



Shana Tova

&

כתיבה וחתימה טובה

From your friends and family

@



JewishGen

WWW.JEWISHGEN.ORG

Dear JewishGenners,

As we have done in previous years, we are pleased to share our “JewishGen Rosh HaShana Companion,” which is a collection of historical and inspirational vignettes about Rosh HaShana that are contained throughout JewishGen.

We hope that anyone reading this material will gain a better, deeper and more personal understanding of the lives our ancestors lived, which will, in turn, help us ensure that our own children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, will likewise feel connected and inspired by the great history of their ancestors – the entirety of the Jewish people.

Wishing all a Shana Tova, a happy new year, and a כתיבה וחתימה טובה!

The JewishGen Team



Table of Contents

#1) Rosh Hashana in Horodetz, Belarus.....	Page 3
#2 The Sztetel Mielec and the Rosh Hashanah tragedy	Page 5
#3) More from Mielec: My memories from the bloodiest era of my people's history.....	Page 12
#4) Spoiled Holidays: Rosh HaShana in Drahichyn, Belarus in 1921.....	Page 20
#5) Rosh Hashana in Kolomyaa, Ukraine, in 1941.....	Page 22
#6) Rosh Hashana in Nowy Zmigrod, Poland, 1939.....	Page 23
#7) The unique style of observing and celebrating Rosh Hashana in Pidhaytsi, Ukraine throughout the generations.....	Page 25

#1) Rosh Hashana in Horodetz, Belarus

This piece (<http://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/gorodets/gor062.html#Page67>) from the Yizkor book of Horodetz, describes the feverish preparations for the holiday undertaken by the Jewish residents of the small Belarus shtetl, as well as how they celebrated it.

Horodetz is in the Grodno gubernia, between Brest and Pinsk. In 1897, 684 Jews lived there among 1,761 non-Jews. While Horodetz is the name used in the JewishGen Yizkor book title, it is also referred to as Gorodets, which the book's translator says is the Russian pronunciation.

The book says that, with the coming of the Holocaust, "Jewish hearts no longer beat there... It was a Jewish village and now it is no more."

The greater the distance from my childhood, the stronger are the memories of the Holidays imprinted in my memory, with the tradition and customs observed in my home. I wander in my thoughts from "Street" to "Market", from house to house, from person to person and from one Holiday to the next Holiday – my thirst for them unquenched.

It is the first of the month of Elul. The sky is clear, bluish beauty, but the trees, the grass – their green has turned to yellow. The leaves on the trees, weakened by age, cannot withstand the slightest Elul wind – they fall to the soil and cover with yellow the dry grass and soft sand around it.

The sound of blowing the Shofar is heard, the first reminder of the approaching Rosh Hashanah and The Day of Judgment.

Soon the Shamash will wake people for "Slikhot" [a collection of prayers the best known of which is *Avinu Malkenu* – "...Our Father, our King, We have sinned before you. Our Father, our King, we have no sovereign but you... Our Father, our King, Deal with us a with loving kindness and mercy"]. His voice – so mournful, melodious, cites the few words: "wake up for Slikhot".

In the middle of night, Jews get up, run to Slikhot, rushing to unburden themselves of the weight of sin. A feeling of fear, mixed with reverence, inhabit even children's hearts.

It is the eve of Rosh Hashanah. Wagons crowded with men, women, children, beddings and food arrive, one by one, from Mekhvedevicher small street, and from the Gentile's side, from Kobryner street. Jewish villagers arrive in the shtetl to observe Rosh Hashanah, pray to God, and ask forgiveness together with the shtetl folks.

The Jews of Horodets are very hospitable.

They share with their neighbor's berths and bunks, sleep on the floor and host these village people with brotherly love, smiling faces and embraces. Soon I see myself in the "Cold" Old Synagogue, by the east wall, besides my mother and grandmother. I peep out of the openings in the wall separating the women's gallery from that of the men's hall.

The synagogue is crowded with Jews – old and young. All of them standing wrapped in their Talit [a prayer shawl]. Three, four, Jews are standing on the middle of the pulpit and the "*Ba-al Tki-a*" [the man whose task is to blow the shofar] is ready to blow. A holy stillness grasps the synagogue.

An intense chill runs through the body. The sound of the shofar is carried throughout the whole street. The tones produced by the shofar feel like an effusion – outpouring of a desolate spirit of hundreds and hundreds of years of "*Galut*" [living in the Diaspora], mixed with the closeness to God.

And the "*Shliakh Tzibur*" [public emissary], Rabbi Yankl Kodliner, begs God and, weeping, sends his prayers to heaven.

Yes, my longings for you, dear shtetl Horodets, will never subside.



#2 The Sztetel Mielec and the Rosh Hashanah tragedy

This piece (<http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/mielec/mie026.html>) from the Yizkor book of Mielc, Poland, describes the lack of awareness to what was happening in Poland by the 1930's, how the realization of just what was happening brought a mood of depression before Rosh HaShana, followed by a description of a horrific tragedy. The "Poh-Lin" that generations of Jews had idealized was no longer.

