

# The Autobiographical Story of a Jewish Girl: Her Survival and Resilience during the Years of the Holocaust

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**Maps, diagrams, and copies of original documents are not included in this translation**

## Introduction

### 1. General Information

During World War II, the Jewish people found themselves in a situation that had no precedence in mankind's history. The extermination of six million Jews carried out by Nazi Germany is beyond human understanding. The question that is almost always asked when dealing with this subject is, "How could it happen?" This question encompasses several questions, each containing a world of factors, emotions, and morals that came together and created this terrible tragedy. The questions are:

1. How could a modern, advanced country carry out the systematic murder of an entire people only because they were Jewish?
2. How could an entire population allow itself to perish?
3. How could the world stand by and not stop the annihilation?

I am not undertaking this task in order to answer these questions; tens, and maybe hundreds and thousands of papers, books, and articles have been written in an effort to answer each one of these questions. Some did this successfully and some did not. As an Israeli who is not a Holocaust survivor, I have been bothered by two main questions:

- a. How did people who lived regular, normal lives, some in wealth who could achieve anything they aspired to, and some maybe in poverty, but free to do as they want, succeed in getting through the infernal hell of the days of the Holocaust?
- b. Why did the Jews go to their deaths like sheep to the slaughter? Why did they not rebel? And why did they not defend themselves?

In order to answer these questions, I chose a way that may not be original, but in my opinion, gives most of the answers, even if not specifically addressing each one. Within the framework of my research, I chose to describe the personal story and experiences of a young Jewish woman, average both in her social and economic background, throughout the years of the Holocaust, from the day the war broke out, through the odysseys of the camps, and to the war's end. This story encompasses within it her ability to endure and preserve her own human identity that exhibits in the most real way what the Jewish people went through during the years in which the Holocaust took place.

The personal story and experiences of this young Jewish woman that are described in my research document her heroic steadfastness during the days of the Holocaust, and her charge to herself to follow the path of "Kiddush of Life"—holding the value of life more important than anything else. And so, in the face of all the hardships, horrors, forced labor, fear, and hope, when she was alone and separated from most of her near and dear ones, with little experience in life, when she had just passed from childhood to being a young woman (a chick who had just hatched from its egg), she navigated herself through the dangers that threatened her life minute by minute while using her healthy sense of self-preservation and sharp intuition in a hell on Earth until her final rescue at the end of the war.

The telling of these experiences will give us the answers to the two questions nagging me: how did people sitting in the Devil's own concentration and work camps, who found themselves stripped of everything,

until they were left with only their naked existence, whose relatives and dear ones had perished, who lost everything they had, whose beliefs had been destroyed, who were tortured by hunger, cold, and cruelty, who expected hour by hour to be exterminated, how could they find meaning in life and self-preservation? In addition, this story will explain in an indirect way why the majority did not rebel on the one hand but, on the other hand, also did not break, and did not give up on life, but objected in spirit and values against what was happening in an effort to save their lives and the lives of their relatives and friends.

## 2. Project Methodology

My work is based on the testimony of a witness, Yona Yurista, who was born in the village of Dzialoszyce, near Krakow in Poland. During the occupation of Poland by the Germans, the witness was thirteen years old, and from then until the end of the war, the witness went through a journey of hardship and tribulation in a hellish inferno, and at the end, was liberated by the Soviets when she was nineteen years old. This work was written in three main spheres of influence: 1) the personal sphere—the experiences of the witness during the years of the Holocaust; 2) the "near" sphere—the events in the environs of the witness, i.e., everything that happened in places (villages and camps) where she was and that directly affected her experiences; and 3) the "far" sphere—some of the main events and occurrences that the majority of the Jews in Poland during the Holocaust went through, that affected, one way or another, the events that were experienced by the witness herself.

In view of the above, I chose to write using chapters of testimony that are divided by different periods and places through which the witness passed. The chapters are divided as follows: 1) life in the village under the rule of the Germans until the deportation; 2) events that the witness experienced from the deportation until she reached the first work camp; 3) a chapter for each work camp; and 4) the rescue at the end of the war which includes the death march.

At the end of each testimonial chapter, I include the historical background of events and also additional testimony about what happened in that period and place. Every so often I broaden the historical background beyond what was happening in that given place to encompass Poland and the Jews as a whole.

## 3. Project Limitations

Since my research is based on the personal story of the witness, a story she is telling today in the year 1986, about events that took place between 1939 and 1945, i.e., more than forty years ago, problems arise in several areas:

1) Memory and forgetfulness, which can be divided into two issues: a) after forty years, there is no doubt that there are many things that have been forgotten by any normal person. Usually events and experiences that are significant or traumatic are etched in memory. All of the little details like reasons, motives, and considerations, the day-to-day parts of life, disappear from memory; b) there are many subjects that are by necessity forgotten by people. The forgetfulness serves a person as a form of protection of the soul. There are many things that a regular, normal person cannot live with and they are pushed to the subconscious mind. Without forgetfulness, many people (with no connection to the Holocaust) would not have peace of mind or a sense of

'balance' in their soul. The forgetfulness protects a person's soul, and if it weren't that way, humanity would not have progressed. There is no doubt that the witness that I interviewed forgot many things and did not bring them up during the interviews due to either simple forgetfulness or because she had suppressed certain subjects.

2) The ability to open old wounds—someone who has experienced a trauma, like the Holocaust, has a hard time recounting what he has gone through in spite of having the details in his memory. This person cannot, or will not, or tries to avoid, bringing up the traumas because they reopen old wounds which force him to relive his difficult moments. The difficulty grows when the memory is accompanied by feelings of guilt.

In the present case, during the interviews, I noticed that for certain subjects and points, "holes" were created and there were misunderstandings in getting the whole picture. When I pressed to get clearer answers and tried to understand things better, I encountered, in some cases, attempts to avoid the subject, and I saw that the pressure I employed created too many difficulties for the witness. In other cases, the witness told me that before or after the interviews, she was unable to fall asleep at night due to the memories that her autobiography brought up. Therefore, several times I gave up and did not press for answers.

It is known that many people, and maybe even in the case of my witness, develop feelings of guilt (unjustified in the majority of cases), especially when they are the only survivors of their family and dear friends.

3) World view—reality is an objective thing that is constructed from a sum total of existing information and data. The world view of a person towards reality is constructed based on two main aspects: a) personal framework: the facts and information that a person uses to create a framework are derived from *their* knowledge of existing facts and information i.e., which facts/information did the person pay attention to and which did he ignore or not know about; and b) interpretation: a person's framework of reality is determined by the weight and significance they give to certain events. In most cases, a person's world view doesn't match an objective reality. As a result, a person is actually the one who creates his own world view and acts and does things based on that personal world view.

In this work, I bring forward and tell the personal story of the witness that I interviewed. The witness acted and did many things during the Holocaust in accordance with the world view that she created for herself during that period.

Today, more than forty years later, it is impossible to recreate the world view of the witness during that period. Since then, and even today, the witness has absorbed a lot of information (research, reading, hearing the stories from many other survivors, etc.) which have significantly changed her world picture of the reality and events during the period of the Holocaust. There is no way today to recreate and understand exactly why the witness acted the way she did. The problem is further complicated and any attempts to recreate events are further twisted when additional phenomena are added:

- a) the natural need to justify her actions and things that she did, both for herself and for those around her. This generally is seen as the adoption of certain ideologies.
- b) the intuitive need of people to present themselves in a certain light that does not always exactly coincide with reality.
- c) the attempt to bend the general picture which was known only many years afterwards into the considerations and motives that resulted in various actions even though many facts were not known to the person at the time.

4) Lack of awareness/ignorance of the general picture—as I mentioned before, the storyteller did not have the full picture of events during the Holocaust in her hands. When telling an autobiographical story, there is a tendency to ignore the policies and general atmosphere that affected events even though they were understood in part, and to focus only on the immediate circle of the storyteller. Some examples: a) The witness said that when she reached Krakow, after avoiding the deportation from her village, she managed to sneak into the ghetto and into her brother's work camp afterwards. From her story, it is understood that her brother organized these things 'under the table.' But by researching other sources on the subject, it turns out that it was actually a policy of the Nazis to centralize in Krakow all of those who managed to avoid the various deportations, and many others did as she did. b) The witness said that her brothers left the village Dzialoszyce and went to work in Krakow. It is understood from her story that they did that voluntarily. Once again, from researching other sources on the subject, it turns out that the ones who determined who left the village to go to Krakow were the *Judenrat*<sup>i</sup>, with the plan to trade workers out after a certain period of time.

#### 4. Overcoming the Project's Limitations

As mentioned earlier, the testimony that I collected is lacking due to the various reasons discussed above. In an attempt to minimize the limitations, I constructed my work in the following manner: I separated the work into chapters, which were determined by certain periods in the autobiography of the witness. I debriefed the witness on each chapter separately. I wrote and recorded her testimony. After each chapter of testimony, I read additional testimony and investigative literature about the same region, place, period, and events that the witness spoke about. I attempted to clarify the picture for myself and to get as close to reality as possible. After the picture was recreated in my mind, I went back and re-interviewed the witness about the same period (chapter) a second time, and for subjects on which I had questions and/or that the witness did not mention, I tried to investigate again and refresh her memory. This refreshed testimony was written in this paper as it was told by her, word for word.

In order to represent the full picture that was associated with places and events mentioned by the witness, I wrote, attached to each chapter, a complementary historical chapter as I was able to absorb and clarify for myself, taken from investigative literature, testimonies found in various other books and the *Yiskor*<sup>ii</sup> book as well as written testimonies that I found at Yad Vashem about places in which the witness lived. These additional historical chapters are in essence complementary to those subjects that the witness did not mention or did not know about and help complete and clarify the picture. In this manner, to my best ability and understanding, I was able to keep the effects of the various limitations that are associated with

a project that is based on an autobiographical story that was written forty years after the fact to the minimum.

##### 5. Summary of the Testimony of Yona Yurista (Tova Zaks)

The witness whose experiences are described in this work was born in 1926 in the village of Dzialoszyce that is near Krakow, Poland. Her childhood name was Toshka (Yona) Yurista (after she emigrated to Israel, she was called Tova, and her married name became Zaks).

Toshka Yurista grew up in a religious home in a village in which the Jewish population was a 75% majority. The Jewish community in Dzialoszyce was organized and lively. Charitable and educational institutions were blooming in the village. Her life until the war broke out progressed on calm waters as befitted a well-to-do Jewish home in which the head of the family was a successful merchant. In the house were five children with the witness being the third—she had two older siblings and two younger ones.

A few days after the war broke out, the village was occupied by the Germans. Since most of the village's population was Jewish, the entire village was turned into a ghetto in which the Jews' lot in life was to be that of hostages, living under decrees, suffering humiliations and forced labor. Life in the village became more difficult because of German rule and also because the village was a place in which many refugees gathered, causing a huge burden on the village community and significantly taxing lives that were difficult to begin with.

Since the witness was thirteen, most of the German decrees affected her. In September 1942, the Germans surrounded the village and began its final annihilation. The witness described in her testimony the difficult atmosphere in the last day before the deportation. Rumors flew "from mouth to ear" about what was going to happen. No one tried to escape, but people wore festive clothing and prayed. They got ready for "Kiddush Hashem" (the blessing of God before death). The witness, who was after all just a child, was able to understand and come to terms with the idea of going like "sheep to slaughter." She managed to escape the deportation thanks to her healthy instincts. The Jews of the village, including her parents and younger brothers, were deported. All of the village's Jews who were deported perished in Bergen-Belsen. Her older brothers who had been taken earlier for forced labor in Krakow were saved for the moment. Her avoidance of the deportation started her saga of passage from one place to another. First she went to a cousin in a nearby village, Kazimierz. From there, she wandered to Krakow, met her older brothers, and stayed with them<sup>iii</sup> for some time in the work camps in Krakow and in the ghetto, performing forced labor along with her brothers. At one point, she was separated from one of her brothers who decided to go back to the village Dzialoszyce where he perished in the second deportation.

She succeeded in slipping away from the second deportation of the Krakow ghetto in October 1942, was placed later on at the Plaszow camp, and went through the horrors of the camp there. During her testimony she related in detail about the conditions of life at the camp and the cruelty of its guards, especially the cruelty of the camp commander, Amon Goeth. In 1943 she was transferred from camp Plaszow to camp Skarzysko Kamienna. Here she was separated from her lone brother, whom she did not see again and whose whereabouts she never discovered.



With the other camp prisoners, Toshka worked in Skarzysko in the weapons and munitions factory Hasag, and described the hunger for bread, the cruelty of the Nazis and their Jewish helpers, and the poor conditions of life and sanitation in the camp which caused a typhus epidemic to break out. The typhus caused so many deaths that a German *aktion*<sup>iv</sup> became unnecessary. She herself came down with a bad case of typhus, but thanks to a family friend who was also a distant relative<sup>v</sup> she was saved from death.

In 1944, with the Russian front approaching, the witness was transferred, with many of the camp residents (along with the entire factory), into Germany to the Leipzig work camp, in which the Jewish women also worked at a factory for weapons and munitions. At the beginning, the conditions were good compared to other camps, but with the approach of the fronts into Germany, life in the camp got unbearably difficult. Here too, because of her hard work and her work with chemicals and acids, her health deteriorated. She had continuous damage to the skin of her hands, eaten away due to working with acids. Again, with the help of the same friend/relative, she slipped away from a transport to a concentration camp.

In 1945, when the defeat of Germany was certain and imminent, the female prisoners were taken on a death march across Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia. Whoever hears about this death march has his hair stand on end. Most of the women who started the march perished on the way. Finally, as the march reached the Sudetes region of Czechoslovakia, the female prisoners were liberated by the Russians.

After the war, the witness came to Israel and changed her name from Toshka to Tova. She found out that she was the only survivor of her family, and one of the few who remained alive from her village.

## General Background

### 1. Polish Jewry

#### a. Demographics

Polish Jewry was the biggest of the European communities. The Jews lived in Poland in large, dense concentrations. In a 1921 census, 2,855,318 Jews lived in Poland, comprising 10.5% of the population. In a 1931 census, the number grew to 3,135,000 but the percentage decreased to 9.8%. This change came about because of the decrease of natural growth among the Jews and because of immigration. At the time of the breakout of World War II, there were 3,235,000 Jews in Poland (others estimate 3,350,000). By then, they were already 9% of the population. More than three quarters of Polish Jewry lived in towns and cities, making up 27% of the urban population. About 40% were professionals. The garment industry was mostly in Jewish hands. The global economic crisis in the 20's and 30's and the anti-Semitic policies of the Polish government brought the economic depletion of the Jewish community. Except for a small strata of wealthy Jews from the upper middle class, the majority of the Jews were workers from the low middle class, owners of small businesses, and employed and unemployed proletarians.

#### b. Antisemitism in Poland

From the renewal of Poland's independence in 1919 and until the breakout of World War II, a war was waged against the Jews in Poland. Its motives and goals were based on ideology created at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by the national politician and author, Roman Dmowski. It occupied, with time, the heart of the majority of the Polish public. Dmowski claimed that the Jews were "the historical disaster of Poland." The Jewish urban population in Poland was, according to him, lacking feelings of partnership with the nation, lacking any political aspiration, and interested only in economic gains. Therefore, supposedly because of the Jews, the country remained in the hands of the nobles who caused, as we know, the division of Poland among the neighboring powers. Wherefore, in his opinion, came the need to strive toward the removal of the Jews so that the Poles would rise in their stead. During Poland's independence there were a great number of pogroms against Jews in different places. The government narrowed the progress of the Jews in the economic domain as well as the educational domain by discriminatory regulations, and with deliberate policies managed to impoverish the Jewish community.

The Nazis' rise to power in Germany accelerated the Fascist trend in Poland and brought the Jewish community to the edge of destruction. A stream of anti-Semitic legislation, violent pogroms and an official policy of "clearing" Jews from Poland threatened the personal survival of Jews. Despite the hostile atmosphere that was intensifying, the Jews were able to maintain a living community, with an extensive network of religious institutions, education, welfare, economic aid, culture, and even self-defense. These were institutions that had no parallel in any other place in Europe. In addition, the Jews were organized in several political parties in all colors of the rainbow from the left and up to the right. These parties presented candidates every time democratic elections were held in Parliament, municipal boards, and community councils.

## 2. General Background of Dzialoszyce

### a. General Geography

The town of Dzialoszyce was located in the Kielce region in lowlands surrounded by mountains. The town and land covered an area of 200 hectares (unchanged since the founding of the town). The town was crossed by two small streams, the Sanzigniovka and the Wikovovka. In the southern end of the town, the streams spilled into a bigger river called the Nidzica. The town was located northeast of the city of Krakow and was close to the main road that led from Krakow to Warsaw by way of Radom.

### b. Town History

Until the 12<sup>th</sup> century the area was a temporary settlement of forest rangers. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century the area became a large village of nobles that was called Zalschitce. In time, the place changed ownership several times until it became the property of a family of knights by the name of Dzialysz, from whence came the name Dzialoszyce. The Dzialysz family allowed immigrants who came from different parts of the country, including Jews, to settle there.

The convenient geography of the place and the potential for trade with neighboring cities, in addition to low taxes from the city leaders, turned the town into an urban settlement in which the majority of its Jewish residents engaged in commerce and crafts. A Christian minority engaged in agriculture.

According to old urban documents, it seems that the first franchise that elevated Dzialoszyce to the level of 'city' was given on July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1409 by King Wladyslaw Jagiello in the city of Chorzow to the owner of the town, Michal Bogumilow. This franchise was approved a second time in 1520 by King Zigmont the 1<sup>st</sup> following a request by the new town owner, Astrorow. (Zigmont the 1<sup>st</sup> ruled in the years 1506-1548. At that time there was political freedom for the Jews, for despite being a pious Catholic, he did not have any hatred for the people of Israel.) Also, additional approvals were given by the King Michal Korybut on September 15<sup>th</sup>, 1706 to the town owner Jan Stradomski and by King Stanislaw August Poniatowski in 1786 to the town owner Piotr Orzowski.

### c. Important Events in the Town History

Multiple changes, good and bad, were experienced by town residents in the years since its establishment. Between the years 1334-1367, the years of the reign of Casimir the Great, Jews were given permits to settle in the town. Throughout the years of the Middle Ages there were struggles between the Church and the kings of Poland with regards to the rights of the Jews. On the one hand, the kings wanted to give Jews more rights, knowing that they would help enrich and strengthen the kingdom. But the Church, from religious motives, wanted to limit the Jews' rights. The situation of the Jews varied in accordance with the king's personality and strength. Of course, this affected Dzialoszyce. In the majority of cases, the situation of the Jews was good.

In the years 1668, 1732, and again in 1846, there were serious fires in the town that destroyed almost the entire town since most of the houses were constructed of wood. In 1794, the head of the Polish nation, Tadeusz Kosciuszko, stayed in town for one day while he was marching at the head of a rebel Polish army to a campaign in the fields of Rachlewitz. Koshioshko led the Polish revolt against the Russian occupation in that year. During that period the Jews helped the Poles in the revolt. Jewish tailors sewed uniforms at no charge for the Polish fighters and a battalion of Jewish fighters was established under the command of Berek Joselewicz. Most of his soldiers fell in the battles against the Russians until the defeat of Koshzioshko. In 1922 a monument was built in town to honor the day in which he visited the town.

In 1936, there was a great flood in which 130 houses in town were damaged (this flood is mentioned in Toshka's testimony).

d. Demographics of the Jews in the Town

Usually life in town was calm and quiet and the population in town developed and grew in accordance. In 1820 there were 1,692 residents, among them 420 Christians and 1,256 Jews. The Christians usually dealt with agriculture and crafts and the majority of the Jewish population dealt with commerce and a minority in small crafts. In a 1921 census the total number of the town's residents was 6,765 souls of which 1,127 were Christians and the rest Jews. In a 1931 census the total number of residents in town was about 12,000 souls, of which 75% were Jews.

