, in the town of Hernoff. A Russian division with many Jewish officers, was stationed there. They showed us warmth and kindness. They treated us with friendship and helped us in whatever way they possibly could. In fact, it made it difficult for us to finally leave this place. Nine months had quickly passed, and officers of Lower Silesia offered to take us to Berlin, where we settled in an American Displaced Persons camp, Slachtensee. There we stayed for several months until the Americans transferred us to Munich. This trip was filled with terrible recollections.

While traveling past the Russian border guards between Berlin and Munich, the Russians confiscated everything of value from us. There were a couple of minutes when we were filled with great trepidation.

When we reached Munich, we met many other Jewish survivors. Most of them were settled in and were making a living for themselves. It wasn't long before I got caught up in the hectic pace of making a living also. But my wife, once again, would not hear about it. I clearly remember her stern admonition to leave Germany. "We were successful in surviving and in leaving Poland, only to live on German soil? This cannot be part of my life! We must find a way to leave this bloody German soil as soon as possible".

REFLECTIONS

From everything that I have seen, I can state that the Poles tried their utmost to help the Germans annihilate the Jewish people. The Germans

immediately sensed the strong atmosphere of Jew hatred in Poland, and it should not come as a surprise to anyone as to why the Germans built the greatest murder factory in Poland. Into Poland, the Germans brought three million Jews from throughout Europe, to be murdered. My wife reminded me that in all the many occupied countries, as well as in Germany itself, the Germans could not build their crematoria. The Nazis knew that this would have an effect on the local populations. Only Poland, the Nazis considered suitable for the mass extermination of the Jewish people. There is a positive side also that should be mentioned, that of the righteous Poles. Those rare individuals that saved Jews for money, as well as for no money. My wife convinced me of how ridiculously low the number of these individuals were. In comparison to the righteous gentiles of other countries, the number of righteous Poles is insignificant. Most Poles were happy, and a number even expressed their joy, when the Nazi murderers executed Jews, or had them carted off to their death at Treblinka and other large death camps.

The unabashed Jew hatred by the Poles was very apparent to all, especially evident during the Jewish uprising which took place in the Warsaw Ghetto. Large numbers of Polish people safely stood on the outside of the Ghetto walls cheering gleefully at the tragic scenes that were taking place as the German Army attacked and methodically destroyed the Ghetto.

The Polish earth beneath our feet was filled with the blood of six million Jewish martyrs. We had hoped at the time that the Polish people had quenched their thirst for Jewish blood. This fatalistic Jewish optimism, that their poisonous hatred would end with the vanquishing of the Nazis, was a big mistake.

In all the towns and cities which had large thriving Jewish communities prior to the Nazi onslaught, roamed young and middle-aged Poles trying to locate and stalk Jews who might be still hiding. The unfortunate Jews that were discovered were robbed and often killed. Although the war ended, we heard that soldiers of the Polish underground stopped and removed all those occupants that appeared Jewish. These unfortunate individuals were shot on the spot.

It was of great danger for liberated Jews to return to their homes in order to seek family members or relatives who may have survived. The Poles would often look at the Jewish survivor as someone who came from another world, and who came to demand return of what belonged to them. Many Poles felt

that their Jewish neighbors wanted to take back what the Poles took from them, as they were led to the death camps.

We heard of the many Poles who would frantically sift through the destroyed homes of their Jewish neighbors, and even sift through mounds of ashes of the Jewish victims in their quest to find the "Jewish gold" they all have come to believe must be there.

The destruction of the Jewish people in Poland was so fearfully awesome, that I feel this is unprecedented in world history.

Language is too poor to express our pain. It was no less painful that after the war, the Poles were still not satiated with Jewish blood. Surcha held the same opinion about the Germans. She did not believe them when they said that they were sorry, and that they feel the tragedy of the Jewish people. To her, the Germans remained a barbaric people, who would never be able to cover up what they perpetrated in Poland and the rest of Europe.

EPILOGUE

Moshe Meyer Baum and his wife Surcha lived in Paris before eventually settling in Israel, where they lived out the remaining years of their lives. They leave a son, Charles, presently living in France.

PHOTOS



Plaque in memory of the Jewish Community of Kielce



Monument in memory of the last 45 children murdered in the Jewish Cemetery in Kielce



Kielce Ghetto Work Pass issued to Moshe Mayer Baum



Rachel, Sara, Moshe Mayer, Yentl (Yallei)



Yentl and Sara



Esther Bekierman, Rachel, Yentl, Sara



Yiedl Bekierman



Friedl Goldberg Bekierman, David, Yiedl Bekierman



David Bekierman



Moshe Pozitski



Friedl Goldberg Bekierman



Mendel Bekierman



Mendel Bekierman with grandchildren



Esther Bekierman with grandchild



Part of Bekierman family



Beinish, Esther, Elke



Elke and Beinish



David, Fraydl (Goldberg) Bekierman



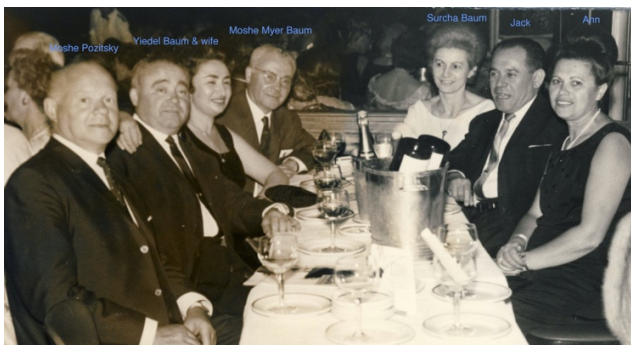
Jozef Walczynski



Jozef and Marianna Walczynski



Yiedl's son, Manny, visiting the Walczynski grave



Reunion in Paris, 1962



Leybl Goldsheyd and wife (post lib)



Surcha (Karash) Baum



Channa (Wurman), Manny, Yiedl (1947)



Charlie Baum (Moshe Mayer's son), Manny (1972)