Mielc was in the Krakow province between the two world wars. In 1900, there were 3,280 Jews living in the town, which is located about 27 miles NE of Tarnow.

Poland was our home. Our ancestors, fleeing the persecution and chaos of the Dark Ages in Western Europe, found a haven in the land where-as its name implies- God rests (*HEBREW*) For hundreds of years Poland was our sanctuary. It shielded us from the turmoil affecting the rest of Europe, and allowed us to cope with the Age of Enlightenment at our own pace. Every Jew thought of Israel, but it seemed as unreachable as the moon. Besides, we were willing prisoners of the Diaspora. Although every year at the Seder table we intoned "Next year in Jerusalem", our roots were deeply imbedded in Cracow, Belz and Galicia.

In the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries, the light of the *Haskalah* finally filtered through to Poland-years after it affected the rest of Europe. The new emphasis on secular learning and nationalism enticed many people of our generation away from the quiet atmosphere of the *Beth Midrash*.

Instead we went to college. We studied world history and the history of our people. In the process, we realized the high risk of disaster for any people living in a country not truly theirs.

In the late 1930's a new cloud-Nazism-appeared on the horizon, containing an all too familiar revival of the hatred to which Jews had been subjected at other periods of history. Nazism was distinguished by the intensity of its cruelty. Those who recognized this threat for what it was desperately warned their brothers and urged them to leave while they could. On their lips was the word, Zion.

But the Polish Jews, for the most part, did not heed this warning. Motivated by skepticism and complacency, they grossly underestimated the seriousness of the situation. Had there not always been trouble for Jews?-Chmelnitzky, the Czars, pogroms. Yet, despite it all the Jew managed to survive, however precariously. The

prevailing view of the situation among the Jews was, "This, too, shall pass". It was just this attitude which sealed their fate.

What had been a burning ember quickly developed into a roaring blaze that engulfed all of us. The Jews of Poland were the first and easiest victims. Too surprised to fight or run, many voluntarily walked into open graves and silently awaited the German bullet. They prayed in the gas chambers for the Messiah they had scorned a few short years before. No town was immune to the thoroughness of the Nazi murderers.

My town was no exception. Mielec was a district town in the province of Krakow. Most of the Jews in Mielec were poor, although there were a few rich landowners. There were a large number of tradesmen, carpenters, tailors, shoemakers, plumbers, barbers, bakers, butchers, house painters, watch makers, bookbinders, and so forth. The craftsmen carried on their trades at home; their children and apprentices all worked together to prepare for the weekly market day which provided income for the entire week. The market square, where the Jewish merchants had their taverns and stores, was in the center of the city. On market day the whole square was crowded with stands selling various wares. But neither trade nor small commerce yielded a decent living. The neighboring farmers who attended the weekly fair were also extremely poor. They usually bought on credit or borrowed money from Jews. Often they came merely to have a drink at the Jewish taverns.

Many of the Jews engaged in various religious occupations: scribes, teachers or ritual slaughter, and the town was alive with Jewish merchants spread along the main streets, recently modernized and equipped with new fixtures. The town was also well provided with a Jewish intelligensia: lawyers, physicians, dentists, teachers, technicians, and so forth. Life, in our town, was progressing much as it idid (sic) in many similar cities around us.

The years immediately before the war, our town was included in an industrial triangle called C.O.P. As a result, we experienced an upsurge in every aspect of life, especially business. However, an influx of new people to our town, mostly nonJewish, brought the beginnings of open antisemitism. With the support of the Polish government, they opened modern stores and cooperatives in competition with Jewish merchants. They used such slogans as "swoj do swego", "Polski sklep" and "Polacy popierajcie Polski Sklep". The hysteria of blind nationalism hit our town. Naturally conditions such as these aggravated tensions among the population. The Jewish people were faced with a struggle for economic survival.

New winds of racial hatred from Hitler's propaganda machine made life more difficult. The political situation worsened with every day. Louder and louder became Hitler's demands for return of Danzig and other territories held by Poland. With each new demand, conditions grew more tense. Naturally, all of us were following events very closely, reading the papers and listening to the radio analysis of the political situation.

The tension continued to mount, until, inevitably, Germany invaded Poland by land, and air in September, 1939.

As I recall it, I was in town a week before the outbreak of war. My brother and I had returned from Krakow because our parents, sensing uncertainty and tension wanted us at home rather than away in the big city. My mother's premonition, as always, proved correct.

It had been an unusually hot summer, especially September. Among our friends, we discussed current events and our impressions of the big city. The small-town philosophers were always on hand with their interpretations. Usually these discussions were lively-even heated-but they were just part of small town existence. All our friends had different points of view, which could be classified as leftist, rightist, centrist, religious, or even atheist. But despite our differences we always parted friends. When we finally heard that war had come, we were not so much surprised as nervous and uneasy about what might happen next.

Within a few hours we noticed a plane flying low over our town, suggesting that the Germans were interested in the nearby industrial complex (C.O.P.). German agents, planted in these industries before the outbreak of the war, made possible a bloodless takeover by the Germans.