3. Life of Jews in Dzialoszyce in the 20's and 30's until the Breakout of the War

a. Testimony About Life in Town

*I was a 13-year old girl when the war broke out. I have many memories that are engraved in me from the period before the war, but I am not sure that they will form an overall picture of life in town before the war.*

*Our town was rich in the various types of its people. There were among them those from all social strata and classes. The area was a rural area and around the town lived farmers in many villages. There were also estate owners, big and middle size. The residents of the villages were small farmers who worked their small plots and the landowners were well-to-do and provided work to some of the area farmers who worked on their estates.*

*Most of the area's farmers were non-Jews. The Jews were the ones that maintained the trade relations with the farmers. There were merchants in the town who brought merchandise to the shops and there were also peddlers who took merchandise from the shops in town to sell in the area's villages and who would buy produce from the farmers and sell it in the shops in town. There were those among the merchants who mediated between the estate owners and the merchants from the area villages.*

*My father traded with the area farmers and mostly with the small and mid-size estate owners. Usually he traded in wheat and therefore our economic situation was good and even respectable.*

*My mother was a housewife, as were most of the women in the town. I had an uncle who was considered the richest man in town. His name was Simcha Yurista and he was one of the members of the community council.*

*Twice a week there were market days in Dzialoszyce, on Tuesdays and Saturday nights. Farmers from the whole area used to come to town, with horse-drawn carts, and bring their produce to sell and also to buy various industrial products. I loved to see the market days. They were colorful and bustling. Many merchants from area towns also came and they brought agricultural products to trade with settlements and towns in the area.*

*The thing that is engraved deep, deep in my memory are the Jewish customs of the town: on Thursday afternoons residents began to return to town, among them my father (may his memory be forever blessed), who was often absent during the week because he went around the near and far villages and towns in the area to sell the agricultural produce that he bought from the farmers. The housewives, among them my mother (may her memory be forever blessed), vigorously got ready for Shabbat. On Fridays the preparations for Shabbat become more feverish, and everything was done at a quicker pace. The housewives cooked and baked for Shabbat. On the eve of Shabbat at 1:00, a siren sounded and that was the sign that it was time to go to the bathhouse. The whole town went to the bathhouse. Later on everyone flocked to the synagogues. The holiness of Shabbat was seen in everything with no distinction between rich and poor, between merchant and laborer. The Kiddush and zmirot (Sabbath songs) came out of every house.*

*On Saturday mornings, calm and rest floated above the town, and the market and alleys were empty. What was possible to see was only people flocking to the synagogues. After the prayer, the same picture again, Kiddush, a meal, zmirot, etc. After the meal there was the afternoon nap, almost everyone was strict about that. After the nap, families were seen coming out of the houses, all together. There were those who went to family visits, others went to the Beit Midrash (religious house) to study a Torah chapter or to hear a Drasha (sermon) and those who just went for a stroll. In the evening, again Zmirot, prayers and lighting of the Havdala candle. There was a real calm in town.*

*I studied at a Christian public school (despite there being a Jewish school in town). Non-Jews studied with me, but most of the students were Jews, due to the fact that most of the population in town was Jewish.*

*There were Zionist youth movements in town, although I myself did not belong to any of them because I was too young, but I recall that at home they talked a lot about Zionism, fulfilling the dream of Zionism, and Aliya<sup>vi</sup> to Israel. We had a relative who did Zionist training during school vacations and after finishing school he emigrated to Israel. The whole family talked about him and he was a revered figure and a role model.*

*My older brothers were in Zionist youth movements. One was a member in "Ha'shomer Ha'za'ir" and the other was a "Beitar" member. There were difficult conflicts, fights and arguments because of these differences. My older brother, who was a leader in Ha'shomer Ha'za'ir, was*

*worshiped by me because of that. I was very proud of him because he was a guide and youth leader in the movement.*

*An event that is engraved in my memory until this very day, was the big flood that happened in the town in 1936. I was about 10 then. There was a very strong storm that raged one evening. The two streams that cross both sides of town overflowed and began to flood the town. There was a strong rain. There was talk that it was an event called a "cloudburst" in which a cloud drops all of its rain in one location. Our house seriously leaked and then it was flooded. They transferred me that evening to a tall stone building that was across from our house and in the morning I saw from the window the terrible sight that the whole town was flooded with water. Many houses were destroyed, it was a frightening sight.*

b. About Life in Town – from Literature and Other Testimonies

The town Dzialoszyce was a town like all others: it did not stand out in terms of famous rabbis, in fabulously rich residents, or in known leaders. There was a regular Jewish population in search of livelihood who cared about the dignified existence of the family.

The Jews in town made a living mostly from trade and craft and expected the residents of the area villages to come and buy their merchandise during weekdays and especially during fair days, on Tuesday and Saturday evenings. Many of the Jews went out on Mondays to fairs in neighboring towns, and so roamed from village to village all week. On Thursday evenings they would return home to prepare a new inventory of merchandise and to spend the weekend and Shabbat with their families. There were many shopkeepers in town and artisans that scraped by. There were also small industrial plants for shoes, soap, socks, oil, etc.

The town was populated mostly with Jews and almost all the houses, commercial houses, crafts, and small industry belonged to them. The few Christians who lived in town resided at the edges of town and had different employment, mainly in crafts, but also clerical and government service for the town and country. The control of the town was in the hands of the Poles even though the majority of the residents were Jews. The municipality, police, post office, train, and schools were managed by the Poles. In the city council there were quite a few Jews and the deputy mayor was Jewish.

The population in town can be described in several ways:

- Economics– there were well-to-do Jews who made a dignified living on the one hand, and on the other hand there were many who scraped by.
- Social/political/religious– can be divided as follows:
  1. Very religious Jews who learned Torah during every free moment and were anti-Zionists in an extreme way, to the point of vowing to fight the Zionists. Most of them were followers of Rabbi Magor and members in the *Agudat Israel* movement.
  2. Traditional Jews were usually respected homeowners that got together to discuss current issues in the Zionist movement and the general Jewish world. Most were members of the

*Mizrachi* movement. Their meeting place was at their place of prayer. They collected money to buy land in Israel.

3. The younger generation began performing public service in town in the 1920's. Various youth movements were established in town such as *Ha'shomer Ha'leumi*, *Ha'shomer Ha'tzair*, *Beitar*, and *Ha'no'ar Ha'tzioni*. Later, branches of *Gordonia* and *Ha'cha'lutz* were also established. These people were more secular, of course. At that time there were two locations for emigration preparation and training in Dzialoszyce, one for the *Ha'no'ar Ha'tzioni* at the estate of the Zionist Shapira family. The other was for the *Gordonia* movement and its members performed various public services in town, a customary part of the training to prepare for emigration.
- Education— the educational trends of the town were in accordance with the makeup of the population. It was possible to find *Heders*<sup>vii</sup> in which children studied in accordance with the different Hassidic trends: *Tshernovel*, *Gor*, *Trasek*, etc. In addition, there was a public Jewish school, *Yavneh*, separated for boys and girls. There was a government elementary school. Those who studied in the government school supplemented their religious studies in a Heder. There was a vocational school and there was a Yeshiva. There was no high school in town and whoever wanted to study more traveled to one of the neighboring towns.
  - In town there were different societies whose role it was to help others. They themselves were supported and helped by the residents of town through donations and volunteer work. The societies were:
    - *Bikur Cholim* (visiting the sick) – its role was to visit and sleep over at the home of someone ill, to help them as necessary (especially for the poor), or to send them a medic, doctor, or medicine.
    - *Menachem Avelim* (comforting mourners) – a society that cared for poor mourners, mostly cared for orphans, widows or those who sat *shiv'ah*<sup>viii</sup> and were unable to go out.
    - *Ner tamid* (eternal flame) – a small society that took care that there would always be gas for the light in the synagogue.
    - *Kan'yan s'farim* (book purchasing) – a small society that cared for buying books for the use of those who studied in the Beit Ha'midrash, Talmud books and religious books.
    - *Chevre Kadisha* (burial society) – a society that fulfilled the debts toward the dead. They took care of the purification of bodies and burying the dead according to tradition and ritual. Its members worked as volunteers.
    - *Taharat Hamishpacha* (family purity) – a society that cared for the poor, providing entrance to the bath house, assistance in education, and support for needy widows and orphans.
  - In the area of culture and the arts there was also extensive activity in town. From time to time there were dance evenings, different lectures, guest speakers (including Zionist activists), drama classes, theaters that came to perform, etc. Every event in town, be it a wedding, bar mitzvah, or circumcision ceremony, was celebrated with most of the town residents participating in the *simcha*.<sup>ix</sup>

In conclusion, life in the town could be described as a lively Jewish life, with Judaism and religion the center of life with everything else surrounding it. The Zionist culture and tradition were seen in every aspect of life.

#### 4. From the Breakout of War—to the Deportation from Town

##### a. Testimony

*Already at the end of the summer of 1939 there was an atmosphere of anxiety in town. Rumors began to arrive about the growing tension between Poland and Nazi Germany. Most of the news was pumped out of the daily newspapers that arrived every day to town. My parents and older brothers talked about it occasionally at home. We knew the hatred of the Germans toward the Jews, but nobody imagined that it would be a war especially directed against the Jews.*

*About the breakout of the war, we knew only a few hours after it broke out. The rumors and news arrived from people who came to town and told about planes that were bombing roads outside of town. I remember that many wanted to go the house of my uncle Simcha, who was the only one in town with a radio, to hear the news. The day after the war broke out (Sep. 2), chaos was felt in town. There was total disorder, nobody knew what to do. Even the few military in town walked around with no answers. A directive was given by the authorities that all reserve soldiers and men up to age 50 must leave town immediately and go in the direction of the towns of Pischov and Kiltze. A scared flow of many people began to leave town. A big part of the town residents decided not to leave their houses, among them my father and brothers too. Those who did not leave took the initiative and began digging defense trenches in the fields close to town. Still on the same day, a small number of refugees began to arrive to town. On Sep. 3, German planes appeared in the town's sky and began to drop bombs. People in town did not even know how to act in such an event, they stood and looked at what was happening in the sky. The result was that one bomb fell at an intersection close to town and my uncle Simcha Yurista, who was organizing the digging, was killed and a family of refugees that was nearby was injured. At this point, all the representatives of the Polish authorities ran away from town, the mayor, the police commander and all the remaining soldiers.*

*In the first few days afterwards there was an atmosphere of chaos. The Poles ran away, the Germans had not arrived yet, and refugee families from other towns and cities were beginning to flow into town. Whoever had lived in town in the past and those who had relatives in town began to arrive in a steady stream. At the same time, some of the Jews who left began to return to town. From my parents' and brothers' conversations I understood the things that happened: the refugees that arrived to town thought that they were escaping from the Germans for a short while until the Polish army could stop the Germans. Of course, they were proven wrong. The Germans were already everywhere and then many came to our town thinking that the war would be brief and until it was over, they could be in a small town like ours that was not on a main road, and would not attract attention. Those who returned to town after they ran away reached the river Sen. Some reached the river before the demarcation between the Germans and the Russians, and then*



*after a few days they found themselves in the Russian area, unable to return to their families. A situation developed that many families separated. Those that reached the river Sen after the demarcation, returned to their families in town. Slowly, slowly, the town began to fill with many residents and refugees. The refugees began to settle in town and in relatives' homes or they rented rooms.*

*Relatives lived with us too. My mother told me that I had to sleep on the floor on a mattress of straw that was in the house for when it was needed. On September 7<sup>th</sup>, a few Germans on motorcycles entered town, rode around in the streets and went away. The next day, on September 8<sup>th</sup>, a German military unit, accompanied with tanks and cannons, came to town and they began to settle in town.*

*The Germans confiscated the homes of the rich for their needs, and housed their soldiers in them. In the first phase, the occupation passed quietly, the Germans did not shoot anybody and there were no victims. Refugees continued to flow into town. They were housed in the few public buildings that were in town and in the synagogues. The few Poles that remained in town were beginning to understand the benefits that they could get from the Germans in town and skirmishes began between Jews and Poles, mainly with Poles who were trying to rob and plunder Jewish shops and Jewish property. A few Jews were killed in the course of these skirmishes and a few were injured, until the Germans got involved and stopped the activities of the Poles. At the start of the occupation the situation was not so bad. Although my father stopped working because Jews were not allowed to trade, but since we were well-to-do and had money, it was possible to get food and eat properly. The Jews' shops were closed except for a few. Slowly, slowly, the situation worsened. It was difficult to get products and even if they were available, they were snatched immediately because the number of refugees in town was great. After two, three months, different decrees fell upon the Jewish population.*

*A yellow ribbon with the Star of David had to be worn on the arm. From time to time, money was collected. The whole community had to collect a certain sum of money and transfer it to the Germans (contribution). The collection of money was done by the Judenrat and, in order to meet the demands, hostages were taken and it was announced that, if the money was not collected by such and such a date, the hostages would be executed. The hostages were usually from among the Judenrat.*

*Afterwards, a directive was made that those with beards were to shave them. The Germans caught people on the street and took their beards off while abusing them. My father, who had a beard, did not want to take it off which is why he stopped going out of the house, he was afraid.*

*My father, who had connections with non-Jews with whom he traded before the war, tried to hide property with them. From time to time, he sent me to the non-Jews outside of town to bring to them various things and valuables from home and to get money. Since I looked like a non-Jew, I used to take the Star of David off, get on the train, and travel. I was very afraid. Jews were not allowed to travel by train at that time, only with a special permit. And so I brought to the different*

*farms valuables such as jewelry, candle sticks, different silver items and received from them a little money which I brought home. With the help of that money we bought food. We hid most of the jewelry at home in different hiding places. We were afraid that the Germans would take them or that they would be taken as part of the contributions.*

*At a certain point a directive came from the Judenrat that everyone 14 and older had to work in different forced labor that the Germans imposed, digging sewers and trenches and drains. The work was done with no payment and no food. The young and strong were sent to work camps in Krakow and so my two older brothers were sent to Krakow to work for the Germans. My father also had to work but because he was afraid to go out with a beard he did not go to work. I was also sent to excavation work out of town. We were a group of male and female youth who were taken out of town daily by train. We dug trenches until about 4 pm and then they brought us back home. The one in charge of us was a non-Jewish Pole. I did not work every day, I had to work once or twice a week.*

*As life in town became more difficult, some of the town residents were discovered to be scum. There were many Jews who cooperated with the Nazis, some worked as policemen in the Jewish police and they were called Odman. They were informers who told the Germans who had money, who did not go out to work, etc.*

*Slowly, slowly, our house emptied of valuables because something had to be handed over to the Germans, once gold, once silver and once furs. Even though we had jewelry that we hid and did not hand over, our situation became more difficult and we began to feel the lack of food. We handed over valuables many times simply out of fear because we knew that there were non-Jews and Jews who were just informers.*

*Of the non-Jews in town, those who stayed were anti-Semitic before the war but during the war their hatred was emphasized. They forced the Jews to hand over everything in the shops and even the shops themselves. Part of the shops were closed because of them. The Jews had no one to complain to and they were afraid and did everything that they were told to do. Aside from the economic aspect, the anti-Semitic non-Jews also made sure to abuse us. Sometimes in the holiday of Passover, they threw bread crumbs into the well from which we drew water, just so that we would desecrate the holiday. There was no other water in town. On Saturdays or Friday evenings they threw rocks at the windows of the house and smashed the glass, just so that we would be without a window all Shabbat and freeze from cold. Other decrees came down such as it is forbidden to leave the house after 6 pm. Whoever was caught was shot or detained. In 1941 a census and registration of all the Jews in town was held. We did not consider it, we simply did not understand why.*

*I personally was very afraid of the Germans. I was afraid that they would kill my father because of his beard, I was afraid that they would search our house and find the hidden jewelry and then kill all of us. We lived in fear and dreadful terror.*

*In the winter of 1942 we were ordered to hand over all the furs that were in town (later I understood that it was for the Russian front). The decrees, oppression, and murders increased from day to day in 1942. Every decree was accompanied by the death penalty. On every little detail, such as not carrying a recognized Jewish sign, not removing a beard, trading in food items, owning a fur coat, a death penalty was given on the spot and without a trial – the Jewish blood became forsaken.*

*Toward the holidays in 1942, rumors began reaching the town about aktzias<sup>x</sup> in other communities in the area. We did not know where they were transferring the Jews. We thought of work camps, in any case we knew that it was not good and the fate of those who had undergone the aktzias was unknown. Everybody in town walked as if they were sentenced to death. The despair was great, as if waiting for the execution of the death sentence.*

*Before Yom Kippur, all the Jews gathered at the cemetery (a regular Jewish custom). Thousands came, men, women, and children, they read psalms and waited for a miracle from the sky. One of the Jews, I think that it was the judge, stood and spoke. I remember his words until today: “Holy Jews, we are to get ourselves to contemplate T’shuva<sup>xi</sup>, it is not enough to repent in the heart, each one needs to voice his sins and G-d in heaven will forgive him and determine the decree. Confess please everyone for his sins and be forgiven. But our sages (of blessed memory) said: ‘With regard to offenses between one another, Yom Kippur also does not forgive, until the friend is satisfied.’ We will please turn to one another, asking forgiveness, perhaps and maybe if we ever did an injustice to one another by an act or thought. We will be comforted about the evil deed and G-d in heaven will forgive us and we will be worthy to receive the divine presence.”*

*The general confession began and the judge read out loud the confession portion and the crowd repeated after him, word by word “on the sin that we sin before you...” It was exciting and everyone’s hearts united as one. At the end of the confession the judge said: “Listen to me, my sons and daughters, our sages (of blessed memory) directed us, even when a sharp sword is laid on a person’s neck, to not despair of mercy, the mercies of heaven are many. If something has been decreed and cannot be undone, we will ask for mercy on our souls, may we sanctify His name, blessed and attested by the verse: the beloved and pleasant in life and in death were not separated.”<sup>xii</sup>*

*I cannot forget this event, even though we did not know what our fate would be, even though we hoped it would be good, it was an event in which deep down inside us, we separated from life.*

*The whole community literally separated from life.*

b. Historical Supplement to the Period – Including Poland

i. The occupation of Poland

On September 1<sup>st</sup>, the German army invaded Poland and advanced throughout the entire width of the country. Already on September 5<sup>th</sup>, in a conversation between General Halder,

General von Brauchitch, the head commander of the German army, and General von Bock, who stood at the head of the northern military divisions, it was determined that “the enemy was in fact beaten.” The Poles tried to fight against the Germans. The Poles, with the cavalry brigade of the *Kawaleria Homoroska*, staged a counterattack against the tanks of General Heinz Guderian that had invaded Poland. The Poles were simply slaughtered. With only horses, the Poles tried to fight tanks, but even with all their bravery and stubborn heroism, they could not stand against the Germans. The German war planes bombarded Poland’s length and width and within 48 hours they destroyed the Polish air force.

On September 6<sup>th</sup>, Krakow—the second biggest city in Poland—was conquered. On September 8<sup>th</sup>, the 4<sup>th</sup> Armored Division reached the outskirts of Warsaw. At the same time Kiltze was conquered by the 10<sup>th</sup> Division under Reichnau and Sandineisz was conquered by the 14<sup>th</sup> division under Wilhelm Walther List. The following week, the Polish army disappeared. Most of its 33 divisions were destroyed or captured within the vast pincer movement that closed in on Warsaw.

On September 17<sup>th</sup>, the Russian army invaded Poland from the east in response, to protect Russian interests. On September 18<sup>th</sup>, the armies of Russia and Germany met in Brest Litovsk and so Poland was divided in two, between Russia and Germany.

On September 27<sup>th</sup>, after being bombarded from ground and air, Warsaw surrendered to the Germans. On September 28<sup>th</sup> a new agreement was signed between Russia and Germany about the final partition of Poland between them. Poland was actually partitioned into three: one part was annexed to Russia, the other to Germany, and the third was called the Generalgouvernement<sup>xiii</sup> conquered area. The west and east ‘ethnographic’ Poland, with a population of 22 million, came into the hands of Germany. On October 8<sup>th</sup>, Hitler annexed the areas that had been, until 1918, within the borders of the German empire. The annexed area was organized in a special administrative district that was called the land of Washrata, which included the city of Lodz.

The central area of Poland was not annexed to the Reich and remained as a separate unit that was called the Generalgouvernement, “the general government of the conquered Polish areas.” Hitler assigned his minister of justice, Hans Frank, as the governor general.

During the war, more than 60,000 Polish soldiers were killed, including about 6,000 Jewish soldiers. Aside from the Polish soldiers that were killed, there were about 3,000 more losses among the Jews during the cruel bombing of different towns. During the siege of Warsaw, the Germans dropped up to 30,000 shells every day on the city.

## ii. The situation of the Jews after the conquest of Poland

The number of Jews in the German conquered areas of Poland was about 2 million, in the region that was annexed to the Reich it was about 600,000, and in the Generalgouvernement, about 1.4 million. All over Poland the Jews’ first response to the

German invasion was escape. Thousands of Jews set off on roads to find shelter. Some were on foot and some in carts and carriages. Jews from big cities escaped to small cities and from small cities, they escaped to the outskirts, and from the outskirts they escaped to towns and villages. Some of the Jews moved eastward toward Russia and the areas under its rule. About 300,000 Jews escaped to the areas under Russian rule and about 25,000 Jews escaped to other countries in Europe.

Already in the first days of the occupation, the Germans began to harass the Jews. Units of the Nazi security police that were called *Einsatzgruppen* (operational divisions) would accompany the German army during their conquering activities. They, with the help of the regular army, carried out crimes against thousands of citizens but mostly against Jews. They burned synagogues, robbed, tortured, raped, and killed Jews singly and in groups. The total population of Poland suffered great losses. Although the Jews were a tenth of the Polish population, a third of the victims in Poland were Jewish.

Below are several testimonies that are an example of the attitude of the Germans during the occupation.

- The story of a witness from Krakow: *“When the Germans entered Krakow, the streets in which Jews lived were immediately witness to abuse, rampage, and onslaught from the soldiers. They beat men and even women, cut the beards of the elderly, snatched watches from passersby and robbed merchandise from the shops. The Germans kidnapped men, women, elderly, and the young to work. Already in the first days of the occupation there were tales of the disappearance of several tens of people that were kidnapped to work and did not return to their homes. There were also cases of arrests with the accusation of shooting Germans. So, for example, was arrested the Zuker family and Shikman family from Grodzka Street who left behind no trace.”*
- The story of witness Lichtman from Wilchka: *“When the Germans entered, Jewish men were kidnapped to work and immediately ordered to strip. Behind every Jewish man an S.S. soldier stood with a bayoneted rifle. The men were ordered to run. A Jew who stopped was stabbed in his back with a bayonet. Almost all of them returned home dripping blood, among them also my father. On September 12<sup>th</sup>, 1939, a new S.S. unit arrived to town. They got the Jewish men out, stood them in the market, ordered them to place their hands on the back of the neck and to shout ‘we are traitors.’ Afterwards they loaded them up on trucks. I ran after them to a small woods, there all those Jews were already lying in groups of five, all of them dead. Four Poles who were also kidnapped were lying dead in a separate group. I bent and kissed my father. He was already cold. All those people were shot.”* Witness Lichtman thought that the local blood-thirsty commander was the one that committed the atrocity. So she ran away from town and reached another town, Mialitz. But in this town she also experienced the same horrors. *“They kidnapped Jews from the street and the houses, shaved the bearded ones with knives or daggers, removed the beards with pieces of meat and skin. They gathered Jews in synagogues and killed them with shots. Those who escaped through the windows*

*were shot outside.” The woman ran away further and discovered that the disaster was happening everywhere. “In the town of Dubika, 20 religious men, wrapped in talits and t’filin<sup>xiv</sup> were gathered. They were ordered to pray, sing, lift their hands to the sky and then German officers came, poured kerosene or gasoline on them and burned them alive. I saw this with my own eyes. They made us run, an elderly man held in his arms a child in a cast who could not walk. They told him to put the child down and shot the elderly man. The child shouted ‘me first’ and later they shot the child too.”*

- The story of a witness from Piotrkov: *“On Tuesday, September 5<sup>th</sup> the town was conquered. On the same day, the Germans killed 20 Jews with shots (some of the names are given in the testimony). The next day, September 6<sup>th</sup>, they ignited the Jewish quarter with flame throwers... Jews who tried to escape from the burning houses were shot on the spot. Only those who managed to run across Vassolna Street without being discovered survived and arrived to Horn’s house on 13 Zamkoba Street. An hour after the fire, the Germans penetrated the house on 13 Zamkoba Street, got 6 Jews out of there, ordered them to run and shot them... On the first day of Rosh Ha’shannah, 29 worshipers were taken out from the house of prayer, beaten with murderous blows and jailed in the prison.”*

The first wave of terror that the Jews experienced was calculated. Its goal was to soften the Jewish population for what was to come. Six *Einsatzgruppen* units “for special assignments” that were made up of S.S. members were attached to the army in the campaign of Poland’s occupation. Heidrich, who was their commander, let his units run wild. They performed mass murders of Poles and Jews, including acts of brutality. The intensity of their actions shocked even some generals in the army, out of fear that it would affect military discipline. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of September, 1939, Heidrich met with the military commander of the Polish area, General Edward Wagner, and there the military’s reservations about what was happening were voiced. But Heidrich clarified that the S.S. units would do what he ordered them to do. Later Heidrich commanded his units to stop the killings and stated that military courts would be established for the population. He expected that the courts would generally give a death sentence and therefore, instructed them to inform him about sentences in which the accused were not given this punishment.

Two days after his meeting with Wagner, a discussion took place in the presence of five S.S. officers. Among them was Eichmann. In this meeting, Heidrich briefed the planned racial policy in Poland and described the duties of the *Einsatzgruppen*. Those present at the meeting received instructions to prepare lists of Polish leaders and also of interim leadership – teachers, clergy, gentry, those with degrees, and politicians. All of them were sentenced to death. As for the Jews, the policy was to concentrate them in towns and to eliminate the small businesses in towns. Jews who were retailers could stay in the village areas as long as they provided the army with merchandise. Heidrich informed the participants of the meeting that a directive would come out which would include 4 points:

- To transfer Jews as quickly as possible into the towns

- To transfer Jews from the Reich to Poland
- To transfer the remaining 30,000 Gypsies to Poland
- To ship Jews from German areas systematically in cargo cars

On that day, September 21<sup>st</sup>, Heidrich's directive came out in an urgent letter whose subject was "The Jewish Question in the Occupied Areas." This letter, which was addressed to the heads of the operational divisions of the security police, was distributed even before the occupation of Warsaw and before the end of the battles, and constituted in reality a milestone in the chronological development of the Final Solution. It is actually a key document on which all the schemes of the Nazis in regards to the fate of the Jews were based and it proves that a plan was conceived to address them.

The document included opening remarks and six numbered sections; a severe warning to keep the steps top secret was in the opening. In addition, it was explained that there was a need to differentiate the final goal, which required a longer period of time to achieve, from the various steps that led to the completion of the final goal.

The concept 'final goal' which appears in the document is veiled in differences of opinion. There are researchers who attribute the extermination of the Jews to the concept of 'final goal,' recognizing the Nazi ideology and its race theory. If the Slavs were considered sub-human, there would be plans for population cuts, preventing reproduction and turning them into slaves in the service of the Aryan race. After all, the Jews who were at a lower level needed to be exterminated.

In contrast, there are researchers who claim that at the time the letter was distributed, the Nazis did not have plans for the extermination of the Jews, but instead made plans to concentrate the Jews and establish Jewish reservations. Therefore, there were also plans later on of settling Jews in the area of Lublin Nisko, the plan of a "Jewish reservation" and the "Madagascar plan," to resettle all Jews to the island of Madagascar.

#### c. Deportations from Areas Annexed to the Reich

In the first phase it was determined that, based on Hitler's decision, the Jews were to be transferred from the Reich into the rest of Poland. Namely, all the Jews and Poles who were in the districts of West Prussia, Danzing, Pozan, and the Upper Eastern Schlezia that were annexed to Germany would be transferred during the course of a year to an area that was later called the Generalgouvernement. Only forced labor Poles who would serve the Germans that were settled there would remain. Heidrich also determined that the Jewish communities of less than 500 Jews were to be dispersed. The Jews were to be concentrated in certain areas in big cities, mainly in the areas in which there were tracks, while the main goal was to transfer them to the area of the Generalgouvernement, in which an administration headed by Hans Frank was established on October 12<sup>th</sup>. He excluded only one area that was located east of Krakow, bordering on Polianitza Yaroslav, between the new demarcation line to the previous line of the Slovakian Polish border

(the town of Dzialoszyce was in this area). It was determined that, in this area, they needed to have only one assistant commander and to establish a council of elders.

On October 7<sup>th</sup>, 1939, Hitler appointed Himmler to the role of 'Commissar of the Reich for the strengthening of German nationality.' His role was to return and to settle those regions that were annexed to the Reich with ethnic Germans who were not Reich citizens as well as citizens from the Reich. This meant that Himmler had to banish Jews and Poles from those areas.

On October 30<sup>th</sup>, 1939, Himmler issued a deportation order for Jews and a certain number of Poles from those areas. Himmler assigned Heidrich to do that and he in turn assigned Eichmann whose duty it was to consolidate the police and security matters that were associated with the deportation of the Jews to the eastern areas. For that, a special unit whose sign was IV B.4 was created in the Reich's security office. In a memo that was issued, Kuppa, the S.S. and police commander in Hawarta, wrote: "Deported will be all the Poles who belong to the *intelligentsia* strata and all those who, in their national Polish position, may endanger the German strengthening. The goal is..... to provide residences and sources of income for the ethnic Germans that will arrive." In the memo, he even designated the number of Poles and Jews that were destined for deportation by the end of February, 1940, namely 200,000 Poles and 100,000 Jews.

The system was as follows: the Jews from the rural areas of western Poland were forced to leave their homes, taking with them only what could be carried in a sack or bundle, and move to bigger towns and cities. Among the Jews severe overcrowding resulted. Tens of thousands of families were dispossessed from their assets and properties and left without means of support. The German plan was meticulously prepared: first a deportation to central gathering places and afterwards, deportation to the east to the Generalgouvernement and some to the Jewish reservation, with the final destination being Warsaw.

Terrible suffering was caused to the Jews with their deportation eastward, both because of the uprooting from their established communities and subsequent cessation of community activities in the cities to which they were sent, and also because of the cruelty of the Nazis. The German plan was carried out carefully and mercilessly. Hitler clarified in the Reichstag on October 6<sup>th</sup>, 1939, that "strict measures were needed in order to generate" what was called "the adaptation and regulation of the Jewish problem." By the end of January 1940, 78,000 Jewish Poles had been uprooted from their homes. So, in the winter of 1939, which was very difficult, in which the temperatures fell to 30 degrees below zero Celsius, tens of thousands of Jews, Poles, women, children, and elderly were roused and moved eastward in sealed cargo train cars that were intended for cattle. The trip sometimes lasted up to eight days. In those transports, hundreds of people froze on the way. Hans Frank, the commander of the Generalgouvernement, described the train cars in his diary as "compressed humans and corpses." Jews and Poles that were not transported, following the Nazi instructions, moved in slow horse-drawn carts during the deportation. Many were forced to go by foot in the snow and bitter cold, and all the deported were allowed to take very few possessions. The deportations were done in part to the Lublin



region and in part to other Galician cities: Krakow, Zsachow, and Tarnow. In the Lublin area there was a plan to establish a large Jewish concentration between the Vistula and Bug rivers.

On January 30<sup>th</sup>, 1940, an additional meeting was held, headed by Heidrich, in which the transfer of the Jews to the Generalgouvernement was discussed. In the meeting they discussed the details in connection to the evacuation operations of 87,000 Jews and Poles from the area of Warta, where they planned to settle Germans from the Baltic. To do this it was decided to mass transfer all the area Jews to the area of the Generalgouvernement. There, hundreds of thousands of Jews were to be concentrated in forced labor camps. In addition, it was agreed in the discussion by Heidrich that 1,000 Jews from Stettin would be deported and their property transferred to the hands of the German settlers in the Generalgouvernement. Frank, who at first enthusiastically regarded the plan of transferring the Poles and the Jews to the Generalgouvernement, realized that this poor land, destroyed and pillaged, did not have the ability to absorb tens of thousands of destitute deported souls in such a short time. It was not the suffering of the Jews and the Poles that concerned him, but rather his ambition and will that the Generalgouvernement, that was under his rule, would be a model of order in the occupied country. The endless stream of the deported disrupted his plan. In addition, there was a conflict of interest between his administration and the police authority that carried out the deportation and did not follow his commands, but the commands of Himmler and Heidrich. Frank loathed Himmler and hated Heidrich, therefore he did not want to let them do as they wished in his kingdom. Things reached the point where he threatened to resign to Hitler.

Workers were needed in the areas that were annexed to the Reich. The mass deportations caused an undermining of the Polish economy. The global criticism of the deportations began to affect Hitler. Therefore, Hitler instructed Göring to deal with the issue. The latter issued a command on March 30<sup>th</sup>, 1940, that forbade the continuation of the deportations without Frank's agreement.

#### d. The Establishment of the Judenrat

Already in the first weeks of the Polish occupation, the Nazis were strict about complying with Heidrich's order of September 21<sup>st</sup>, 1939. Judenrat were established in the cities Warsaw, Lodz, Pyotrokow, Krakow, and others. The Nazi's goal was to take advantage of the organization of the Jewish community and its authority for their benefit and to use the traditional authority of the community organizations for their own needs. The communities served as intermediaries between the Nazi rulers and the individual Jews. The Jews themselves were also interested in activating the community organizations, mainly for the purpose of providing community services.

Hans Frank's regulation about establishing the Judenrat in all the Jewish settlements was published only on November 28<sup>th</sup>, at a time when the Judenrat were already in existence in many Jewish places (it was the way of the Nazi rule—to do something and only later give it the official seal of approval).

#### e. The Economic Blow to the Jews

One of the ways that the Nazis conceived to harm the Jews was by means of economic damage. The Nazis published a series of rules and regulations that were designed to paralyze the Jewish initiative and activity in the field of economics. For that purpose, they established an organization whose role it was to take control of Jewish property – The Eastern Office of Trust, established by Göring with the help of Eichmann.

On September 18<sup>th</sup>, 1939, Jews were restricted in receiving payment or salary to a maximum of 500 zloty. If they had to receive more, the rest was recorded into a blocked account. The bank was allowed to pay a Jew (from his money) a maximum of 250 zloty a week. A Jewish family was allowed to hold 2,000 zloty at the most outside of the bank.

During the deportations, Jews were not allowed to take property with them aside from a small sack of belongings. All the rest of their property was transferred to the Eastern Office of Trust. Almost all professionals were dispossessed from their livelihood: lawyers, teachers, musicians, actors, reporters, etc., were left destitute. Jews who were eligible for old age pensions or disability pensions were denied those rights. In the areas that were annexed to the Reich the Nazis were permitted to seize and confiscate assets of the Jews and Poles (an October 17<sup>th</sup> command). In the areas of the Generalgouvernement it was possible to seize and confiscate only the assets of Jews. On January 24<sup>th</sup>, 1940, a command was issued in the Generalgouvernement regarding the obligation to declare Jewish assets and allowing the seizing of their assets. The Nazis intensively dealt with “skimming the cream” from the Jews. The Trust Office and all those that competed with it without authority looted warehouses and luxury apartments. Officers, soldiers, clerks, and policemen went in, singly and in groups, to shops, warehouses, public institutions and homes, taking whatever their hearts desired.

When the ghettos were established, the Jews who were transferred to the ghettos were not allowed to take their property. This property was transferred to German institutions. There were also many acts of property theft from homes and factories in the ghettos. In addition to all that, the German authorities placed one-time high and burdensome payments, of money or an equal non-cash equivalent or both, on the Jewish communities in almost all the cities and towns (called “contributions”). At times they presented such claims as a “fine” for imaginary offenses. To ensure that the payments by the Jews would be made, the Germans arrested people or heads of community until receiving payment and threatened that, if the payment were not made in full by a certain date, the prisoners would be executed.

#### f. The Establishment of the Ghettos and the Isolation and Marking of the Jews

Despite further Heidrich guidelines from September 21<sup>st</sup>, 1939, in reference to the concentration of Jews “in as few points as possible,” it was not possible to fully execute such a directive. There were hundreds of Jewish settlements in Poland, therefore the isolation of Jews in ghettos began. The ghettos were established in the Generalgouvernement areas and in the areas that were annexed to the Reich in cities and towns. The ghettos were the instrument of depriving the Jews

of their existential base. The role of the ghettos was to cause crowding, to increase poverty and shortages, to spread disease, and to increase mortality. The ghettos were also designed to allow supervision and facilitate control over the Jews. The first ghetto was established in the city of Piotrkow on October 28<sup>th</sup>, 1939. The Lodz Ghetto was established on February 8<sup>th</sup>, 1940. In other places, half-open ghettos were established. In addition to the isolation of Jews in ghettos, in order to facilitate the supervision work for the Nazis and in order to degrade the Jews, a directive was issued on November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1939 in regards to marking all the Jewish men and women in the Generalgouvernement.

#### g. Forced Labor

On October 26<sup>th</sup>, 1939, a command was imposed on the Jewish population in the Generalgouvernement whose subject was "Forced Labor." The implementation of the command was assigned to the supreme commander of the S.S. and the police in the area. This commander issued two decrees on the subject on the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> of December, 1939. In the first decree it was forbidden for Jews to change or leave their place of residence without a special permit from the authorities. The Jews were also forbidden from going outside of their homes from 9 in the evening until 5 in the morning the next day. The second decree asserted that there was a work duty for every person aged 14 to 60. The Germans did not wait for the publication of the above commands. In reality, from the beginning of the occupation of Poland, they forced Jews to perform different jobs. They would catch Jews in the street, or take them out of their houses, lead them sometimes even to faraway places, and force them to perform work for them with insults and abuse. After the command was issued, the Germans mandated the Judenrat to come up with a certain number of workers every day. The Jews did not get payment for their work. Since among the Jews there were those with means and those without means, there was an arrangement with the Judenrat that those with means would be released from work by paying a fee.

In the summer of 1940, it was decided in the government of the Generalgouvernement to combine the exploitation of Jewish labor, which until then had been solely under the authority of the police, with the Office of Civilian Labor and its extensions. It was decided to take advantage of the professionals and craftsmen, but not in the form of forced labor. In the memo that came out it was determined that the exploitation of Jews for work would be done in two ways: a) "forced labor," as per the command dated October 26<sup>th</sup>, 1939, that would be directed mainly toward large enterprises that needed a great number of workers in one place. The workers in these enterprises would not receive payment and would stay in closed factories; and b) on the other hand, professionals would work and receive payment (although low wages: less than 20% of what non-Jews got).

In order to take advantage of the forced labor for the needs of the German nation and to benefit the war, many work camps were established in the areas of the Generalgouvernement. Jews were gathered into those camps from many other camps and they were mainly torture camps. The workers were employed in physically difficult work: erecting fortifications, road construction,

building bridges, drying swamps, land improvements, work in industrial plants, etc. In almost all of them, the conditions of work, residence and diet were deadly; blows and abuse were daily acts. The starved and tortured workers lost their strength and health very quickly and the mortality rate among them was very high.

#### h. Other Decrees

In addition to the above decrees the Germans imposed many other decrees on the Jews. Below are several of them:

- On January 26<sup>th</sup>, 1940, it was forbidden for Jews to travel by train in the Generalgouvernement.
- In November, 1939, at the end of the invasion of Poland, the authorities ordered the closing of all Polish high schools and allowed studies to continue only in elementary and vocational schools. All the Jewish schools were closed and were not allowed to re-open. Only on August 31<sup>st</sup>, 1940, were the Judenrat assigned the duty (after Jewish pressure) to open and maintain elementary and vocational schools.
- It was forbidden for Jews to gather and pray in synagogues. Even gathering for the purpose of studying at the beit midrash was forbidden.
- Kosher slaughtering was forbidden.
- Growing beards was forbidden.