Business came to a standstill. Stores were closed, and the hoarding of food and necessities became the order of the day. People who had gone through World War I generally believed that it would take time for the Germans to capture the entire land. We were inclined to believe the government's boasts concerning the strength of the Polish army and air force, and their ability and determination to defend every inch of Polish soil. It did not take long to realize that our confidence in Polish resistance was groundless.

The townspeople were reacting feverishly to the increasingly grave situation. All around us the scenes of war were becoming part of the daily experience. Refugees by the thousands, carrying bundles of their precious belongings on bicycles, horses and wagons were moving east through town, trying to escape the advancing German army. These were pitiful-looking people-tired, exhausted, disappointed-who had left comfortable homes to undertake this miserable journey. My own friends, influenced by the sight of these war refugees, discussed what, if anything we could do. We knew that the outlook was grim-maybe hopeless.

One thing upon which we agreed was that it would be pointless for us to take our entire families east, since most of us did not have the means for such an undertaking. We decided to hire a bus that normally commuted between Tarnobrzeg and Tarnow to carry about 20-25 of our friends as far east as possible. Our parents reluctantly

agreed to our plan and prepared clothing and money for us to take along. Anyone who has ever gone through a similar experience knows the tension and heartache of leaving your loved ones to undertake a trip with no visible end, but we thought this was best under the circumstances.

Carrying our bundled possessions and accompanied by our families we all met at the bus, where unexpected obstacles suddenly developed. The bus, because it was considered a public transit vehicle, could obtain neither a permit for the trip nor gas, which was rationed. Our negotiations availed us nothing and our hopes-so high a little earlier- were cut short. Greatly disappointed, we all returned home.

For the next couple of days, despite conflicting rumors concerning where the fighting was taking place and the Germans advancing, there were no significant changes. People streaming through town began to reflect the feeling that their efforts to escape were useless. Worn out and disappointed, many decided to stop right where they were and some even turned back to their own towns. The weather was warm and dry, a blessing for these travelers-but also for the Nazis. Any open spot could be a resting place for these refugees. They slept and did their housekeeping under the open sky.

Watching them and seeing the human misery to which many of them were exposed made us feel almost relieved that our own trip had not materialized. Back in our homes, we again met with our friends to plan the next steps. Everyone offered different suggestions. Events, however, were progressing so rapidly that all of our plans were impractical even before they were fully formulated.

Hitler's troops quickly mastered the situation. The entire Polish army, despite their boasts of readiness, fell like a house of cards. The air was full of rumors; one day we were looking for English or French planes in the skies, the next day we were awaiting a Western army sent to defend us. In reality, even the slightest attempt at organized resistance by the Poles was summarily crushed. Hitler's (sic) army took over town by town, region by region. Our town nervously awaited its turn. The Jewish population was especially jittery.

We knew that very hard conditions lay in store for us. The little knowledge we had about the Nazis' attitude toward the Jews, and their treatment of the ones in Germany, left us with no illusions. Although the Jewish community anticipated terrible conditions, they wanted desperately to believe those who had gone through World War I and who claimed that eventually (sic) we will weather the storm and manage to adapt ourselves to the new conditions and live with them. How naive they were! The younger generation did not share that view, and had tried to escape, but failed. Since we had no alternative, we remained in town, wondering along with everyone else what would happen next. It did not take long to find out.

Finally the day came when the spearhead of Hitler's army entered the town. First a group of German soldiers on motorcycles drove into the center of town. The rumble of their motors was accompanied by bursts from their automatic rifles and machine guns as they fired indiscriminately at bystanders. There were a few casualties and the rest ran for shelter. The Nazis' objective was to scare the people as well as to keep the road open for military traffic. The Jews for the most part, locked themselves in their houses, watching and listening. Tanks and armored trucks with soldiers soon filled the marketplace. Except for the troop movements, the town was quiet and tense. Very few people ventured out onto the streets. We knew that it was the beginning of a new order. Gone were the Polish officials in charge of governing the town. Into this vacuum flowed the opportunistic-hooligans, underworld, and the rest of the animal element.

In no time, they were mingling with the Germans, showing them the better stores to loot. The Germans and their newfound allies broke windows and doors, pillaging merchandise right and left. Of course, the police made no effort to stop them, and in minutes they destroyed what had taken years to accumulate. This was our first taste of German presence.

We were in our homes, windows covered, and with the smallest possible light in an effort to appear as if nobody was there. We took turns at lookout through the rest of the day and night. By the next morning, things seemed to have quieted down. Slowly we emerged from our hiding places. There were no longer any German army units in the market. Instead, German soldiers armed with carbines patrolled the streets, in pairs. It appeared that Germans who had been living for years in different settlements in the countryside (Volksdeutsche) were now suddenly in position of authority, in charge of various functions in town.

It did not take too long to adjust to this somewhat unclear existence. Naturally there were many moments of fear. The sudden knock at the door by the Germans to check the people in the house; the constant demands for "Schmuck" or other valuables; the requisitioning of various household items which happened to catch their fancy. Sometimes they took the male Jewish members of the family to perform various chores for them, such as cleaning the office, washing the cars, or sweeping the sidewalk, as well as many more humiliating types of activities.