#### i. Historical Supplement to the Period – the Town of Dzialoszyce

All the upheavals and decrees that the Jews of Poland underwent applied also to the Jews of Dzialoszyce, of course. Below are some of the main problems encountered by the town residents during the Nazi occupation.

##### i. The refugee problem

As the war broke out, thousands of refugees began to arrive in town. Most refugees arrived believing that this small town that was not on a main road and was far from a main traffic artery would not be especially hurt in the first battle blows. Already on the second day of the war, on September 3<sup>rd</sup>, fighter planes showed up in the town's sky and dropped bombs. There were a few wounded and one dead: Simcha Yurista. For five days nothing special happened in town. Polish government officials left. On September 6<sup>th</sup>, a few German motorcyclists that were part of the striker force entered town. They made several circuits of the town and left the way they came. On September 7<sup>th</sup>, a mechanized military force accompanied by tanks and cannons arrived.

The refugees continued to flow to Dzialoszyce, mainly from the nearby town Pinczow, which was razed to the ground by the Germans, as well as from Lodz, from where many Jews were deported. In the beginning of 1940, when the Germans began to establish ghettos in different cities, more and more refugees who managed to escape from the cities arrived. There were many reasons for the influx, mentioned above, and also there were many who

came who had been former residents of the town, many who had relatives in town, and many who came because there was not yet a ghetto in town.

It is true that a ghetto was not established in Dzialoszyce, but the town, being mostly populated with Jewish residents, became one big ghetto. There was a strict prohibition against leaving the borders of the town. Whoever did that took a risk. The outlook of the residents compared to Jews who were imprisoned in ghettos in other cities was better; there were no fences, no sentinels, there was no permanent German police station. The town was under the supervision of the district authorities (policemen, S.S. personnel, etc.) headquartered in the town of Miechow and who visited Dzialoszyce every day. All during the year 1940 the population in town grew. Housing conditions that were quite difficult before the war became even more difficult. Almost daily a family absorbed relatives and family members. Every hole and corner was utilized in homes. The town looked like an asylum. In public places, hundreds of people were housed, under difficult conditions that are impossible to describe. At the beginning the situation was still tolerable, the refugees had cash money and it was possible to manage, but the trouble started when the money ran out and all the valuable items were sold. Many families were left with nothing and were hungry for bread.

ii. The economic situation

Also before the war, Dzialoszyce was not considered a city in which there were many rich and noble men; there was poverty in town. With the breakout of the war, most of the sources of livelihood for the town's people were blocked. The big businesses were confiscated by the Nazis by appointing trustees. Many shops were eliminated on their own because of the prohibition against Jews trading their merchandise. It is true that more than a few merchants managed to hide part of their merchandise in various places, taken out over time and traded for survival. But during the occupation rigorous searches were conducted for the merchandise that was under supervision and, sooner or later, the Germans found all the hiding places. The merchandise was confiscated and those who hid it were severely punished.

The prohibition against leaving town destroyed the infrastructure and livelihood of all those who traded with the villages. The craftsmen had no one to sell their products to because people did not have money to buy them. The villagers also stopped coming to town to buy products. In addition, whoever wanted to create and build something was unable to because of the shortage of raw materials.

On top of the destruction and economic depletion, many more decrees were added, by which the Jews had to give the Germans every valuable in their possession. First they were ordered to hand over all foreign money in their possession, in time all the silver and gold valuables, radios, furs, etc. Every confiscation was accompanied by deaths for the purpose of intimidation. Occasionally penalty fines were imposed on the town for different reasons,

usually bogus. The fines were large. The 'contributions' had to be paid by the designated date otherwise the Nazis murdered a few of the town's dignitaries. The Judenrat also collected money for its purposes, mainly to offer assistance and for bribing the Nazis in an effort to change decrees or to postpone their implementation.

Most of the residents lived, therefore, under terrible conditions of poverty. There were those who did not have a penny to purchase a little flour and sugar which were sold by rationing points. Under these conditions, all kinds of unusual dealings and undertakings sprang up. There were those who dealt with food smuggling from the big cities by disguising themselves as Christians, there were those who sold the remaining hidden valuable objects to villagers, etc. All those dealings were under great danger that if caught, a death sentence would be imposed.

### iii. Forced labor

In October, 1939, all Jews from the age of 14 and up were required to perform different forced labor and other odd jobs inside the town limits. In the beginning, the jobs did not include the whole population. Occasionally some groups were recruited to perform certain jobs like digging sewers, drainage, etc. Later the Judenrat was assigned the task of providing a certain number of people daily for jobs such as snow clearing, drainage of swamps, road construction, or building a new railroad. To facilitate this, a German work coordinator arrived in town by the name of Mucha. Under his supervision, many hundreds of Jews went out daily to central work locations like Sosnowiece, Rzeszow, Slaboszow, Cazimierz Wielki, and others, to develop new areas according to the German's plans. The Judenrat cooperated in this area, in order to avoid situations in which certain groups were recruited regularly while others did not work at all. In this fashion it succeeded in spreading the burden imposed on all the residents.

A work department was established in the Judenrat, headed by Mr. Hoffman. Since basically all those with physical ability had to work, a rotation was introduced for all those able to work. Every few weeks the groups changed in accordance with the work department's determination and in accordance with the changing demands of the authorities. There was, of course, also a consideration of the wishes and problems of the people. The forced work provided some means of sustenance to a significant portion of the families. As long as there were those capable who had money and preferred not to go out to work, they would pay substitutes to go to work in their stead and they paid them a daily rate from 5 to 12 zloty for a day's work. The Judenrat facilitated those exchanges and deals.

Aside from the jobs that were imposed using the Judenrat, German policemen would sometimes show up and occasionally catch groups of youngsters and take them along with them. At first their fate was unknown but after a while it turned out that they were in work camps by Krakow in the Richard Strauch factory. The Judenrat managed to obtain a permit to deliver supplies and food, clothes and blankets. In addition, the Judenrat succeeded in

obtaining the consent of the authorities to rotate the people in the work camps. In this matter there were deep problems since none of the town's people wanted to go to the camps. There was a need to activate the Judenrat police. In some cases, substitutes were located in exchange for money.

During the war different welfare organizations for needy families were established in town. In addition, organizations were established for distribution of clothes and blankets, and a public kitchen was established that provided food to the needy.

#### iv. The *Judenrat*

The *Judenrat* in Dzialoszyce was actually made up of the people of the community council who had been elected before the war. After the fighting, the community council faced problems with which it did not have prior experience. If before the war the council dealt with slaughtering procedures, keeping up with the synagogues, the salary of the town's rabbi, the existence of the Jewish school, etc., after the war it had to cope with new and more difficult roles. It became the resource for all the refugees and it had to comply with all the decrees of the authorities, to provide people for work, to collect taxes for the contributions, and to collect more money from the wealthy and less from the poor. It had to rotate people through the forced labor and work camps. Part of the population was always unhappy or dissatisfied. There were always those who felt deprived. The *Judenrat* had to cope with all that. According to Dr. Moshe Bejski's<sup>xv</sup> assessment, "the *Judenrat* fulfilled its obligation in the town of Dzialoszyce in a good and fair way."

#### v. Other decrees

In the first days of the war the Germans forbade public prayer. The synagogues and religious schools closed. But in town, the Jews used to pray in any place in which a minyan<sup>xvi</sup> could be crowded, despite the danger involved. Kosher slaughtering was forbidden, but even though there was no meat in town, if there was meat for sale, it was meat from a kosher butcher. The slaughterers and butchers took the risks upon themselves.

The decree that mostly hurt the Jews came out at the end of 1941. There was a directive that it was forbidden to grow beards. A date was set for a collective shaving. The panic was great and many shaved their beards. In contrast, there were many who did not shave their beards and because of that, did not come out of their houses. If they did come out for any reason, they wrapped their faces with kerchiefs or bandages, as if they were wounded, so their beards wouldn't be discovered. Many were caught and punished for that.

### 5. The Deportation from Town—and Up to the Arrival at Plaszow Camp

#### a. Testimony

*So we lived until the year 1942, in fear and hope. We were afraid of the Germans and we had hope in our hearts that the Germans would be defeated. In 1942, I approached the age of 16.*

*Every so often I went out to jobs out of town with boys and girls my age, overseen by a Polish supervisor from the area who cooperated with the Nazis. We worked from early in the morning until 4 in the evening. To the job and back we traveled by train.*

*In the summer of 1942, rumors started spreading in town, and news came of aktzias that were carried out in different areas in Poland. The news was about Jews who were taken out of their homes and deported from the cities and towns in an unknown direction and nothing was known about their fate. We did not think about extermination at all, we thought that the Jews were deported to work camps as was done to some of the people in the past, and their fate during the first phase was also unknown for a while. We were afraid of the deportations, we knew that it was a dreadful, terrible thing. We knew about the cruelty of the Germans, and we knew about the difficult conditions in the work camps. We talked about it a lot at home and we searched for ways to avoid it all the time. My older brothers were in Krakow. As for them, it was clear to us that they were working and therefore would not be deported. I, my parents and my younger brothers, did not know how we would stand the suffering, the atmosphere of fear, the terror and tension that prevailed at home all the time.*

*My father, who had good relations with area farmers, tried to secure us a place of shelter at one of them. Every time he tried somebody, he returned home disappointed and angry. Just before Rosh Ha'shannah there were rumors about aktzias in area towns: Slomnik, Visclitze, Tschrnovitz, and more. The fear and feeling of helplessness became more real. The Pole who was responsible for us in the forced labor took care to tease us and tell us that, here in just a little, we would be deported too.*

*And then September 1, 1942 arrived. We went out to work as usual. The Pole who supervised us informed us that tonight deportations would be carried out in town and that for that purpose, many German soldiers and S.S. men came to town. That day we were only girls at work. Boys were not recruited for that job for some reason. The girls who were with me started crying and wailing that they wanted to return home. This announcement totally obscured our brains. The crying and wailing were heard all day. There were also outbursts of hysterics, some of them even prayed... We all wanted to return home and be with parents, brothers, and family. The Polish supervisor did not give in, he insisted on the need to work until 4. Work we already did not do that day. Most of us were withdrawn into ourselves and waited for the hour of the return home.*

*When the hour arrived, everybody ran to the train station. I don't know what came over me that minute, I was shocked, my brain was foggy, I was very afraid. I was afraid of the Germans, afraid that they would kill my family members, I was especially afraid that they would kill my father because he did not take off his beard. I was afraid that we wouldn't be able to stand it. I have no logical explanation to what happened to me at that moment at the end of work. And so, as I was petrified and reflective, I stayed in the dig area. I did not run with the rest of the girls, but entered into a trench, sat down, as I was hearing the girls who worked with me running to the train. When I woke up from my reflections and paralysis that attacked me, I found myself alone in the fields outside town as the quiet surrounded me from all sides. I curled up in the trench and decided that*



*in the morning I would go to my cousin that lived in the nearby town of Kazimierz. And so I fell asleep until morning.*

*In the morning when I woke up it was very early. Still foggy and not knowing what to do with myself exactly, I intended to go to the town Kazimierz. I did not know the exact direction and decided that I would ask people on the way. I started walking on one of the roads. On the way I met a Pole and asked him how to reach Kazimierz. He answered that I was going exactly in the opposite direction, the way I was going leads to Dzialoszyce and I should not dare go there because the town was surrounded by S.S. men and they were carrying out a pogrom against the Jews, they were deporting them, that I should walk away from town as soon as possible.*

*I immediately turned in the opposite direction. I decided that from that moment on I would hide my Jewish identity and every time I was asked, I would say that I was Polish, I would use a different name (as it was I did not have documents because I was a minor) and would say that my parents were snatched by the Germans to work in Germany.*

*On the way in the direction of Kazimierz I met more Polish villagers. I asked them where the town that I was looking for was and they showed me the direction. Whoever asked my identity, I told him the story that I made up and that I was going to family in Kazimierz.*

*So I walked for three days. I ate on the way whatever was there, fruits, vegetables, roots. Poles gave me a piece of bread from time to time. During the nights I slept in the fields, as far as possible from any settlement, so that not too many questions would be asked.*

*After three days I arrived to the town of Kazimierz. I asked where my cousin lived, they showed me, and I went to his house. He welcomed me happily. I told him about what happened to me and he was very worried. I showered and they gave me new clothes. He asked if anybody knew that I was with him. When he was answered in the negative, he said that he would house me in the attic at his house and that I should not go out of the house because I could endanger them and myself that way.*

*Kazimierz was a bigger town than Dzialoszyce, but had fewer Jews. There was a Gestapo police station. There was a directive (order) that if anybody was caught hiding somebody else that was not from town and without a permit, his sentence was death and his house would be blown up with everyone in it. The situation of the Jewish community was similar to what happened to us. They lived in constant fear and terror. Every day they collected silver and valuables for contributions out of hope that they would not be deported.*

*After a few days, about a week and a half I think, of sitting at the house, I went out to the street. I don't remember for what reason. I went out and went around and the Gestapo caught me, took me for an interrogation. Since in my external appearance I looked like a Pole, it was not difficult to convince them that I was Polish and that my parents were snatched to work in Germany and I was just walking around in the streets, looking for handouts and somebody to take me to their house. They let me go.*

*I returned to my cousin's house in secret and did not go out again. A few days later during the night somebody knocked on the window of my room. I opened it and saw my older brother. He came in and we fell in each other's arms. I told him my story and that I didn't know what happened with our parents. He said that he also didn't know what happened with our parents. He only heard that there was a deportation and a pogrom. He also told me that he worked for the Germans in Krakow and that the brother who is younger than him also worked there (I had two older brothers, one 21 years and one 18 years).*

*We agreed that night that, since my stay at my cousin's was not safe, and the general situation of the Jews in town was not safe, I should get to Krakow. He would care for me there and mainly it was important that we would be together. We arranged to meet in Krakow on Sunday. On Sunday that week I got on the train that goes to Krakow, posing as a Polish girl. I reached Krakow. My brother waited for me at the train station.*

*My brother worked outside the ghetto in the Richard Strauch firm. The work in the company was very difficult but they were treated more or less fairly. Since he had documents as a worker, he could move almost freely about the city. He belonged to a work camp that was located in Koboszynska Street and worked in Kshenziospa Street. Although it was prohibited to leave the camp after work hours, but at that time, there was no supervision over them at camp, there was no problem to get in and out of camp. Also in the Krakow Ghetto, where documents were needed to stay there, it was easy to get in and out at that time.*

*My brother took me to the ghetto and housed me at a close family of ours, who were a couple with three children. I lived in the ghetto and usually did not go out of the house because I had no travel documents. I sometimes met with my younger brother who also worked with my older brother and lived with him at the same camp. One day the three of us agreed to travel to our town, Dzialoszyce, with some other people from camp. We were given a travel permit from the Strauch firm. We wanted to travel in order to find out what was happening to our parents and younger brothers.*

*We traveled to town. We found our house the way our parents left it. The door was locked, everything was in its place and the furniture was covered as if they were coming back any minute. My brother checked my parents' jewelry box. It was in its place and all the jewelry was in it. My brother divided the jewelry in three. One part to each of us. We knew that with that help it would be possible to make our lives easier, to buy clothes, food and maybe to bribe from time to time. It would maybe help us to go through the hell. We took a few objects and clothes for everyday use. On the same day, we had to return to Krakow. When the time came to gather and return, our older brother informed us that he was not returning to Krakow and planned to stay in Dzialoszyce. I don't know exactly what his motives for that decision were. I think that the reason was his fiancé. He was engaged to a girl he loved very much and when he found out that she was taken in the deportation with her parents without a trace (like everybody), he hoped that they would return at some point and he would be able to meet her.*

*I and my younger brother returned that same day to Krakow. My brother returned to his camp and I returned to the family with whom I lived. Before we separated, I gave him the package with my jewelry so he could keep it for me. I continued to hide in the ghetto at our relatives' for some time. The woman worked as a clerk at the headquarters of the Jewish police. My brother visited me from time to time. One day he told me that he received a letter from my older brother and that he decided finally to stay in the town Dzialoszyce and not return to Krakow. He also added and wrote: Whatever happens he is staying in town and in our house there. (That was the last sign of life from him. Later we found out that he was taken in the second deportation in town in November, 1942). All the happenings in Krakow that I was telling about were happening at the end of September and beginning of October. I don't remember the exact dates.*

*During the month, the atmosphere in the ghetto was getting more and more dismal. The trauma of the first deportation had not passed yet and rumors were starting that there would be more deportations in a little while. The guards at the gates increased and it was difficult to get out of the ghetto.*

*One day the woman with whom I stayed returned from work and was saying that there would be a deportation in the coming days (she found out at work). The family with whom I lived decided that they should leave the ghetto as soon as possible and escape. I don't know if they knew at that time, the meaning of deportation. I did not know. Since I did not understand anything, I agreed with them. They decided that the next morning I would take their two older children and try to leave with the permit holders that were leaving the ghetto for work. Simply to try to sneak through the gates, to take advantage of the long lines at the exit. They themselves did not have a problem because they had travel permits. Their problem was to smuggle their little daughter. We agreed to meet at a certain place in the city.*

*I stood in line in front of the gate with the children. It was terribly crowded. Before I reached the gate, one of the policemen approached me and asked what we were doing. I answered him that I was looking for my parents in the long lines. He took the children and told me to search by myself. As I was arguing with him, I reached the gate, and with the stream of exiting people and the terrible crowding, I found myself outside the ghetto. I went to the place where we were to meet, took off the yellow patch and waited.*

*Of course the couple with the children did not arrive. They were behind me in the exit lines and saw my argument with the policeman. Apparently they stayed in the ghetto (I don't know what their fate was later on. Apparently they were deported with the rest of the Jews in the October deportation).*

*So I remained in the heart of the big city alone, with no money and not knowing what to do with myself. I knew the name of the camp where my brother was and no more. I was afraid to return to the ghetto, for fear of being caught. I started walking around in the streets of the city doing nothing. After about a half a day of wondering around, I raised the suspicion of a Polish policeman who approached me and asked me to identify myself to him. I played the role of the Polish girl*

*whose parents were taken to Germany and said that I lived with relatives and even mentioned the address. Apparently I did not manage to convince him. He took me to a copper scrap yard and started to interrogate me more intensively: Where do my relatives live? How to get there? How did I get here? etc. Of course, he understood that I was lying very quickly. I saw that I was not coming out of this matter, and started to be terribly afraid, I was in despair. I burst out crying and told him the whole story: I am Jewish, what happened to me up to now, that I was afraid that he would betray me to the Germans or return me to the ghetto. In addition, I told him that my brother worked for the firm of Richard Strauch and that his camp was on Kobizneska Street. I promised him that if he'd take me to my brother, my brother would give him a diamond in return.*

*Apparently I managed to persuade him. He took me to the camp and my brother indeed gave him a diamond. I stayed that day in camp with my brother who, by chance, did not work that day. All the Jews who lived in the camp where my brother was had a document that was called a Judenpass. I, of course, did not have one and, therefore, my stay in the camp was forbidden and dangerous. That same day my brother went out of the camp and made arrangements for me to sleep with one of the non-Jews who lived near the camp, at his house for a sum of money. I lived at the non-Jew's for several days. My brother paid him daily for the accommodation. At the same time, my brother took care of buying a forged Judenpass document. A few days after he got the document, I went into the camp and was assigned to work in the kitchen. I was the only female in the camp. Since I worked in the kitchen, I ate well and was physically healthy. I got stronger emotionally because I was close to my brother and he was my emotional support.*

*Three days after I left the ghetto, there was the deportation of the month of October (October 28, 1942) in the Krakow Ghetto. The rumors about what was happening were really horrible. Thousands of dead among them: children, elderly, women, and babies. Thousands were also deported to the east (at that time we still did not know that they were led to extermination camps).*

*In the beginning of November (November 10) we heard that in our town Dzialoszyce a deportation was also carried out. The rumors talked about a deportation of a few hundred Jews in a cruel manner and that a pretty big part of them were murdered on the spot in cold blood by the Nazis. We did not know the fate of our brother and had no information. In mid-November, many Jews started to stream to Krakow from the nearby cities in which an area of 'Judenrein'<sup>xvii</sup> was declared. My brother and I, who held Judenpass documents and were able to move about with certain freedom, tried to look for people from town in order to find out the fate of my brother. Most of the Jews who arrived in Krakow were housed in the ghetto and part were sent to the different camps in the Krakow area. At this point we already started to hear that the deported were sent eastward to extermination camps. During our inquiries we met a few people from our town who were there during the second deportation. We found out that our brother was sent east with most of the deported. We did not know if he was sent to a work camp or extermination camp. With all our hearts we hoped that he was sent to a work camp and that we would see him one day.*

*In the month of December, we were transferred to a new camp on Zstorska Street in Podgorsze. I stayed a kitchen worker. We lived in a new place in terrible crowding. It was winter and it was*

*very cold. There was little and meager food but somehow my brother and I managed thanks to the money and few jewels that we had, with which we bought clothes and food. The guard over us in that period was still not too severe (after the war I found out that Strauch took care to protect the Jews from the S.S. and that was the reason that, compared to others, our conditions were not bad). From time to time my brother and I would sneak into the ghetto to buy things, to visit relatives and friends, to shower, to pray, etc.*

*About the month of February, 1943, the Krakow Ghetto was divided in two: part A that was designated for Jews who had a place of work and part B that was designated for those who did not have a job. The apprehension started to gnaw at people again. It was clear that the division to part A and B did not bode well. The significance was the separation between the productive people (those who were working) and those who were not working and probably targeted for liquidation. The fear gnawed in everybody's hearts. It was clear that even those who were working were not safe and were not immune from the deportation. There was a precedent for that in the last deportation in October.*

b. Historical Supplement to the Period – September 1942 to March 1943

i. The first deportation in the town of Dzialoszyce: September 1942

In the summer of 1942, rumors and news spread in town about akzias that had been carried out in different areas in Poland. No one in town knew where the people had been led.

On September 1st the town was surrounded with S.S. men and Polish *Junkers*<sup>xviii</sup>. No one was allowed to come in or go out of town. Whoever tried to escape was shot on the spot. A message was transmitted via loud speakers and announcements that all, with no exception, were to report the next morning to the market in town.

On September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1942, in the early hours of the morning, all the town's Jews reported to the market. There were several Jews who tried at the last minute to bribe Poles to help them escape. Often they could not escape because the Poles did not want to help. Nazi sentinels stood around the market square and kept the order. While they were keeping order, they shot different people from time to time, whoever appeared to them to breach the order or just to frighten people.

As the Jews were gathering, many horse-drawn carts with Polish drivers arrived at the market square. The Nazis announced that whoever was unable or had difficulty walking by foot to the train station, should get on the carts and would be driven there. The rest would walk. Elderly Jews, women, and small children got on the carts. The carts with the Jews on them were driven to the Jewish cemetery outside town and not to the train station. The Jews that were on the carts were ordered to get off at the cemetery and to get into big holes that the Polish 'Yonkers' had dug earlier. They were mowed down with machine guns. The number of dead in this Nazi action was between 1,200 to 2,000 people.

The rest of the Jews at the market square were ordered to walk to the train station under heavy guard. At the train station they were all loaded onto cargo cars and driven to the town of Miechow, reaching it in the early evening. From the train station in Miechow, the Jews were led to an open field at the edge of town. There were many other Jews there that were brought from different towns in the area. They spent the night outdoors under heavy German guard.

The next day in the hours before noon more Jews arrived from other towns in the area. In total, about 20,000 Jews were concentrated in Miechow. All the Jews were ordered to get into groups of five. The Nazis began to carry out a sorting of the people. The sorting was carried out by Kreishauptmann Schmidt. All the young were directed to the left side and the rest to the right side. Those who were directed to the left were immediately separated by armed guards and the rest were directed to an empty lot nearby. Everything took place quickly and efficiently. About 2,000 young were separated during the sorting. They were driven by train in open cars to Camp Prokocim near Krakow that same day. The rest were loaded on a train in closed cargo cars and were driven to Belzec and there they were exterminated. On that day, about 8,000 of the town's population were led to extermination.

#### b. The second deportation from town – November 1942

Two weeks after the deportation, people who had not been there at the time of the first deportation or those who had managed to escape from work camps and those who had managed to escape the deportation began to assemble in town. After a few weeks, several hundred Jews gathered in town.

On November 9<sup>th</sup>, 1942, in the late evening hours the town was surrounded again by companies of S.S. men and another roundup of Jews began. The Nazis went from house to house and searched every possible shelter. Whoever they found hiding, they killed. They collected all the Jews who were in town, sorted them, and questioned them. Most were led to an open grave at the edge of town and liquidated with machine guns. The grave was covered later. The few that were not liquidated were driven eastward, some to work camps and some to concentration camps.

#### c. General Background on the Events in Krakow up to the Deportations

In May, 1940, the Judenrat was tasked with the preparation of special residence documents, called *ausweise*, for Jews in Krakow, to be given only to Jews who could benefit the economy of the Nazi war effort. Those who received the documents could stay only in a certain area in which the Jewish ghetto was to be established, in a few streets in Podgorze on the other side of the Visla River. During 1940 a voluntary evacuation was conducted. August 15<sup>th</sup> was set as the day of voluntary departure. The ones leaving were given the right to choose another place of residence and to take their belongings with them.

The Germans intended to give residence documents in town to only 15,000 Jews. But in September 1940 it turned out that "the committee for matters of exit" gave certificates to 30,000 Jews. Those who did not get certificates were deported from town in different ways. Usually the Germans conducted manhunts and searches and whoever had no residence document was deported.

On January 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941, an order was issued that directed all the men age 16 and older to work 12 days clearing snow until the end of January. For each work day a stamp was given on the other side of the residence document. It was also determined that whoever did not present a residence document with 12 stamps by the end of the month would be subject to deportation. This threat urged people to report to work.

On February 4<sup>th</sup>, 1941, an order was issued by the Gestapo that extended the period of work for two more months (until May). It was determined that every month 8 days of work were required. This time, the stamp for work days was to be placed on the identity cards that they started to distribute in place of the *ausweise* (which had been temporary residence documents). The Germans caused many difficulties with the distribution of the identity cards. It was not done automatically. Not everyone who had a residence document received an identity card. There were many bureaucratic complications designed to find grounds for taking the documents and causing deportation from town. In this way the Nazis reduced the number of residents in Krakow.

On March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1941, an order was issued by Governor Otto Wächter about establishing a special neighborhood for Jews. The explanation for establishing the ghetto was for sanitary reasons. A neighborhood that was part of Podgorze was assigned to the Jews. It was determined exactly in which streets the Jews were allowed to live. The Poles that lived in the areas assigned to the Jews were deported and resettled somewhere else.

Jews with a special permit were allowed to work outside the ghetto. In the first months after the establishment of the ghetto, the connection with the other parts of town was quite active. According to licenses that the office of labor issued, Jews went out of the ghetto and worked in Polish factories and German workplaces. In addition, craftsmen and merchants whose workplace was outside the ghetto were allowed to go out and work.

In time, the conditions in the ghetto became more difficult: it was difficult to get food and other means of support, the sanitary conditions worsened, and different decrees came down incessantly. During 1941 the number of residents in the ghetto increased. Many Jews who lived in the area of Krakow and surrounding towns, and those who had escaped at the start of the war, began to return and settle in the ghetto. The reasons for the return were many, but the major one was the desire to live in a Jewish society, together with family and friends. The thought was that the walls of the ghetto would separate the Jews from the hatred that prevailed throughout Poland. The Jewish police and the Gestapo carried out occasional raids and manhunts, catching Jews with no documents and deporting them to work camps or concentration camps. Most of

the ghetto Jews tried to get work in military factories or productive enterprises since getting an identification card was contingent on work permits.

#### d. The Aktzia of June 1942

On the 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> of May, 1942, the Jewish council received an order from the security police to carry out a check of identification cards of all the ghetto residents. The Jews stood in long lines in front of the building housing the German security police and were told to present identification cards and work permits. The Germans generally recognized the permits of the German factories and workplaces and stamped the permit of the document holder.

At the end of the inspection on May 31<sup>st</sup>, thousands of Jews with no identification cards remained in the ghetto, designated for deportation. On the same day, all the Jews who did not have identification cards stamped with the proper stamps from the previous two days were ordered to gather in one of the streets. It was determined ahead of time that 2,000 Jews would be deported that same day. As soon as they gathered and the quota was filled, those Jews were deported eastward (nobody knew yet that deportation meant extermination). A few thousand Jews with no stamped documents still remained in the ghetto. On the night of June 3<sup>rd</sup>, a check was conducted again. Again 2,000 people were gathered and deported.

On June 6<sup>th</sup> the security police conducted a renewed check of the identity cards. Once again, people crowded in long lines by the police building for the purpose of a renewed check and presented work permits and identity cards. This time the identity cards were not stamped but those determined to be suitable received a blue card called *blauschein* that bought them the right to stay in the ghetto. This time too there were many Jews who encountered the German's refusal to grant them the new residency cards even though a week before they had accepted all the permits that they held. Recommendations of German employers and prior stamps from the security police did not help. Those who did not receive documents were detained immediately and transferred to the yard of Optima (the clothing warehouses of the German army). On Monday June 8<sup>th</sup>, those who were detained were driven eastward to extermination camps.

In the aktzia of June 1942, 5,000 Jews were deported. That same month the area of the ghetto was made smaller. The right side of Limanowskie Street and the whole area neighboring it were taken out of the ghetto area. The whole side of uneven numbers remained in the ghetto. The connection with the city became more difficult. Once again the Jews were not allowed to leave without having a personal document. The exit from the ghetto was done in groups that were accompanied by guards from the Jewish police or from the factories.

#### e. The Work Camps in Krakow

In every district in Krakow aktzias and selections were conducted in the summer of 1942. Jews were transferred from the various towns to central places in the area. In the central locations those able to work were sifted out and the rest were sent to extermination camps. Those who were selected for work were transferred to different work camps that were established in the



Krakow area in several places. The Germans avoided placing those able to work into the ghetto to avoid mixing them with the population that was designated for deportation, concentrated in the ghetto. The work camps were established in the Krakow area in the following places: Camp Prokocim was in one of the suburbs of Krakow, another camp was on Kobeirzynska Street in which people worked for the Richard Strauch Company, and an additional camp was on Jerusalimska Street, etc.

f. The Firm of Richard Strauch

This was a German-owned company that dealt with drainage and building ramps on the banks of the Visla River. The company employed Jews who were selected for forced labor. The branch of the company in Krakow dealt with this type of work. The Jews that were employed by the company entered the work camp on Kobeirzynska Street. Mainly Jews from Dialoszyce and Proszowice worked in this camp. For work in different parts of the city, they went out of the camp and worked 13-14 hours a day. The work was mainly digging by hand with shovels, transporting wheelbarrows, etc. The food they received daily included a slice of bread every morning and watery soup for lunch. The food, of course, was not enough and people were hungry for bread.

The camp was not surrounded by barbed wire and there was no perimeter guard around it and so, even though there were directives not to leave the camp area after work hours, people did in order to trade valuables in their possession for food, clothes, and other things. Many of the people in the camp used to sneak from the camp to the ghetto for the purpose of visiting relatives, going to the bathhouse, and going to the synagogue.

After the deportation of October 1942 from the Krakow Ghetto, the workers of the Richard Strauch Company were transferred to a camp on Zatorska Street in Podgorze close to the Visla River. The whole camp was a house with 4 rooms into which many Jews who worked hard labor daily were crowded. The overcrowding was terrible, the food was bad and meager, and when the winter arrived, it was dreadfully cold. In this location the camp workers resided until the beginning of 1943, when the camp was liquidated and the Jews were transferred to the Plaszow Camp.

g. The Aktzia of the Month of October 1942

On October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1942, the German commissar of the Jewish council in Krakow, Kommissar David Gutter, issued an order which required the Jews in the ghetto to evacuate the Solna, Dabrowki, Janova Wola, and Traugutta Streets (an area that was called Ukraine) and to move to other parts of the ghetto. This order was canceled later on but it was clear that the intention of the Germans was to reduce the size of the ghetto and meant an additional aktzia. People waited for this aktzia; some tried to escape or smuggle relatives out, and some tried to get work or work documents. On October 27<sup>th</sup> in the evening hours, battalions of German police and S.S. surrounded the ghetto. At night the Jewish police began to enter apartments and gather people who were on pre-made lists. Those who were sentenced to deportation were told to gather in Zgoda Square and there they were ordered to sit on the ground and wait. They were organized in groups. Children were organized separately, the elderly separately, and the men and women also. The square was

packed with thousands of people. A heavy silence was in the air, the silence of a cemetery. Hundreds of S.S. men guarded the women, elderly, and children. The workers were not allowed to leave the ghetto to go to work and instead were ordered to gather according to their workplace on October 28<sup>th</sup> near the labor office. A sorting and distribution of workers to the special work locations was done on the spot. The sorting was done by appearance. Usually those who appeared fit for work were left. *"We were gathered in front of the labor bureau. All the workers in the ghetto. We were divided by workplaces in which we worked and afterwards a committee passed between the lines and chose people for work..... According to its discretion..... the rest go to the brotherhood square (Zagoda) for transport..... one in ten was saved..... everything was done in total silence...."*<sup>xix</sup>

After the selections the S.S. men broke into houses at the same time that they were shooting in the streets and apartments. They dragged with them those who tried to hide. The S.S. men also broke into the home for the elderly and killed several elderly and sick who were lying in their beds. Others were dragged down straight from bed, while still undressed, and loaded into trucks. The Nazis also broke into the orphanage in the ghetto and took more than 300 children. All the deported were sent by train eastward. That day about 6,000 men, women, and children were deported to the Belzec extermination camp.

#### h. The Underground in Krakow

During the year 1942, an underground began to organize in the city of Krakow, whose activists were from pioneer youth movements in Krakow. The 'Jewish Fighting Organization' was really established in August 1942. The headquarters of the organization was connected to the Jewish Fighting Organization around Poland and consisted of four members: Dolek Liebskind, Abraham Leibowicz (aka Lafan Rimek), Shimek Draenger, and Manyek Eisenstein. The first operations that the underground carried out were preparing fake documents, mainly exit and entrance permits to the ghetto, travel documents by train and Polish *Kennkarte* (identification cards) with which the activists moved from place to place. Later on they began to organize groups of fighting partisans in the woods, together with the Polish underground. This activity failed and was stopped later on.

The underground established cells and activity points outside the ghetto, with the aim of acting against German objectives in Krakow and against Jews who acted within the Gestapo. They almost did not operate until the month of October, out of fear of retaliation from the Germans that would hurt Jews and especially their family members who were in the ghetto.

The aktzia of the month of October gave them a boost to carry out more intensive operations. *"Now they were free. Their last connections with the usual daily family life were cut. Whoever hesitated before to abandon a younger brother, an only sister, or elderly parents, then now, after the aktzia, felt that the cables were untied and that he was free with no scruples to throw himself into the whirlpool of work."*<sup>xx</sup>

From this time forward, until its activity was stopped, the Jewish underground in Krakow carried out a great number of daring acts. Here are some of its main operations up to December 1942.

- Sabotage of the railway between Krakow and Bochnia that caused the train to derail.
- An attack on the clothing warehouses of Optima and the confiscation of uniforms, clothes, and shoes for the fighters' use.
- An attack on the train warehouses on Jaroslawska Street.
- The assassination of a German gendarme on Starobi Shlomo Street and highjacking of his weapon.
- The assassination of a German soldier on the promenade by Sebastian Street and an S.S. officer on the promenade by Karmelitska Street.
- The attack on two Gestapo agents in a pub at 4 Golombia Street.
- The assassination of a senior clerk of the Generalgouvernement.
- Igniting the army barracks near the Todt Company (munitions and armaments) on Gzekoszki Street.
- Acts against Jewish police and Gestapo agents.

The peak point of the underground's operations was attacking the big coffee house Tcheganria on December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1942. In this operation 11 German officers were killed and 13 were wounded. Within the framework of this operation, the men of the underground also attacked the coffee house Esplanada, the officers' club Zakopianka, the movie house Skala. Other German facilities and vehicles were ignited and posters were put up. This was the last operation of the underground in the Krakow area since following the operation scores of underground members were arrested. Some died in attempts to escape and the operations of the organization were silenced. The members of the underground scattered to different locations in the Krakow area and continued limited underground operations. Over time, many of them were captured, executed, or sent to the extermination camps. The Jewish Fighting Organization existed in reality until October 1943. That month Shim'on and Gustav Drenger were captured and executed.

i. The Period from October 1942 until the Final Deportation in March 1943

After the October deportation, the Germans reduced the Krakow ghetto, and separated it from the region that was called Ukraine. News penetrated the ghetto about the aktzias and liquidations that were carried out in various places in Poland. The fact that even regular work for the Germans did not grant more security also penetrated people's consciousness. The labor office in the ghetto fell apart, and all matters that involved the Jews' work were then administered by the S.S. commander and the police. Accepting Jews to work, releasing them from work, determining the number of workers, etc., was determined by the commander. Factory owners and foremen presented lists of people employed by them for approval by the police and in this way obtained for them Judenpass documents signed by the S.S. commander. Such a document granted the right to live in the ghetto.

In November 1942 many Jews flowed into the Krakow Ghetto from nearby agricultural towns and areas that had been declared *Judenrein*. The crowding in the ghetto greatly increased. Friedrich

Wilhelm Kruger, the supreme commander of the S.S. and the police, opened more residential neighborhoods for Jews. Jews got out of the ghetto for different jobs and some were housed at work camps that were near their workplace.

In February 1943 the Krakow Ghetto was divided into two parts: Part A was designated for those who worked and had permits. Part B was designated for those who either did not work or had no designated workplace.

In November 1942 the Plaszow work camp was established in the area of the old Jewish cemetery. The work was carried out by Jewish forced laborers. In February 1943 a new commander by the name Amon Goeth was assigned to the camp and the pace of the construction of the camp increased significantly. On March 13<sup>th</sup>, the Jewish council was given an order that within 6 hours all the residents of part A must move to Camp Plaszow and residents of Part B must gather the next day in Zagoda Square in order to find appropriate work arrangements for them.