Some people were taken for the whole day and some just for a few hours, as we started to feel the real pinch of the Nazi occupation. At first they were "polite", taking just the Jewish men and exempting our women and children. This went on for the first few days. Later, Jews were randomly picked up in the streets or at home, wherever Germans caught them, and taken to different places where they were held without food for an entire day. Families often puzzled as to the whereabouts of a loved one, but during this period nothing truly terrible occurred and, given the circumstances we grudgingly accepted it.

After that first day of looting we were prepared for more drastic events, especially now that the *Volksdeutsche* were becoming more visible in their swastika armbands, issuing orders and confiscating property. In other words, they became the real "balabatim". All their previous cordiality, especially with some of the Jewish merchants, abruptly was replaced with nothing but hatred and mistreatment. We swallowed these new conditions, since we had no choice.

Just before Rosh Hashanah, the mood of the Jewish people of Mielec became one of depression. Preparations for this holy occasion were curtailed because, given the negative attitude of the German occupying army towards the Jews, the wisest action would be to avoid any overt religious activities and to keep things as quiet as possible.

The very devout Jews, including our Mielecer rabbi, Mendele Horvitz, and his advisors, felt that the Germans would not interfere with our religious practices. They believed things were not so very terrible, that somehow the Jews would manage to maintain their day-to-day existence. On such an important holiday, they said, Jews should not neglect their laws and traditions. Rather, they should make all the customary preparations.

The rabbi decided therefore to order the re-opening of the ritual slaughterhouse, and prepare the bath house (Mikva) to accommodate local residents and strangers stranded in town

Beginning early the following day, people rushed to these newly reopened places, and at first it seemed that no difficulties would arise. Suddenly, in the early afternoon, German soldiers armed with machine guns surrounded the slaughterhouse and bath house and ordered all the people present to step out into the yard and line up with their hands raised. Those inside the slaughterhouse were hopelessly trapped, but some of the ones in the bath house tried to hide or escape through the rear of the building.

The armed ring of Nazis grew tighter, and more soldiers carrying machine guns appeared. Some of our supposedly good gentile friends began to congregate for the drama that was unfolding in all its gruesome details. They even helped the Germans by pointing out people trying to hide or escape.

The situation became grimmer by the hour. People unaware of what was happening in the area continued to arrive at the bath house. They were immediately (sic) stopped by the Germans and brought to the yard of the Mikva to join the other captives. A strange calmness embraced the town.

From my house, bordering the encircled section of town, I could see armed Germans harassing any Jew trying to leave his house. The Germans shouted "Jude-halt!" and

sometimes accompanied this shouting with bursts of shooting, causing the terrified Jews to retreat to the relative safety of his home.

It was twilight, as I recall, when my family and I locked our house, sneaked through the back yard, and climbed up into the attic of our next door neighbor to await the unknown events to follow. The town was incredibly quiet; we could hear every footstep of the soldiers Suddenly we heard a barrage of spurting machine guns, and feared the worst. After a short interval, we smelled smoke and assumed that a fire was burning not far from us.

As the night went on the fire intensified, giving the night skies an eerie brightness and engulfing us in smoke. From our neighbors we learned that the bath house, slaughter house and a few surrounding building; all had been set on fire. Our large shul (synagogue) was also on fire.

Shortly afterwards we heard a knocking on the gate of our back yard. A muffled voice called up to us "Open up, open up, let me in-this is the rabbi, Mendel". We quickly lowered a ladder and let him in.

The rabbi was accompanied by one of his assistants, disguised as a woman by a white shawl covering his bearded face: He told us of the tragedy that had occurred-that all the people caught in the little slaughter house and bath house had been gathered in the yard and, after a few hours, were made to return to the cramped slaughter house. The Germans then directed their machine guns on the helpless victims. Still unsatisfied (sic), the Germans poured kerosine on what a few moments ago had been living people and set them on fire.

The fire burned until the morning hours and we remained in our hideout. It was estimated that 40 or more died that day. It is difficult to establish the exact number, since many were out-of-towners.

We tried to find an answer, some explanation for this senseless, barbarous, vicious, murderous act perpetrated on innocent decent people. The pride, dignity, and feelings of all of us who lived and witnessed this nightmare were shattered. Daytime arrived and we left our hiding places with one burning (sic) question on our minds: "What's next, WHAT'S NEXT???".



#3) More from Mielec: My memories from the bloodiest era of my people's history

This piece (<http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/mielec/mie026.html>) is the very next chapter from the Yizkor book of Mielc, Poland. It needs no description.

It was a few days before the High Holy Days at the end of September, 1939, when the Nazis marched into our town, Mielec. A deadly fear immediately overwhelmed us. It did not take long for them to commit their first outrageous act. When they found out that there were Jews in the bath house since it was the eve of Rosh Hashanah, they immediately surrounded the area. Then they went inside and drove the naked victims into the courtyard of the nearby slaughterhouse, doused them with kerosene, which their Polish helpers had brought along in barrels, and ignited the kerosene.