## 6. Plaszow Work Camp

### a. Testimony

#### i. The transition to camp Plaszow

*In the month of February 1943, the work camp in Podgorze was liquidated, a camp in which me and my brother were staying. We were taken, together with our whole group, to the Plaszow Camp and told that this was our new camp.*

*The Plaszow Camp was erected in the area of the old Jewish cemetery of Krakow. When we arrived there were only a small number of huts and the camp was in the process of being erected. Construction work was being done. There were about 2,000 Jews in the camp, mostly from the Krakow area, some were from our town, Dialoszyce. We also dealt with work related to the enlargement of the camp, of course. As I mentioned earlier, the camp was erected in the area of the old Jewish cemetery. The Nazis had no sentiments for this place, of course. In the first phase they removed the headstones, leveled the area, and erected huts. A great part of tombstones were smashed and broken, of course. The commander of the camp at that time was Sturmfuhrer Muller.*

*My brother worked at the camp building concrete sewer pipes. I worked in chiseling stones which were partly tombstones from the cemetery. The tombstones served, among other things, for building and surfacing the camp.*

*The conditions in the camp were very difficult. We were crowded into a few huts. In every hut there were hundreds of people. We slept in bunks, one on top of the other in triple layers. We got up every morning at 4 am. There was a roll call and some of the people would go out accompanied by armed S.S. to jobs outside the camp. Another group stayed to work in the camp. The food was bad and very meager. While we worked in the camp we would*

*get hit if it only seemed to one of the guards that someone was working slowly. In many cases the S.S. criminals just shot people.*

*At the end of February, Muller, the camp commander, was replaced and in his stead an S.S. officer by the name of Amon Goeth arrived. A big group of S.S. officers arrived with him and took key positions in the camp. When they arrived, the work and discipline conditions in the camp worsened. The work hours were extended, the building pace was accelerated, and more punishments were given to whole groups of people. Every day more people were killed and/or executed.*

*In the middle of the month of March (March 13<sup>th</sup>) we understood why the pace of building was accelerated. On this date the Krakow Ghetto was finally liquidated. What we heard and what we saw was horror. All people of Part B in the ghetto were deported eastward to extermination camps. While they were deported, a few thousands in the ghetto were shot during the selection. All the Part A people were deported from the Krakow Ghetto and brought to the Plaszow Camp and housed there. A not small killing was done on them too. All the Jews were designated for work and all the dead were transferred to the Plaszow Camp. The dead were transferred on top of flat surfaces and they were buried in a big mass grave in camp.*

ii. Life in the Plaszow work camp

*With the transfer of all the Krakow Jews that survived the aktzia, we turned into a very big camp. The number of people in camp changed from time to time. At its peak there were over 25,000 prisoners. The total number went down from time to time because many times prisoners were sent to other camps, there were many executions and, in addition, transports of prisoners from other places in Poland would arrive from time to time. Polish prisoners were also at the camp and were held separately from the Jews.*

*The fear in camp was great. In each and every moment, a person was in danger of death without knowing where it would come from. Amon Goeth, the camp commander, was insane. He would go around camp with two big wolfhounds. Every so often he would order them to attack this Jew or another, or he would shoot with no reason and kill a Jew while it was all carried out exclusively for his pleasure. The S.S. men under his leadership behaved exactly like him. They would go around among the working Jews or between the huts in the evenings and every time they would find a wrong in this behavior or another of poor Jews. They would punish, flog, shoot, and abuse them.*

*In general, on the subject of punishments, I don't know if it was planned or spontaneous. Punishments were given all the time in this camp. Many of the punishments were collective punishments. Below are a few examples:*

- *Mass beatings: they would get all the people in camp to the main campgrounds and beat everybody.*

- *Punishment roll calls: they would get all the camp prisoners to the main campgrounds, stand them in lines all night or for several hours. Of course, it was not allowed to sit or recline. The S.S. men and Amon Goeth among them would walk between the lines shooting or beating whoever they wanted with no reason.*
- *Night works: as a collective punishment, especially during the building of the camp, they would impose on us, for different reasons and at times for no reason, a collective punishment to all the camp people, or to most of them. The punishment was to get out and drag heavy loads to a new area that was added to the camp on top of the hill that stood nearby. Thousands of men and women went in long single files, one after the other. The length of the lines was between 2 to 3 kilometers. A heavy load on the shoulder of each one: stones, trees, etc. The parades lasted hours upon hours in the cold and in the rain as people were wet to the bone, their strength lost a long time ago. Only the nerves and the fear from the Germans, their beatings and shots, urged us.*
- *The stone train: in the quarry that was within the bounds of the camp, narrow train tracks were laid that led to the hill that was close to the camp at a distance of 2 kilometers. Workshops were set up on the hill. Trolleys loaded with heavy stones were placed on the train tracks. Those were driven to the hill for the purpose of laying foundations and road construction. Punished companies from among the men worked in the stone quarrying. Companies of punished women were employed in driving the trolleys. They would harness two lines of women to ropes that were tied to the trolleys. The women were required to drag the loaded trolleys up the hill in all weather conditions, cold, rain, snow. Many of the women died while they were carrying out this work.*

*I mentioned earlier that I and my brother also worked in building the camp. At a certain point, after the deportation from the Krakow Ghetto to Plaszow, the women were separated from the men and a camp for women was established in a separate area. The women's camp was surrounded with barbed wire and its gates opened and closed only for the purpose of getting women out to work and back. It was a difficult phase for me because this created a barrier between me and my brother. Like everything else that the Germans did in camp, this separation was also done in a complete surprise. They just put it to us as fact one day when we returned from work. We were not even allowed to take our personal articles from our old house with us. When we were transferred to the women's camp, all the men in the general camp stood and watched how we were transferred. To my great fortune, my brother was among those men and when the gates of the new camp closed, he threw a package with my personal objects to me, a few clothes, a coat, a pillow, etc. The connection between me and my brother became more difficult. We would talk through the fences even though it was forbidden and dangerous. Sometimes at night my brother would sneak into my hut in order to be with me for a few minutes. All that despite the danger in it. Many men who tried to sneak or sneaked to the women's camp were caught and punished. The punishments were in accord with the German's mood, there were those who were executed or shot because of their desire to maintain contact with the women.*

*With the completion of most of the construction work in camp and the completion of the construction of the workshops, most people who worked in the building of the camp were referred to work in the workshops. I was also transferred to work in a workshop for paper. The work was difficult, little food, we were always hungry. There was a supervisor at the workshop who always needed to know where each one of us was (we worked men and women together). If somebody was missing at the time of one of the German's checks, we would all be punished: night work, roll calls, etc.*

*My brother, who occasionally came to visit me, used to bring me, stealthily of course, a little food or other things. He still had the jewelry we took from our parents' house. I don't know how he managed to hide them in all the hardships of the camp. In any case, he brought various things with him.*

*As I mentioned before, during roll calls Amon Goeth, the camp commander, used to walk between the lines and abuse us or just kill people. I won't forget one case in which they stood all the camp prisoners in roll call so that we could see the hanging of one of the women. I don't remember the reason for her hanging. I remember that before they hung her, she spit in the face of one of the S.S. officers. It was a heroic act.*

*There were occasional selections and deportations to extermination at the camp. All those who weakened and/or were sick or reported as weak, were sent for extermination. The selections were usually carried out suddenly with no prior warning. They would come, gather the required amount and did not even allow to collect the belongings.*

*One day I got sick with dysentery. I could not stand on my feet. I was placed in the hospital at the camp. I lay at the hospital for several days while the medical team treated me. The doctors and the nurses at the hospital were usually Jewish. The administrator of the hospital was Dr. Gross, a Jew from Krakow who collaborated with the Germans. Every time there was a selection, he would give a list of sick ones who lay in the hospital and in his opinion would be weak for a long period.*

*When my brother heard that I was in the hospital, he snuck in and came to visit me. He warned me that if the Germans came to the hospital, it would mean that the sick would be taken for selection and, that in such a case, I should hide immediately in the bathroom. At this point we already knew with certainty that selection meant extermination camp or execution on the hill by the camp. Indeed, on one evening I heard that there was going to be a selection, I got up from my bed and hid in the bathroom. That is how the selection skipped me.*

*After I recovered I returned to work and to camp. My brother would occasionally give me guidance on what to do and how to avoid selections or to serve the Germans. I followed his advice and all in all I was saved from a number of selections.*

*And so life went on in terrible fear from Goeth and his people, poor living conditions, filth and dirt everywhere, fleas that stung and annoyed, lice that did not give a rest, scores of women overcrowded in stinking, unaired huts, pessimistic and optimistic rumors at step after step. My big fortune was that I was close to my brother. It helped me emotionally, gave me strength and hope. The meetings between us, the encouragement and help that he gave me, made it possible for me to hold out in this hell.*

*At the beginning of November 1943, on a rainy and cold day, we were informed that part of us were going to be transferred to another camp. They started gathering men and women. To my bad luck I was among those who were being transferred. They gathered us from around the camp and so without giving us time to pack our belongings, they took us to the Polish camp Polger in Plaszow. The camp people that were not transferred stood and looked at us. This time too, when my brother heard that I was being transferred, he threw me a package with things to take on the way. Those were my belongings that I had no time to pack (because they didn't give us any). I don't know how he organized this. I was in a gloomy mood, afraid of the unknown. I was afraid of being separated from my brother, I was in shock and cried all the time. They did not let me go say goodbye to my brother. After they gathered everyone, we were loaded on cars that were designed for cattle, without water and without food. For a whole day we were driven until we reached a place called Skarzysko Kamienna. There we were placed in the work camp.*

*From this point on I was separated from my brother and never saw him again. He perished and I don't even know how and when.*

b. Historical Completion – The Transition and Life in the Plaszow Camp

i. The transition to Plaszow Camp

In November, 1942, by the order of the S.S. commander and the police, construction began on huts on the plot of two old Jewish cemeteries in Podgorze on 25 Jerusalemka Street and Avraham Street #3. These huts were designated for Jewish workers from the Krakow Ghetto. The place was first called Barackenbau and employed people in different professions. At the beginning the work was administered by the people of the Jewish council. Afterwards, the Untersturmfuhrer, Miller, who also commanded two additional camps, Judenlager 1 and Judenlager 2, got the command from the commander of the S.S. and the police. Later they were attached to the Plaszow Camp.

The work was done quickly. They leveled the area of the cemeteries, destroyed the tombstones (the marble slabs of the tombstones paved the main street of the camp later on and with the granite slabs they decorated the residences of the S.S. men). With bulldozers they got the corpses out of their graves and threw them into a collective grave. The number of huts grew and then they began to hold workers permanently in the camp, as camp workers. They were barred from free exit from the camp.



In the beginning of January 1943 the German workplaces received an order from the commander of the S.S. and the police to house the Jewish workers in their factories in the Plaszow camp.

In February 1943 the Untersturmfuhrer Leopold Amon Goeth was appointed as commander of the Plaszow camp. He began to speed up the pace of construction in the camp. The camp workers were required to sometimes work in two shifts and those who worked outside the camp were required to work in the camp construction when they returned from their outside work.

In the beginning of March, Commander Goeth announced to the Jewish council that as of March 10 the transfer of the Jews from the Krakow Ghetto would start according to their place of work. The transfer would be done while paying attention to the daily quota of the workers.

The transfer was not done at the required speed and therefore, on March 13<sup>th</sup> Kommissar Gutter received an order from Julian Scherner, the S.S. and police commander, that within 6 hours all the residents of Ghetto A must transfer to the Plaszow camp. And this was indeed done. On the same day 8,000 – 10,000 Jews and about 2,000 corpses of those who resisted or were late at the time of the transfer were brought to Plaszow. (In the Krakow book different numbers appear – 6,000 were transferred from the Ghetto to Plaszow, 3,000 were murdered. From the day that the Jews were transferred, the camp was called by a new name: “a camp for forced labor on behalf of the S.S. and police in the district of Krakow,” or *Zwangsarbeitslager des S.S. und Polizeifuhrers im Distrikt Krakau*).

ii. March 1943 deportation from Krakow Ghetto

The ghetto was surrounded with S.S. and Ukrainian guards. All the people who were to be transferred to the Plaszow camp gathered in Jozefinska Street. They were ordered to stand in groups of five according to their place of work. An inspection was conducted whether they had the *Judenpass* work documents. Whoever was unable to present his document was taken out of the line without mercy.

Amon Goeth went around among the people in lines and oversaw that parents did not try to smuggle their children (many parents tried to do that by hiding the children in backpacks and suitcases). The Germans started getting the children from the hands of their mothers while they were cruelly beating many women who did not want to hand them over. Shocking acts happened at that point. After Goeth saw that the task would be difficult, he announced that the children would be sent to the children’s home and from there would be transferred to the camp. Many parents decided that they were not leaving the ghetto without their children so they stayed, even though they had a document and could transfer to Camp Plaszow. At a certain point an order was given to not take belongings and that all the suitcases and backpacks would be collectively transferred to Camp Plaszow. Those who were not transferred to Plaszow were ordered to move to Ghetto B. A directive was issued

that whoever was found in Ghetto A after 5 pm would be sentenced to death by shooting. That evening the S.S. men went from house to house and whoever was found in Part A because he did not have documents and/or was late in arriving to the transfer, was shot and killed. There were many dead in the streets.

The next day, March 14<sup>th</sup>, in the early morning hours, S.S. men and Ukrainians went in to Part B of the ghetto. All the Jews were centralized and gathered in Zgoda Square. The Jews were ordered to remove all their luggage and the Germans started in their classification. The mass of people was divided into groups: women and children, men and elderly. Children from the children's home and babies were brought to one of the houses and massacred. Women and old men were brought to another house and also massacred.

The S.S. men went into the hospital and killed all the patients and the doctors who had not evacuated the day before. S.S. guards went house to house and whoever tried to hide was shot and killed. Among the groups of men, professionals were sorted and were sent to the Plaszow camp. All the rest, men, women, children and elderly, were loaded onto trucks at noon, driven to Auschwitz and there they were liquidated. After the deportation the Germans assembled Jewish squads whose duty it was to clean the ghetto, centralize the corpses, transfer them to a big communal grave in Plaszow, and sort and arrange the gear that was left by the Jews.

Thus the Krakow Ghetto was shut down and emptied.

### iii. Life in the Plaszow camp until November 1943

Until the middle of 1943 there were two main groups in the Plaszow camp: one group of those who went out to work outside the camp and a second group of those who worked in the camp proper in its construction at the beginning and later in the workshops that were established there, the products of which were intended for the Germans.

Wake up was at 4:30 in the morning and at 5:00 the work started. Those who worked outside the camp went out in groups of 70-90 people, usually with Ukrainian guards. For example: about 700-800 people worked in the Strauch firm, and went out every morning to work outside the camp in Krakow. Some worked in construction and some in shoveling coal. Another group of Jews worked for Schindler. Those who did not work outside the camp were divided into groups and worked inside the camp in construction. The fate of those who worked outside the camp was better, at least during work hours; the attitude towards them was better, and they were not beaten and were not driven like those who worked in the camp under the immediate supervision of the Nazi and Ukrainian guards who enjoyed abusing the Jews. Their food during work hours was also better, and in addition, they could exchange different products for food items that they occasionally smuggled from the ghetto to give to family members. There was a total ban on doing that: it was forbidden to be in touch with people outside of camp and even more so to trade in food. But the hunger that prevailed in camp motivated people to take the risk. Every once in a while the

guards at the gate of the camp would conduct surprise checks. Whoever got caught with even a little food in his tools, clothes, or pockets was punished with 25-100 lashes. At times the whole group was punished with flogging or night work. In other extreme cases, guards executed people.

The period of Amon Goeth was characterized by the heavy pressure on the camp residents and by the difficult physical abuse. Goeth would go around the camp with two big wolfhounds and have them maul Jews. Sometimes, for entertainment, he would shoot Jews who were walking around the camp from a window in his house. They served as his target shooting practice. When he went around the camp and did not like something he would get his gun out and shoot for no reason. For different reasons, the Germans would hang people by their necks, or hang them by their hands. In other cases they would put people in prison in cells that measured 50 or 55 centimeters on a side.

In addition to these punishments there were also collective punishments. The Germans would stand all the camp prisoners at roll call without moving for 6, 8, 10, or 12 hours or stood them naked all night in the cold winter months. In other cases camp residents would get punished by performing exhausting night work after day work, after which they worked all day again.

As of mid-1943, the work outside the camp was stopped. The workshops that were established in the camp provided work for all the camp residents. The work that was done at the workshops was for the use of the Germans and the German military.

Occasionally the Germans would send Jews from Plaszow to work at other camps. During 1943 and 1944 Jews were added to the Plaszow camp from areas around Krakow that were declared as Judenrein. Based on Polish data, a total of 15,000 Jews passed through the Plaszow camp, of whom 8,000 were murdered. 2,000 Poles who were suspected of membership in the underground also passed through the camp.

#### iv. The underground in the Plaszow camp

There is not much information about the resistance movement in the Plaszow camp since there were no survivors of the underground movement, but it is known that there was a resistance movement. Stories about frequent escapes from the camp are known, among others from the report of the Department of Internal Affairs of the Delegatura<sup>xxi</sup> for the period from August 15<sup>th</sup> to September 15<sup>th</sup>, 1943. In the report it was written that “from time to time mass groups of escapees are encountered, about 10 or several tens of Jews who escaped from the camp or work places.”

The same source reported on a serious armed resistance that occurred at the end of August 1943. “On August 18<sup>th</sup>, in the late evening hours, two trucks that belonged to the camp command, with 16 Ukrainian guards and more than 300 Jews, escaped the camp. As per data from the police, the escapees took with them weapons and ammunition for 100

people. After this escape, nobody was allowed out and an investigation took place. As an act of revenge for this escape, the German police shot to death 200 Jews. On August 31<sup>st</sup>, three trucks left the camp loaded with the corpses of the dead.”

Maybe the data is exaggerated, and it is likely that it is exaggerated, since it is impossible to put 300 people in two trucks, but the fact that there was a resistance movement is correct. It is known that there was a resistance movement that was organized by the Jewish prisoners in collaboration with the Ukrainians. Of this group not much is known since no trace remains.

There are details on an underground group that got organized in October, 1943. This group was named the “Jewish Fighting Organization” and emphasized the continuation of the tradition of the Zydowka Organizacja Bojowa (Z.O.B., the Jewish Fighting Organization) from Krakow. Twenty-five names of the Jewish Fighting Organization members from Plaszow are known. The organization was made up of prisoners with a special status who had a certain degree of freedom of movement (for example, there were five *kapos*<sup>xxii</sup>). Three people stood at the head of the organization: Adam Shtab, Victor Traubman, and David Herz.

The major role of the underground at a certain point was to try to obtain weapons in order to carry out acts of resistance when the time came. In January 1944 they managed to steal two guns from guards who fell asleep during guard duty. Other weapons were obtained later on with the help of Jewish tinsmiths who worked at the weapons warehouse and copied the warehouse keys. All in all, six guns and one rifle were obtained by this underground. At the camp proper, in an underground fashion of course, hand grenades and primitive bombs were developed and manufactured in secret. The weapons and the bombs were hidden in a bunker that was established by the sheet metal works.

There were attempts to get in touch with the Polish underground in an effort to get help and weapons but those attempts were not successful for many reasons.

The intention of the underground was to rebel, if and when the time of the liquidation of the camp and the dispatch of its residents to an extermination camp took place. For that purpose operational plans were prepared. In mid-1944 the commander of the organization, Adam Shtab, was caught while trying to bribe a Ukrainian to sell his weapon. He was arrested and underwent many tortures by the Nazis who wanted to get details about the organization from him, but they were not successful and he was executed.

The organization continued to exist despite the blow that it absorbed. At the end of May, 1944, when the camp was evacuated, a rebellion was not carried out because there was information of a high level of credibility that the Jews of the camp were not being sent to an extermination camp, but to another work camp.

v. Subject summary – Plaszow camp

The Plaszow camp is considered to be one of the more difficult camps in which Jews worked. I did not intend to describe the horrors, torture, and suffering that the Jews went through in the camp. Every moment of the day, each person was in danger of death.

I will summarize this chapter with two testimonies. One is of a prisoner by the name of Gala Meirsdorf that was written in the camp itself while she was a prisoner. The second is from Judge Bejski that was given at Eichmann's trial. Both, of course, were at the Plaszow camp.