One could hear the cries of the victims for as long as there was a spark of life in them. The bestial murderers remained in the courtyard until the last body was consumed by fire. During those terrible hours, no relatives of the victims were allowed to come near them. The area was surrounded by the S. S. Only when they left did we behold the terrible picture. We did not know the exact number of dead because in addition to people from Mielec, there were also in the bath house at the time many refugees from towns previously occupied by the Germans.

After this frightful tragedy, the town was quiet for a short time. People again started going out in the street, and a few even ventured to go to the synagogue. Alas, they paid for this with their lives. One morning the Germans entered the synagogue and chased the worshippers outside. They were then lined up along the walls of the Shul, and shot. Afterwards the Germans put fire to the three houses of worship and a whole street nearby, where the rabi's (sic) house was located.

After this new slaughter, we sat in deadly fear behind closed doors. Closing the doors didn't help us, however, because the Nazis would break in any time of day or night to abuse us and to plunder our homes. After a time, we were commanded to set up a civil administration-a Judenrat. Orders were constantly being received by the Judenrat to deliver merchandise of all kinds. In order to meet these demands, the Judenrat had to impose heavy taxes on the Jews.

We were also subjected to forced labor. Every day, there would be an increased demand for laborers, both men and women. We accepted this readily enough, wishing

only to be allowed to live. Soon, the businesses were reopened and the businessmen were given allotments of merchandise and permission to travel out of town to buy more merchandise. At the same time there were all kinds of regulations which every Jew had to obey, such as wearing the white-and-blue armband with the Star of David, and observing the prohibition against leaving the city.

Despite all this, we had the impression that the worst was over-that from then on we'd at least be able to exist, We did not yet know about their diabolical plans because we were cut off from the outside world. Thus, we had not yet heard of the transports and the extermination camps in different districts of Poland, as well as elsewhere in Europe. So, in our ignorance, we coped with the constant day to day regulations.

In the winter of 1941 the Germans ordered us to give them our furs. The Judenrat announced that any items of fur had to be brought to a certain place-even a child's coat, or a fur collar. Further, we were given only a few hours to comply-with the death penalty in store for anyone found in possession of even the smallest piece of fur. And there was worse to come. Robberies, break-ins in the middle of the night, and beatings to death became quite frequent at this time. This situation lasted until the 9th of March, 1942.

On this gray, cold morning the Nazi goons surrounded the streets, broke into the Jewish houses and chased everyone outside. After they had searched thoroughly in every nook and cranny of the houses, they forced the people to walk a long way outside the town. There the detainees were locked in hangars for 24 hours, without food or water. Mothers begged the guards for some snow which they gave their children to drink. Many people were shot during the enforced March.

On the second day, the victims were transported in open wagons in the direction of Lublin, where many extermination camps were located. How was I saved from this "Aussiedlung" as the Nazis called it?

There was a doctor in town who came to Galicia from Vienna many years before. He was a German, but a very fine man. The Nazis chose him for Mayor. He sympathized with our bitter lot but could not help much. Before the "Aussiedlung" he notified the Judenrat about it, and they, of course, told us cautiously that whoever had the courage should try to save himself or herself. By this time the town was already surrounded by murderers who would shoot on sight anyone they suspected of trying to get out.

When I learned about this new danger, I ran to a "Volksdeutsche", a fine man with whom I was acquainted for many years, and begged him to help me. He hesitated--his mother, who had Jewish forebears, told him: "You cannot endanger your life". He, however, had a Jewish heart, and when he accompanied me out of the house, he told

me to wait for him in a certain place, and that he would meet me there in his automobile. I begged him to permit me to take some of my family with me, but he said that he would take only me and one of my daughters. Should the police interrogate him, he would say that I was his mother and the girl his sister.

I ran home quickly to get my daughter, and then, in unbelievable fear I walked slowly to the meeting place, so as not to awaken any suspicion. He soon arrived in his car and transported us to a township named Polaniec, which belonged to another district. My other daughter was then in a village and joined me too in Polaniec.

The Jews were still living in their homes in this tiny township, but one felt already the approaching doom because here we heard about the concentration camps from the Poles. People thought about little else but how to save themselves from this awful fate. In our desperation we decided to obtain Polish papers. This was very risky, because it was easy to recognize us as Jews. And generally it was very hard for Jewish people to get along among Poles.

At this time, this threat of recognition was not so much from the Germans as from the Poles, who after recognizing a Jew would denounce him to the Gestapo. By a miracle, I found a Pole who provided Polish identity cards for my two daughters, my sister's daughter, and myself. I paid him a large sum of money for this, but it was well worth it because it opened the way to escape from the Nazis' hands.

Having Polish papers, I now needed help from the Poles again. To just go and live among the Poles in a town or village was dangerous because the Poles recognized us easily, and for a pound of sugar they would bring a Jew to the Gestapo. In this situation, a miracle happened again to me. In Polaniec my neighbor was the late Psachie Honig. He knew some Poles like the Dobrowolski brothers who, like himself, were mill owners. He asked them for help and they provided hideouts for us.

Afterwards he contacted a second brother, and proposed to him that he help me, which the Pole agreed to do. For me the situation was difficult. I was now 'Polish' and he had to find a place for me to live as a Christian. He found a place with a peasant in a village. He did not tell him that I was Jewish, but introduced me as a wife of a Polish officer from Posnan. It was the day before the "Aussiedlung" the Pole came to my house and took my daughters and me away. The peasant who took us in agreed to take in only 2 persons, that is only one of my children and me.

My older daughter remained in the house in Polaniec, and another Polish friend came and took her away. It is hard to describe the parting with her. I don't know how my heart endured the pain, This was indeed proven by those who were able to- withstand the spiritual and physical tortures of the Nazi beasts. The friends who found place for my older daughter and my sister's daughter were our neighbors in our estate. They

showed great heroism in these acts, since the Nazis punished with death any friendly contact with Jews.

These friends brought the two girls to acquaintances in Cracow, who kept them only a short time because they were afraid of both the Germans and their own neighbors. Thus the unhappy children found themselves in the tragic situation of not knowing where to find a shelter.

The Nazis had been hiring young Polish people for work in German factories, because their own youth was in military service. My two unfortunate girls volunteered-as Poles, of course-and were sent with a transport of Polish workers to Germany.

Each of them was sent to a separate place. Again they were in danger from the Poles, who quickly recognized them as Jews, which was very easy because they looked emaciated. To make matters worse, the element of Polish youth was very low, mostly adventurers and the like. It was a real miracle that these Poles did not betray the two girls to the German administration. They spent two fearful years in the labor camps. They survived.

And how did I fare during these 2 years at the peasant's house? Since we came as Christians, they gave us a room where we were able to cook. We went out very little because we were afraid of being recognized, but despite these precautions, once the neighbors saw us, they started to suspect us as Jews.

One morning they indeed sent in a Polish policeman, an antisemite, to investigate the two so-called Poles. He quickly recognized us as Jews, despite my stubborn insistence that we were not. I presented our Polish identity cards and said that I was deeply insulted by him thinking of us as "Zydowkis". It is hard for me to describe this experience-it was the dread of death that gave me the courage to defend myself.

It was dreadful when he turned to my child to question her about her school certificate, and so on. She, alas, had no answers. This policeman was a loyal servant of the Gestapo. After the deportations, a few Jews had escaped to the fields, but he exterminated them. He had a firm conviction about us. As he left, he told us he would be back. But to the landlady he remarked: "I am sure they are 'zydowkis', but I won't bring you to the Germans because of them since it can be dangerous for you.

Why was he so good to these people? A short time before he had received from my landlady a present of a young pig, and this was a big thing during wartime. This is how we were saved, thanks to the gift the policeman had received. After this visit our landlord asked me whether it was true that we were Jews. I denied this, I assured him that we were Catholics for generations. He calmed down, and even admitted that we did not look like 'zydowkis'. Some time passed and then, by accident, our identity was uncovered. An acquaintance who had been hiding in the same village heard a rumor

that Jews who said that they were gentiles were living at my landlord's house. He came late at night, and requested to see me. Then, thinking that the landlord knew that we were Jews, he told them my name with all the details. When my landlady knocked on my door and told me that a Jew wanted to see me, had said that my name was Mrs. K, I almost fainted. When he came in, I could only say: "You brought misfortune on us".

I waited fearfully until the morning, certain that the landlord would not want to keep us longer. He thought for a long time, looking at my face which expressed the terrible desperation of a mother preparing to defend her child's life.

Finally, he took pity on us and said: "I won't deliver you to the murderers, I will hide you". And the same night he moved us to the barn, where, he had a hiding place for Polish officers who had fled during the Army's retreat. This was a corner covered with straw and other things. We were lying there all day and night because it was dangerous even to go out at night. We had to beware of the neighbors and even of the children of our landlord, who were still too young to keep a secret.

How was it possible to exist in the hideout? Our guardian angel, the owner, provided us with everything. In great fear that somebody might see him, when all the lights were out, long after midnight he would come to our hiding place. He brought food for us, and emptied the pot that served as a toilet. Not only did he endure the physical (sic) drudgery, but more important the fear that somebody might become aware of our presence. He said that should the neighbors of the next house become suspicious, they would certainly denounce us to the Germans.

We remained in the hideout for the first few months, but it became increasingly dangerous. A practice of searching the homes of the peasants had begun, particularly those who did not deliver to the Germans the children who were registered in their homes. They forced their way in at night, and searched. In some houses they found Jews hiding. Our own landlord became more frightened and thought about finding a safer shelter for us.

In the darkness of night, he dug a deep hole in the same barn, lined it with straw, and covered the entrance with various tools. This time he made the entrance from the coach-house, which was attached to the barn with a wall of boards. He cut out a very small opening in two small boards, through which it was possible to crawl on all four. The small boards were like a door, with a wooden bolt inside. From outside he covered it with tools, carts, sleds, and so forth. It was no small thing for this man to come to this place in the pitch blackness of night, to bring us food for the next 24 hours. One can image how big was the physical exertion for him after a day's work as a peasant, and even more, the strain of the deadly fear in which he was living.