Excerpt from the testimony of Gala Meirsdorf that was translated from Polish (not by a professional translator):

*"Beginning of November 1943, cold and rainy outside, just our luck. An atmosphere of restlessness is felt in the camp and it feels like something bad is going to happen. The announcement system invites the kapos and commandats to enter the camp. If they come, it means that there is some change. Every change, of course, is against us, every change may be a catastrophe.*

*The worst thing that happens to us is the fear, the fear that affects our brains. The devil himself is preparing bad surprises for us..."*

Excerpt from the testimony of Judge Bejski – when asked by the legal counsel at the Eichmann trial why the Jews did not rebel, he responded:

*"There is no one answer, I can say what was the general situation. From that maybe you'll understand, and it is certainly difficult to understand for whoever was not there. In the end it was mid-1943. It was already the third year of the war. It did not start with that. It started with something else. People were already, all the Jewry was depressed from what happened these past three years. This is one thing and the second thing – there was, anyhow, hope: here people are working hard labor, they are supposedly needed for work. What may.... It was clear at that moment that if the smallest thing will be done when many people, many forces..... First of all, there is no more room also by us – and I admit – to describe the feeling of fear after 18 years. A feeling of fear, when I stand today in front of Your Honors, no longer exists, and I don't think that it is possible to instill it in somebody. In the end, it is a fear of terror. Standing in front of machine guns, and the very observance of the hanging of a youth. Then there is no remaining ability to respond."*

7. The Work Camp Skarzysko Kamienna

a. Testimony

*We arrived at Skarzysko in November 1943. Jews from other places and different camps came with us. Most of the people looked like skeletons (muselmanns<sup>xxiii</sup>). From the train station we were led by foot to the camp, accompanied by armed Ukrainians. Along the way we saw many corpses*

*lying on the side of the road. The Ukrainians who accompanied us told us “these are all the people who dared to escape..... if one of you dares to escape, that will be his end also.”*

*A friend who was actually also a relative arrived with me to Skarzysko. We were together in Plaszow and our ways did not part until the end of the war. When we arrived to camp we saw many prisoners who looked like they were dying, and the color of their skin was yellow. When we asked what that was we were told that these are the prisoners who work with gunpowder (pikrina in Polish, but actually picric acid) in the factory. The rumors that passed among us immediately were that anybody who works in that, his skin turns yellow and his days are numbered because the dust burns the lungs. In general, the work camp in Skarzysko Kamienna was attached to the weapons and ammunition factory that supplied to the German army. The name of the factory was Hasag. All the camp’s people worked at the factory.*

*As soon as we arrived they had us stand in roll call and began to sort us. This was done by one of the camp’s commanders, a Nazi by the name of Batenschleger. I am not sure of the role that he performed but I think that he was the deputy camp commander.*

*In the sorting they took all the people, especially the men who looked healthy, young, and handsome to work with the gun powder. Myself and my friend were also sorted and placed with the group that was to work with gun powder. Fortunately, before the sorting was completed, my friend saw one of the Jewish policemen in camp (kapo) that she knew before the war and she told me, come let’s get out of the line so he can see us and quickly give some jewelry (I still had a few jewelry pieces from my parents’ house). I gave her my ring. She approached the policeman that she knew, spoke with him, gave him the ring (as a bribe) and he immediately took us to a group that he was in charge of and its role was to work in the artillery shell department.*

*After the sorting they gave us numbers (each one of us had a serial number that had to be remembered) and took us, according to the order of the sorting, to an additional sorting and, this time, to be distributed to different wings of the buildings.*

*The factory was divided into three wings (werke): Wing A, Wing B, and Wing C. The most comfortable wing was Wing A, the worst was Wing C. Based on the rumors we heard in Wing C, people were able to survive no more than a month, because the gun powder that was produced in the wing entered the lungs and burned them from the inside. Before death, they became yellow. My friend and I were sorted to Wing C but fortunately we did not work directly with the gun powder.*

*The camp was a huge house that one could not cross from end to end. The height of the house was 4-5 stories above ground and two stories below ground. This was essentially the whole camp. The house had a yard, of course. In the room/huge halls bunks were arranged in rows, each was seven layers. The space between the bunks was very small and it was necessary to crawl in order to go to sleep. We slept on planks, of course. Wherever we slept, it was not good. Below there was dirt because everything fell from the top, it was hard to get to the top and it was dangerous*

*because the entrance and exit from the bunk took a longer time. When the whistle blew in camp to get out to work we had to do it quickly.*

*Everything in the camp was dirty and filthy and we, the prisoners, were also of course. We received very little food and we were very hungry. The daily menu included only a liter of soup and 200 grams of bread a day. The dirt and filth left their mark in camp, there were epidemics of typhus and dysentery. People died from these epidemics every day, from exhaustion and from the powder. Almost every morning we would find corpses of prisoners who died during the night. We took them out of the room and threw them into a big hole that was covered with lime. Nobody, of course, lifted a finger to stop these epidemics. The work that we performed every day we did in the factory that was located inside the nearby forest. Every morning they took us on foot to the factory, accompanied by Jewish kapos and very few armed Ukrainians. In the factory itself we had Polish supervisors who harassed us day and night. They were happy that we were suffering and added to our suffering by pressure and abuse. Every good thing that was on us, clothes, shoes, boots, etc, they tried to take by force and/or threats or claims such as: you are going to die in a month anyway, not worth leaving this or that in your possession. I had few valuables, I made sure to hide them and with their help I managed to get additional food, medicine etc.*

*My role at the factory was to clean the threads of the shells. The shells would move on a conveyor belt, by my spot was a foot pedal. When the shell reached me I would stop the conveyor with the pedal and with the help of a screwdriver, cleaned the thread. This is how I worked every day for 12 hours continuously.*

*The camp commander was a Nazi S.S. man by the name of Infling. On his hat was a symbol of a skull with two crossbones. There was another Gestapo man, dressed in black, a Ukrainian by the name of Romanenko. He was probably in charge of all our guards who were Ukrainians. The Germans who were there were only the commanders of the Ukrainians. There was also a Nazi by the name of Batenschleger (who is mentioned earlier) who was the cruelest of all. All of them were in the external administration of the camp.*

*There was also an internal administration in the camp, sort of a council or Judenrat. The Judenrat had a chairman and there were also Jewish police that were appointed by the Nazis. The commander of the Jewish police was a rude, cruel man who with his own hands killed people and Jews, his name was Schpermann. Schpermann had a deputy and his name was Czepicki, who was no better than him and sometimes even rose above him in the degree of his cruelty. The doctors and some of the orderlies were also unpleasant people. Each one took advantage of his position on the back of the low and oppressed prisoners.*

*Life at camp was very difficult. Fortunately, my work was relatively good and I also had valuables of my own with whose help I sometimes completed critical shortages. Our biggest nightmares were the weekly inquiries. In reality it was twice a week, on Thursday after work in the factory and on Sunday at the camp. Every person who weakened or was not to the liking of the foreman,*

*the Jewish policemen, or just did not stand straight, his sentence was death, either by a shot or his deportation to Dachau.*

*Generally the situation was grim. If you looked good it was also not good – meaning that you had money, and we were not allowed to have money or valuables. If you looked bad – it was also not good and you were sent to an extermination camp. If you were dressed – it is not good – where were the clothes taken from, meaning that when clothes were collected you did not hand them over. Batenschleger personally arrived every morning, entered the women's bathing place, chose the prettiest girls that he saw and usually returned them after two days when they were already dead.*

*Infling would walk around the camp during work hours and those that were seen by him outside the building risked being shot by him. Usually, there were people in the camp, those who worked a night shift, who did not work during the day and could not stay in the rooms because of the heat and therefore, sat outside sometimes.*

*During my stay at the camp I got sick with typhus. Fortunately, my friend cared for me and got me out of it, otherwise my life would have ended then. With the help of my valuables she bribed one of the orderlies and that gave me permission to stay in the room for a few days. She bought medicines and gave them to me. My situation was very bad, I was really dying. Fortunately, my body was strong and I succeeded in getting over the sickness with the help of the medicine, something that many others did not succeed in doing and died. After the illness I was very weak and I was always afraid of being sent to Dachau because of my physically weakened state after. After the illness, some other complications developed, I got pleurisy and I was deaf for a long time. I don't know how I managed to survive in camp after what I went through. I owe my life to my friend who worried and took care of me, brought medicines and even took risks for me. Otherwise I would have not been able to withstand it.*

*Every once in a while there were transports out of the camp to extermination camps and transports of Jews from different places would arrive to camp. One of the transports that arrived from Majdanek had a special name – K.L.'niks (K.L. means Konzentrationslager, or concentration camp). The transport consisted mostly of Jews who were sent to Majdanek after the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. There in Majdanek they actually did not do anything, the Germans just gave them serious trouble and abused them so that they would be eliminated slowly. Part of them were sent to work in Skarzysko Kamienna in this transport. Upon arrival to our camp, the deputy police commander, Czepicki approached Infling the camp commander and told him, "These are the Jews that killed Germans in Warsaw." Those, of course, were the people among the first to suffer at every opportunity and any excuse.*

*This was the atmosphere at camp. Whoever weakened, they made sure to weaken even more, the camp residents, the Jewish officials and also the administration.*

*Infling was replaced at one point and a new commander by the name of Kuehnenmann arrived. He knew a little Yiddish. He walked around the camp with a big dog and cast fear and awe in*



everybody. He was an ugly, hunchbacked man, was cruel in the most humiliating way. Every day he would choose people and kill them under different pretexts. Czepicki and Schpermann helped him with that.

While I was at camp there were all sorts of sabotages in the production lines and theft of ammunition by people of the underground. I don't know what they did and how they did it exactly, I did not come in contact with them. I heard about those things and after every serious sabotage or theft there would be a big uproar in the camp, searches, roll calls, and executions by shooting or hanging.

Around April, May 1944 the conditions of life in Skarzysko improved a little. The improvement was reflected in the food. We received ½ kilogram of bread a day instead of the 200 grams and a liter and a half of soup instead of a liter. The improvement stemmed from the fact that the Germans understood and saw that there was nowhere to bring Jews from. The killings and death from disease created a shortage of personnel at the factory, the foremen began to respond to the shortage of personnel and they were unable to fulfill the required production quotas. The shortage of personnel caused the termination of the killings and selections for transports. There was no place to bring Jews from so it was decided to strengthen the existing personnel.

I started to get stronger after the illness. Everything I had as security, valuables, jewelry, etc., ran out and was sold or confiscated in searches but fortunately I still had the clothes on my body. There were those who did not have clothes and they sewed themselves clothes from the paper that made up the cement bags.

#### Leaving Skarzysko

In July 1944 the Russian front began to get close. We received a directive to start packing the factory, all the machines, tools, etc. At the end of July or August 1944 we were told that we were being transferred. Part of the men were transferred to Czestochowa and part of the women were sent to Buchenwald and I and another big group were sent to Germany to the Leipzig work camp.

Leaving the camp, most of the women were without clothes, as I said before. Their bodies were wrapped with paper from cement bags. The S.S. man who was in charge of the transport from Skarzysko to Leipzig saw us, took pity on us, and ordered to open the warehouses and distribute clothes. They put us in cattle cars, it was very hot and suffocating. Many threw up and it was horrible. So we were driven during a full day and night until our arrival to the Leipzig camp in Germany.

#### b. Historical Completion

##### i. General data

The camp was established in August 1942, close to the established location of the German weapons and ammunition factory Hasag – Aktiengesellschaft Hugo Schneider. Jews from different places in the Generalgouvernement were concentrated into the camp, usually

those that were selected to work were taken out of the transports to the extermination camps. Of course, those were the healthy and strong among those that were sorted. 150,000 Jews worked at the camp while occasionally the work force was exchanged with new forced labor workers. The veterans and those who became weak were sent to extermination camps. Within the boundaries of the camp, 10,000 people perished from punishment, disease, and epidemics.

In the camp itself very difficult conditions prevailed; there was severe hunger and the Germans, Ukrainians, and Poles abused the Jews. The sanitary conditions in the camp were very bad and as a result, diseases and epidemics like typhoid and dysentery broke out. There was a harvest of death in the camp.

The camp was divided into three wings (werkes) where Werke C was the worst and Werke A was the best (relatively). The camp was established within the framework of the German policy in the years 1942-1943 in which the shortage of the workforce in Germany grew. Already in 1942 the German economy was over a million workers short. In order to recruit workers in all the occupied countries and bring them to the Reich, in a forced manner of course, Fritz Sauckel was appointed in March 1942 "proxy for general recruitment of workforce." As much as Sauckel succeeded in grabbing and taking Polish workers from the Generalgouvernement and transferring them to the Reich, so grew the necessity to employ Jews in the factories of military manufacturing. This practice was determined for a certain time as the formal policy of the Nazi government. This was also reflected in the Skarzysko camp; the number of Jewish workers grew from 2,000 Jewish workers in September 1942 to 20,000 at the beginning of 1944.

#### ii. The underground in the Skarzysko camp

Several unconnected underground groups operated in the Skarzysko camp. The underground activity was carried out on several major levels: escapes from the camp, sabotages in the production line, and theft of ammunition and weapons and their transfer to the Polish underground. A Polish underground periodical, *Current Information*, number 12 dated March 26, 1943, wrote about the escape of 20 Jewish prisoners from the camp. The escape occurred February 7, 1943, after they overpowered a German gendarme and took his weapon. At the end of 1943 it was reported that the flow of escapees from the camp increased.

The report of the Ministry of the Interior dated December 31, 1943, stated that Jews who escaped from Skarzysko caused many forest fires around the camp. In the Delegatura report dated June 2, 1942, it is written that "in the Kielce region, in the area of the Skarzysko factory for weapons and ammunition, the Jews who are employed as workers constitute a communist base (about 4,000 people). It is estimated that at least half the people belong to P.P.R.<sup>xxiv</sup> and engage in propaganda, some in sabotage and extraction of ammunition. A certain part of Jews belongs to Z.O.B.<sup>xxv</sup> It is interesting that this whole area, is suffused in

communism, and no doubt has means of communication, money (mostly American currency), as well as products (like cigarettes) that are supplied from the outside.”

It is clear that this report is not true. Although certain Jews had connections with the P.P.R. and even with the *Armia Krajowa*<sup>xxvi</sup>, some prisoners who worked in the ammunition warehouse had connections. They would steal ammunition and weapons and transfer them to the German underground. From that to saying that 2,000 people belonged to P.P.R. and that it was a communist base, is a very long jump. That came from the imagination of the writer of the report.

In January 1944 two cases of ammunition disappeared from a warehouse in huts 162 and 163. A search was conducted in camp. The ammunition was not found, but all kinds of valuables, clothes, and food were confiscated from prisoners who had managed to hoard them. A warehouse keeper and two other workers were executed because of the theft.

There were sabotage acts in the production line of two huts, number 6 and number 33. Workers poured sand into crates of explosives and poured water into the boilers where the explosives were washed. This way, the explosive that was placed in grenades, shells, and gun pellets was affected, so that when activated, it did not work. Several workers sabotaged ammunition casings, again so that they wouldn't work when needed. Young women who worked in factory A secretly stole shells and bullets and brought them to the huts of the Poles so that they would transfer them to the Polish underground. They hid the ammunition in their underclothes, in their boots, or in the double soles of shoes and boots. A Jew by the name of Edek was discovered with a weapon when he was caught trying to escape. He was interrogated, tortured, and in the end, revealed that a Jewess by the name Lola Mendelewicz helped him in smuggling the weapon and ammunition. She was executed and with her, the Polish foreman and forewoman. Of course, the one who tried to escape was also executed. All four were publicly hanged at the gate of the camp.

In the 84 and 85 huts, workers dismantled anti-air weapons, emptied them of all the explosive powder and filled the shells and grenades with new explosives. They had to screw the newly prepared shells in a way that sealed them completely. The workers intentionally did not seal the shells so that the shells would not work when activated.

### iii. Additional testimony

Testimony of Ozer Grundman as reported at Yad Vashem:

*I stayed at the camp because I had an infection in my foot. I suffered for months with it, until one day I saw that it was no longer possible. I approached the camp doctor. The doctor told me “nothing will happen to you, stay in the camp for 3 days and then go back to work.” The next day at 10 Infling arrived and they announced “all the sick out” – we knew that the meaning was certain death. We were 18 people. We went out. He approached each one and asked “What do you have?” “Why did you not go to work?” and each one told him his story. When he came to me I told him that I have nothing. So, he looked at me and said to*

*me: "So why did you stay in the camp?" I answered: "The doctor X gave me approval for one day to rest, I received a blow to the leg and don't have anything." He still did not want to believe and asked "And you are really going back to work tomorrow?" I answered: "Yes, look," and showed him the other leg, not the leg where the wound was – I said, "Look, I have nothing." After me, two others probably caught on and informed him that they were going back to work tomorrow. Of the 18, three went back to the huts, the remaining 15 people, five minutes did not go by and we heard the rattle of machine guns. This was generally the work camp Skarzysko.*

iv. The liquidation of the camp

The Germans started to evacuate their factories for weapons and ammunition, as well as the Jews, from the path of the Soviet forces advancing westward. During the months July-August 1944 the Germans started to pack the Hasag factory in Skarzysko. The camp workers were ordered to dismantle everything that could be dismantled, get it packed, and load it on trucks. At the same time the evacuation of Jews from the camp itself also started. Part of the camp workers were evacuated for extermination in Auschwitz, mostly the weak and elderly. Another part, mostly the strong and healthy, were evacuated to other work camps. The work camps to which the Jews were evacuated were Czestochowa, Ravensbruck, and Buchenwald. Most of the women were evacuated to Leipzig inside Germany where there was also a weapons and ammunition factory and they wanted to take advantage of their experience. The evacuation of the camp was carried out until January 1945.

8. Leipzig Work Camp and the Death March

a. Testimony

i. Leipzig camp

*Around August 1944 we arrived at the Leipzig camp. We were exhausted and weak from the train trip in substandard conditions. At first we thought that we were being led to extermination camps, this feeling of ours got much stronger when we arrived because we were ordered to get undressed and get into the showers. We were sure that here they were going to exterminate us in the same way that they exterminated Jews in the gas chambers with the pretext that these are showers. (At that time we already knew about the extermination in gas chambers—and also about the Germans' cover story that they were showers). After the showers they disinfected us with DDT, took our old clothes away and gave us a striped outfit, called a pasiaki.*

*In Leipzig, like in Skarzysko, there was a factory for weapons and ammunition. Immediately the next morning, we went out to work. First, of course, they sorted us into different jobs. I was sorted to work in the cleaning of bullets and artillery shells with fire water (acid). My good friend who saved me from death in Skarzysko arrived to camp with me.*

*At first the conditions at camp were good relative to the Skarzysko camp. We received more food, a quarter of bread, a quarter of margarine, potato peel soup and sometimes we received pieces of sausage from horse meat. The camp was clean and orderly. We lived outside of the factory area, in blocks. Only women were in the camp and each block was supervised by a female Pole. Compared to the terrible conditions in the Skarzysko camp, we felt during the first period like in a health resort.*

*But things changed for the worse very quickly. The conditions worsened, food rationing began. The Germans also had less food because the front was approaching and a food shortage began also in all of Germany. The work conditions and attitude towards us also worsened. There were blows and abuse every day, the work hours lengthened, and the work became more and more difficult. The Germans demanded to increase the production quotas.*

*From this camp, as opposed to Skarzysko, the Germans hardly sent people and/or transports to extermination camps and the killings were fewer since they could not easily give up on working hands. There were no replacements. At this phase there was already no place from which to provide them with Jews. For the purpose of extermination, occasionally people who became very very weak and could not work and/or those who committed serious offenses and they wanted to execute them were sent to Dachau.*

*Since my work was cleaning bullets and shells with fire water, my hands got injured. The fire water began to eat the skin of my hands, my situation worsened from day to day. All the skin in the palm and arm was eaten and the tissue was exposed. The pains I had were terrible and the fire water that came in contact with the exposed tissue, really paralyzed my ability to work. I went to the German who was in charge of us at the factory and asked him to change my job. I did not want to work with fire water any longer. He went and informed his supervisors that I was no longer able to work (I did not know about it in retrospect). They did not change my job. One day, as I was returning from work they informed me that I was going with the next transport to Dachau (the significance was death because I was no longer in the circle of work). This was already close to the end of the war. I thought to myself, here I was able to drag myself to here, and now I am being sent to death when the end of the war can already be seen on the horizon. I started to make peace with going to my death. I don't know exactly what happened, but my friend who was with me all along the way, succeeded in bribing somebody for a pack of cigarettes that she had and got me off of the list of those that were led to Dachau. From that day on, I no longer complained, despite the mortal situation of my hands and in spite of the pain, I continued to work. From time to time, my friend managed somehow to get some ointment and gauze with which I bandaged my hands and continued to work.*

*The Russian front was getting closer in the months of March and April, 1945. The conditions at the camp became worse more and more. It was clear to us that the end of the war was arriving. Together with the hope, fears gnawed in us about what would happen to us. Were*

*we even going to see the end or would we be exterminated? The Germans and S.S. men were very nervous and their attitude toward us became worse from day to day.*

ii. The death march

*It was Friday, April 13, 1945, in the morning. That day the Germans started to distribute all the food in the camp and told us that we were leaving the camp. We were shocked and did not know where they were taking us. They also said that the food we were receiving from today until further notice was it, no more food because there isn't any. The Polish and German women were left in the camp and they only took us. According to them, we were going to get away from the front.*

*Each one of us received 1/8 bread, sugar and margarine. Since I was very hungry, I couldn't resist the temptation and ate everything that same day. I did not think at all, I acted like an animal. I was hungry so I ate and did not think about tomorrow, the main thing was to get through the present day alive.*