At about this time, he heard about a case near Dembica, where Jews were found at a farmer's house. The farmer, together with the Jews, were all shot.

In time, the village deduced that Jews were living with our farmer. Accusations to the police station started again, ushering in a horrible time for us all. One search followed another as they looked into every nook and cranny of the house and farm buildings. Four times during the last year of Nazi rule they looked for us, threatening the house-owner with death if they found the Jews. If, however, he would voluntarily give up the Jews, nothing would happen to him, they said. The man, however, stood fast like a hero, crossed himself and swore that he never had had Jews in his house.

It was a great miracle that the Nazis didn't find us, since they often stood just a few steps from the door to our hideout. Of the four searches I want to describe one. It was the last search and the most terrifying one. It was a short time before the liberation. The Nazis pried into every nook, as always, and when they finished, they said to the farmer: "You have to report this afternoon to the office of the criminal section".

One can imagine the fear that must have seized him. Before leaving, although he never came to our bunker during the day, he came to us and spoke thus: "I have an order to go to the police and I don't know whether I'll come back alive, but I promise you that I won't give you away". To his wife he said: "Remember, you should not reveal anything, even if the devils come to you and tell you that I confessed-you should know that I won't do it even if they threaten me with death".

And again a miracle happened. The Pole who obtained the shelter for us at our farmer lived in the same village. When the search went on by us, the whole village knew about it and, of course, so did he. Since he was very anxious that nothing happened to our farmer nor to us, he stationed himself on the road where the Germans had to pass. It was his good luck that he was acquainted with them. He did not reveal that he knew anything about their mission and only asked them why they were there. So they told him that they had been looking for Jews. He told them that if Jews had been hidden there, he would have known about it. He invited them in for drinks and they were drunk when they left his house.

When our peasant came fearfully into the office of the chief of the criminal police, the latter was very friendly to him, even treating him to a cigarette, and then ordered him to leave. During this time, we had been experiencing moments of deadly terror. When night came and the farmer was still not back, I could hear through the cracks in the boards how his wife was wringing her hands and speaking to herself in desperation. I cannot understand how my heart could endure the fear that the murderers might come for us at any minute, and the pain over the fate of the people who had protected us so faithfully. At last, late at night, our angel came into our bunker and told us that all was in order. This was the last search, in 1944.

At this time a ray of hope had already started to shine for us. The Red Army advanced closer, and at the end of July 1944 the front stabilized not far from our village. Bullets flew over our heads and we could hear the clatter of the cannons, but despite the danger from grenades which fell on the houses, we were full of hope of impending freedom, because it was evident that the Germans were being defeated.

The front did not shift for a long time, until the Russians attacked the Nazis with Katyushas, and started to pursue the retreating murderers. We were still lying in our bunker where we were joined by others Jews who had been hiding in the same village. They had escaped from the houses in which they were hiding, before the retreating enemy set them on fire. At last came the great moment. Our guardian, after he looked around and determined that it was safe for us to leave the hiding place, came to us and told us: You can already come out, you are free people".

He stressed that for our safety from the peasants, and in order to be farther from the front, which was still not far from our village, it was important that we leave the place. He led us out early in the morning when his neighbors were still sleeping, because it would have been dangerous for him if the peasants had found out that he had hidden Jews. The farewell was so moving that I will never forget it. He handed me two thousand Zlotys, and told us, "I have no more; take it, so that you will have a piece of bread until you come back to your house". His wife gave us a basket of bread, cheese and other products. Both accompanied us some distance and told us "God bless you".

This man, Jozef Madry, suffered almost two years of living in constant fear of death, for our sakes. After we came out from the bunker, my daughter and I, plus the Jews who had been with us during the last days, headed away from the front. We walked, although we could hardly keep on our feet which were weak and stiff from lying so long in the bunker. Ther (sic) was no possibility of getting a horse and wagon, however, so we wandered, spending the nights in barns of peasants, until we arrived in in (sic) the town Rzeszow. Here we remained a few weeks until we were able to return to Mielec.

The return was very, very heartbreaking. Living in all the Jewish houses were Poles, who received us with great hatred because they did not think that any Jews had remained alive. In some cases, the peasants killed the Jews who came back to their homes. In the town of Kielce, the Polish murderers started a pogrom that killed 42 people. These incidents frightened us, the few survivors and we left for Cracow. There the few who came out from the bunkers, fields, and woods soon gathered.

It took some time until we contacted the American "Joint", which assisted us. In Cracow, too, it was impossible for us to remain for long. The atmosphere was full of hatred. When a dead child was found, the poles accused the Jews of having killed it. I lived through a frightful experience at this time. One time, I was in the street with my

daughter when a mob of holligans appeared, yelling "Kill Jews!". We managed to escape with our lives in a streetcar. At this time, the Polish enemies killed a Jewish couple who had survived Hitler's hell. After that we had to wander further. With a group of others, I went over to Silesia. After a time "Brichah" started smuggling people through the borders. We were among these. At last, they brought us to the very land of the Nazi murderers. But here in the American Zone, we felt protected by our American friends.