*We were arranged in groups of six and started to march. I felt very bad because I stuffed all the food they gave us at once and I really could not walk. I felt that I wanted to die. I sat down several times and said that I am not moving from here. But, again, to my great fortune, my friend came to my aid. She went to ask for water for me from our German escort. She received a beating from him instead of water because she dared to ask.*

*Somehow, with the support of the women around me, I succeeded to hold out and walk. We were about 10,000 women, skinny, tired, and hungry. We marched and marched several days. Whoever could not walk at the beginning was shot and killed. There was no food and we received hardly any water. Later on, whoever fell, they did not even shoot. It was a waste of German bullets. We were accompanied by men and women from the S.S. During the march, the number of guards dwindled. They just left and escaped. At times we went by groups of men who were also marched with no purpose, sometimes even in the opposite direction from us. The feeling was that the Germans probably didn't know what to do and each was going wherever he wanted.*

*The hunger bothered us a lot. We started eating grass in every place we stopped or slept. We simply plucked all kinds of weeds that were near us and ate. Sometimes we stopped in villages along the way. The brave girls among us used to sneak and go look for food in barns or abandoned houses. This sometimes cost them their lives. There were farmers and/or our guards who caught them and killed them. There were those among us who at times found a potato, started a fire in order to cook it. This cost them their lives.*

*I personally broke down several times during the march. I would sit and ask to be left alone. I was very weak, almost unconscious, totally drugged from the effort, indifferent to what was happening around me. Several times I asked the guard who was called Ivan, to shoot me. But he always laughed in my face and said that it's a shame on the bullet that will kill*

*me. Luckily, my friends used to lift me, support, and encourage me, and so I was able to continue further. The sadists among our male and female German guards used to beat us during the march without mercy.*

*During the march we arrived to the river Elbe and the Germans got us into the water in order to cross it. I was sure that here this was our end, that instead of shooting us and wasting bullets on us, they were going to drown us, but that did not happen. We crossed the river and walked on its other side.*

*One day, it was the 25<sup>th</sup> or 26<sup>th</sup> of April, we arrived at one of the villages. As I said before, the guard on us was very sparse. Thirteen of us girls sneaked away and when we entered the barn floor, we caught a nap on the hay. When we woke up, we were alone in the village, and from afar we heard the sounds of shooting at the front. The village was probably abandoned by its residents. Suddenly we saw Russian soldiers, probably the vanguard of one of the units. We waved to them in greeting and said that we were Jewish. They told us to walk in the direction of the front where there were Russian units. But we wanted to rest more, we were tired, exhausted, and hungry, and we did not have strength to walk. We went into one of the abandoned houses, and found food. In the yard there were a few chickens, we caught them and slaughtered them. We cooked ourselves food and ate. We showered in the house and went to sleep.*

*When we woke up, we heard the sound of cars traveling in the village. We went out and saw military units. We were sure that these were Russians. We went out and shouted “we are Jewish, we are Jewish.” We were caught by several soldiers and received a beating from them. By their talk we understood that they were German. They had just re-occupied the village.*

*We escaped as long as our souls were with us. Six women succeeded in escaping together and we began to walk in the direction that our group had gone. On the way we started to meet more Jewish groups who walked without knowing where to go.*

*So we walked by foot the length of the Elbe, joining another group every time. At a certain point we crossed the river again until we arrived at a village by the name of Oschatz in the Sudeten region. We stayed there to rest. The next morning when we woke up there were no more Germans. It turned out that the Russians had occupied the place and so we were liberated.*

*The last stage of the war, the death march, was one of the most difficult periods that I went through at the time of the Holocaust. Despite all the difficulties in the camps, the difficult conditions, the hunger, beatings, and the fear, the period of the death march that was relatively short compared to everything that I went through, was for me the most difficult. Every day that went by I asked myself if I was still alive. The physical hardship was great, but with it, the emotional difficulty, the knowledge that here is the end but you don't see it, the impatience for the end of the war, all that weighed greatly emotionally.*

*Many of us died during the last phase of the war, because of exhaustion, because of the physical effort and/or the cruelty of the Germans and most important, the emotional breakdown, the inability to continue to tolerate the suffering.*

b. Historical Completion

i. Evacuation of camps into Germany

During the months July-December 1944, during the advancement of the Russian forces westward, the Germans evacuated work camps in the German occupied areas. Thousands of prisoners who were still to a certain extent able to work, were brought to work camps inside the Reich in which there were armament factories. The reasons for it were varied:

- So that the factories, mainly the armament factories and concentration camps, would not fall into the hands of the Russians.
- The shortage of workforce in Germany grew because of the recruitment to the military up to the utmost possible limit. Heydrich, who was appointed at the end of July as Commander of the Military Reserves, still referred in the summer of 1944, at the peak of the gas chambers and incinerator operations, a significant number of Jewish prisoners to Auschwitz factories and also to factories inside the Reich.

For the above reasons and because of his efforts to improve his image in the eyes of the West, Heydrich ordered the dismantling of the extermination facilities in Auschwitz. In addition to that, he ordered Eichmann in December, 1944 in these words: "If you dealt until now in extermination of Jews, you must—when I order you this moment to be a shelterer of Jews."

The main camps in the Reich to which Jews were evacuated were: Bergen Belsen, Buchenwald, Mauthausen, Ravensbruck, and Leipzig. These camps filled up during these evacuations and became crammed to capacity and infected with epidemics.

During the months December, 1944 – March, 1945, the Germans streamed masses of prisoners into Germany from the camps in the German occupied areas that were going to be conquered by the Russians. In the dozen camps that were there, about 500,000 non-Jewish political prisoners and about 200,000 Jews were gathered during the winter.

Of the hundreds of thousands that were evacuated, many had to travel in open cars, exposed to the European winter. Hundreds died from hunger and cold. Many others were evacuated in marches on foot for weeks into Germany. These marches turned into death marches because of the run-down state of the prisoners, lack of food, and weather conditions. Many perished on the roads. From Danzig and Stutthoff about 29,000 Jews were evacuated, mostly women, in ships and trains. Only 3,000 arrived to the camps in Germany at the end of this journey.

The Jews that arrived at camps in Germany, which were full and crowded anyway, increased the suffering in the camps. The number of deaths in the camps went up sharply due to



overcrowding, hunger, abuse, and epidemics. In the Mauthausen camp alone more than 7,000 Jews, 15,000 Gypsies and 4,000 prisoners of war died within a little more than 4 months. Another 40,000 Jews perished in Bergen Belsen and 40,000 perished in other camps.

ii. Life in the Leipzig camp

The Leipzig camp was a work camp like all the other work camps. There were workshops and there was an armament factory. The female Jewish prisoners worked as ordered. There is not much difference between what was described in other camps, to what was happening in this camp. Therefore, I chose in this case to bring into my work a song that was written in the camp by one of the prisoners which describes what happened and how she felt.

The song was written in November, 1994 by Meirsdorf Gala and was translated literally from Polish to Hebrew, not by a professional translator.<sup>xxvii</sup>

“I am hungry”  
This is what you hear all the time  
“I am hungry”  
The word blows the ears  
Need to know to manage alone  
And search for a little food  
There are those of us that know  
To sew and launder and in return  
Receive ‘sausage’  
There are those who sell rags  
And receive a little butter  
There are those who read  
The future, and also lend their  
Comb for a time and in return  
Receive a little bread or  
A little soup  
In this situation  
The trade develops  
Among the detainees  
And I am far from all that  
And the hunger gets worse  
And the situation is very difficult for me  
I hope that once G-d  
Will allow us  
To pass the gates of this camp safely  
And we will be free  
And then we will tell everyone  
How the Germans treated us  
How they starved us for a piece of bread  
How we received beatings how we were starved  
The whole night in the bitter cold  
We were ordered to stand on knees, this

Is part of the punishments that were imposed on us  
How they shaved our heads in addition  
If we can go through all this  
Then we promised ourselves  
That revenge we will take from them

The song speaks for itself and there is no need to explain what happened to them in this camp.

### iii. The death march

In March and April, 1945, the Allied forces deepened and penetrated into German areas, Russia from the east and the western allies from the west. It was clear that the forces would meet in the center of Germany. Hitler and his people still hoped that the German army would be able to hold out, if not in Germany then in the mountain areas of the Sudeten or the Austrian Alps.

Inside the Reich chaos prevailed. The Allies' planes constantly bombarded the railroads and the industrial factories were also bombarded endlessly. German refugees who escaped from the Russian forces flocked from the east.

Two separate policy lines brought the S.S. to extend the suffering of the Jews and to the development of the last phase of mass murder as it was conducted during all the years of the war. This phase was the death march. The two policy lines by whose light the Germans operated were:

- The will to prevent the Allies from liberating any man who was witness to the mass murder.
- The will to establish, during as long a time as possible, a mass of forced workers to fulfill all the needs that faced the crumbling German army: repairs of roads and railroads, rebuilding of train platforms, repairs of bridges, digging underground bunkers from which it would be possible to continue to manage the battle, preparing traps and tank barriers, establishing mountain strongholds deep underground.

But above and beyond all those reasons remained the additional and constant claim that argued that the Jews were not human beings, that they needed to suffer and that it was not important if they die, however cruel the circumstances.

Therefore, the death marches were conducted, despite the chaos and great confusion in Germany. The work camps opened and only the Jewish prisoners were taken out and escorted by S.S. guards, led eastward, southward, westward and northward, with no aim and with no defined direction.

Many died on the roads—the German/Nazis took Jews after they went through all the events of the Holocaust, work and extermination camps, loss of their dear ones, and as they were exhausted, discouraged, hungry and looked like skeletons (muselmans), who were not

able to respond to anything and led them during many days over Germany and Austria with no food and hardly any water. Many of them died or were killed on the way and were left in the places where they died.

This continued until the total surrender of Germany on May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1945.

## 8. Summary

In the opening speech at the Eichmann trial, Gid'on Hausner, the Attorney General who was also the prosecutor said, "In the place that I am standing in front of you, judges of Israel, to accuse Adolf Eichmann, I am not standing alone. With me are standing here at this hour, 6 million prosecutors, but they cannot get up on their legs, to point an accusatory finger toward the glass booth, and to shout to the one sitting there: 'I accuse' because their ashes are piled among the hills of Auschwitz and the fields of Treblinka, washed in the Polish forests and their graves are scattered over Europe's length and width. Their blood cries out but their voice will not be heard. I, therefore, will be a mouth for them and will say in their name the words of the terrible indictment.

The Book of Chronicles about the people of Israel is saturated with suffering and tears. The command 'in your blood is my life' accompanies this people since it appeared on the stage of history. Pharaoh in Egypt decided to torture them and to throw their sons to the Nile. Haman ordered to exterminate them, to kill them, and to forgo them. Chamilnitski slaughtered masses. Petlura held pogroms to kill them but in all the bloody path of this nation, since becoming a people and until today, no man arose who could do what this cruel regime of Hitler and what Adolf Eichmann carried out. The outstretched arm of this regime in order to exterminate the Jewish nation..... Even the most terrible abusers, the blood chillers of Caesar Nero , Attila and Genghis Khan, these are the sinister figures of barbarism and bloodlust, who were for eternal abomination – they pale compared to the horrors and scenes of annihilation that will be presented to you in this trial."

This work of mine is based on the autobiographical story of the witness, Tova Zaks, who is one of millions of Jews who went through the Holocaust. The story is constructed and based on her personal story that leads from her life in town at the eve of the war and until the end of the war, when during her personal story, historical expansions to events and places that she went through are interwoven.

In this work I described the uncompromising stand of the witness against the whole organization and the huge apparatus that rose against her and against the Jewish people to exterminate them and to deny them human likeness.

The witness is one single individual out of millions of Jews in Europe whose situation was like hers. All the Jews tried to stand and survive what was happening, each in his own way, but only relatively few managed to survive. Six million Jews were the victims of the attempt to stand against the oppressor. The concept of standing that we are using, contains more aspects than in the concepts of disobedience, rebellion, or resistance. This concept includes the active Jewish resistance: the underground, the Ghetto wars, partisan activity, etc. Despite the almost impossible conditions that we know from the Holocaust, there were brave

Jews who raised the flag of rebellion in the various occupied areas. Although they were few, their influence was significant.

The concept also includes the mental, moral, spiritual, and cultural disobedience of the individual and of the whole. The majority of the Jews did not raise the flag of rebellion and did not carry out armed operations but fought and tried to stand. Not with shots or armed fighting is a fight or heroic act expressed. Sometimes, operations, whose people are not armed, reveal no less courage. The totality of the Jews' activities that express the will to live, to survive, to sanctify life, to conform, and to all that was done against the Nazis who intended to exterminate Jews, to tear their human image and turn it into human dust, they call in the literature "the survival of the Jews in the Holocaust."

And as I said before, the witness, Tova Zaks, who tells her story and experiences, is one of these women who succeeded to withstand, to survive and get out of this hell on earth alive and to return to her true image. This story folds within it her struggle against the Nazis' intentions and plots and her withstanding it.

In the introduction to this work I set myself two questions which I intended to answer through this work. The first question was: how did the Jews succeed in going through this hell and inferno?

I asked the witness several times during our meetings, how did you withstand this? The only answer that I received was: the hope and will to live. The answer seems very simple. But as you read her experiences and go over her history during the Holocaust it is difficult to understand it.

What was there to hope for? For another day of life? Even though the Nazis did not report on their situation in the fighting, what was known was that they were winning and defeating the Allies and when the Allies started to defeat the Nazis, the extermination machine worked full speed ahead. If a person was not murdered immediately, then he became a forced laborer whose life was slow death while systematically losing humanity. When his strength was gone, he was sent to the gas chamber. The beginning and the end were identical for almost everybody. How could there be hope in such a circle?

What will to live can there be in such a situation? First the name, privacy, and personal features are denied, slowly, slowly the clear thought and physical control are lost, while hideously tortured and abused the like that has not been invented. How do we want to live like that? It is probably impossible to understand this, not going through it. It is difficult to understand the soul and secrets of a person in such situations.

I did not find an answer to this question in this work, but on the contrary, increased the dilemma and the question marks. I found a more objective and possibly more professional answer in the story of Victor Frankel's *Man's Search for Meaning*. In it he writes: "What does a person do when he suddenly feels that he has nothing to lose except his almost ridiculous naked life...to save a person in camp first of all a sort of a cold mental curiosity escapes, uncommitted to his destiny. And after that come tricks or deceits of war designed to save the rest of a person's life although the chances of being saved are slim. A person is capable of carrying evil deeds, humiliation, fear, and rage about wrongs, thanks to images of loved ones that he carries in his heart, thanks to the religion, the sense of humor and even a brief glance at nature's

delight, the powerful healer – despite sunset. But these moments of solace strengthen life's will, only if they help the prisoner to get a bigger meaning for his suffering which appears pointless..." Frankel likes to quote Nietzsche: "Whoever has some why for which he will live will be able to bear almost any how."

In the answer we see that the limits of a person's soul are very different from what is thought. He is capable of withstanding cruelty, injustice, hunger, and fear almost with no limits provided he has a purpose for carrying this suffering. An unimaginable mental strength lies within people.

As to the second question, why did the Jews go like lambs to the slaughter?

To this the work gives very clear answers. First of all the significance of the expression "lambs to slaughter" means that the Jews behaved unjustifiably as lambs who offer their necks to the slaughterer. Well, this is not how it was and I already mentioned this. The great majority tried to stand against the Nazis and their evil schemes.

The intention of this question is, why didn't they revolt? Many answers are given in this work about this. Didn't most of the Jews revolt? To revolt, the Jews needed physical strength, food, clothes, medicines, work that is not exhausting, a place to live and get organized in, mental strength, leadership, information about the enemy's target, young people, weapons, sympathetic population, and a chance to win. Of course, all those things were unavailable. Several factors joined together and prevented the Jewish people from thwarting the Nazis' plans, and they were:

- The secrecy with which the Nazis planned and carried out the extermination—we see that in the story. The witness just learned about the extermination at the end of 1942, beginning of 1943. The process was already at its height.
- The calculated and sophisticated gradualness with which they made their plan, bringing the Jewish people to the actual point of extermination when they were broken in spirit, body, and leadership. This is again emphasized in this story. First families were separated, then the non-productive were killed, then they starved them, crowded them, the rest were suppressed and treated cruelly and then broken completely.
- The lack of means available to the Jewish people, that they had no training in the art of war, against the strongest and most modern of all the world's armies at the time.
- The hostility that surrounded the Jews, in the local population too, that sometimes joined the occupiers in extraditing the Jews and even actively exterminating them. The story repeats itself in all the concentration camps, there was nowhere to run away from them.
- The collective responsibility that affected the Jews. For every discovery of a revolt by one, a whole community paid dearly. Every breach of discipline by a Jew led to a whole group punishment.
- The attitude of mistrust in the rumors that arrived after the beginning of the extermination. The heart did not want to believe and it is natural that the brain could not grasp the twisted ideas of extermination.
- The hope that soon the wheel of war would turn and therefore, the ghetto and camp prisoners could hold out and remain alive with minimal conflict with the oppressors (sanctification of life).

After the picture became clear beyond all doubt, it was too late. The Jewish people were trapped while broken, without means, in a hostile environment against an extermination machine that was operating with full steam and energy.

Despite this, in various places uprisings and acts of rebellion occurred as acts of desperation and revenge even if just to die in dignity and sell life at the highest possible price.

## NOTES ON THE TRANSLATION

**(maps, diagrams, and copies of original documents are not included in this translation)**

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- <sup>i</sup> The Judenrat were the administrative agency imposed by Nazi Germany during World War II predominantly within the ghettos in Nazi-occupied Europe.
- <sup>ii</sup> *Yiskor* means “to remember.”
- <sup>iii</sup> Tova recalls that they stayed with the Botnin family, distant relatives.
- <sup>iv</sup> An *aktion* was a German roundup in order to exterminate Jews.
- <sup>v</sup> Ruth Jurista Lida, who settled in Norfolk, Virginia and passed away June 30, 2014.
- <sup>vi</sup> Literally, “rising up,” but the word is used to describe emigration to Palestine, as it was known at the time.
- <sup>vii</sup> Literally, “rooms,” but it means a Jewish house of study and learning.
- <sup>viii</sup> The seven-day Jewish period of mourning.
- <sup>ix</sup> Literally, “happiness,” but the general term covers any type of celebration.
- <sup>x</sup> This is the Hebrew version of the German word *action*.
- <sup>xi</sup> Literally, “the answer,” but the intended meaning is *repentance*.
- <sup>xii</sup> This comes from the Bible, from the relationship of David and Jonathan. Upon learning of Jonathan’s death and Saul’s suicide, David laments: “Saul and Jonathan, beloved and pleasant in their life, And in their death they were not parted; They were swifter than eagles, They were stronger than lions... How have the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! Jonathan is slain on your high places. I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; You have been very pleasant to me. Your love to me was more wonderful Than the love of women. How have the mighty fallen, And the weapons of war perished!”
- <sup>xiii</sup> The General Government or General Governate of Poland, a German zone of occupation in central Poland.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Religious objects worn during prayer.
- <sup>xv</sup> Dr. Bejski was born in Dialoszyce, was a judge in the town, and much later became the president of Yad Vashem, the Holocaust museum in Jerusalem. He testified against Adolf Eichmann at his trial.
- <sup>xvi</sup> A religious quorum of ten men, required for prayers.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Literally, an area cleansed of Jews.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Young Polish noblemen or lords who took careers as soldiers and/or mercenaries.
- <sup>xix</sup> From *The Diary of Yustina*.
- <sup>xx</sup> From the book *The Fighting Pioneer*, p. 16.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Government delegation for Poland; this was the Polish government in exile during World War II.
- <sup>xxii</sup> A prisoner who was assigned by the SS guards to supervise forced labor or carry out administrative tasks in the camp.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> A slang term used among captives of concentration camps to refer to those suffering from a combination of starvation and exhaustion.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Polska Partia Robotnicza: the Polish Party of Workers.
- <sup>xxv</sup> Zolowska Organizacja Rojowa: the Jewish Fighting Organization led by Mordechai Anielewice.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> The dominant Polish resistance movement at the time.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Translated again, directly into English, without respect for the poetry of the work.

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