It was ironic for those of us who suffered so cruelly at the hands of these people, in a land literally soaked in Jewish blood, to come here. This, however, was the place where "Brichah" brought us, and told us to remain until there would be a possibility to emigrate to other countries. Here we had the assistance of the international refugee organization, and from our brothers, the "Joint". The latter, generously gave material and spiritual help. Their medical help and the fact that they sent us to spas, made it possible for us to slowly regain our health. We were very depressed because by this time the great tragedy involving the death of our brothers and sisters was already clear to us. The few who had survived the Hitler hell were all identified through the "Search Service," or through other means.

In conclusion, I want to emphasize the magnanimity of those Poles who acted so nobly, risking their own lives to help us. I intended to reward them with land from our estate, but the Polish Government instituted an agrarian reform and divided the estate among the peasants without any indemnity for us. My children and I are corresponding with them and sending them packages and money that we can afford. Of course, this is very little considering how much they really deserve.

These are the ones who helped us: The Ruseks family, neighbors of our estate; they did a lot for us after the deportation ("Aussiedlung") when we were in Polaniec. It was their son-in-law, Jozef Stachara, who obtained the identity cards for us. The one who took us out from the fire a day before the Aussiedlung was Wladyslaw Dobrowolski; he also brought us to Jozef Madry, who kept us almost two years.

I also want to mention that what I have described here is only a small part of my experiences of these awful years. It was truly miraculous that I was able to survive so much suffering. Only the urge to save the lives of my children gave me the strength and courage to face such terrible dangers.

Before Dobrowolski found the place for us with Madry, I was travelling around, naturally with a handkerchief on my head like a gentile, without the armband and looking for a place among the gentiles but no one let me cross his door step. I was aware that I was endangering my life and I cannot understand where I got so much courage. Only a mother can marshal it when the lives of her children are at stake. I am among the very few mothers who can tell about it, since few of the older people survived. They were the first selected for the crematoria.



#4) Spoiled Holidays: Rosh HaShana in Drahichyn, Belarus in 1921

This piece (<http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/Drohichyn/dro107.html>) from the Yizkor book of Drahichyn, Belarus, describes how “the holiness of Rosh Hashana rose above the fear and worry” during the Polish-Russian war.

Drahichyn was in the Grodno province, while still part of the Russian Empire before WWI. In 1878, there were 1,300 Jews living in the town, and by 1921, there were 1,521 Jews. The town is located 40 miles W of Pinsk, and should not be confused with the smaller town of Drohiczyn, Poland, 49 miles WNW of Brest.

In 1921, during the Polish-Russian War, the residents of Drohitchin lived through unbelievably difficult days. The town went back and forth from one side to the other several times. Only those who lived through those days can have an idea what that meant.

The Jews in Drohitchin lived through fear of their lives for several weeks and months. People usually stayed in hiding in their attics, cellars, going through suffering and torment. At night the town looked like a cemetery, without the slightest ray of light to penetrate the darkness or rustle or move of a single person. All that was heard was the neighing of the horses and the clattering of the military wagons, which occasionally penetrated the silence of the dark night.

Daytime started giving way to evening, another frightening day for the Jews. This time, however, it was Rosh Hashanah, and Jews were praying together. They felt like letting their hearts pour out and weep a little.

The holiness of Rosh Hashanah rose above the fear and worry. Here and there a few Jews showed up; they were sneaking around like shadows, headed in the same direction.

There was an old house on a side street. A poor Drohitchin Jew lived there, and all the shadows disappeared inside. His house was used as a makeshift synagogue because the Czar's army was in control of three quarters of Drohitchin, and had burned down all four synagogues, so it was in this house that some of the Jews arranged to hold their prayer services. (By the way, to be more exact, this house belonged to Yossel the wagon driver at a side street on Kobrin Street).

An hour later a group of Jews stood and prayed. As they went on, the congregants started forgetting about the danger they faced, and were able to pray earnestly. Their prayers were a huge cry that cast great fear into the stillness of the night.

Suddenly, there was total silence. What happened? A group of Bolsheviks surrounded the house, and everybody's hearts pounded from fear. The eldest ordered all Jews to leave the house. Only the cantor remained at his spot with his tallith [prayer shawl] over his head. Apparently the Bolshevik was in awe of him.

On the street the entire congregation was surrounded by armed soldiers who barked out the order, "Get going!" Everyone's knees were shaking from fear, and they were wondering where they were being sent. They were led to a large empty building, Feivel Katz's Wall, and told to carry bricks and clay.

This is what happens: the Bolsheviks needed to bake bread, and since Drohitchin didn't have a large oven because all bakeries were destroyed, they came up with the idea that the Jews should build an oven overnight. No appeals and begging about Rosh Hashanah did any good. The Bolsheviks didn't want to hear about it. The Jews had to get to work, some as bricklayers and others as assistants. A couple of dozen Jews, young and old, worked throughout the night until the oven was complete.

The Jews then went back into hiding. For the rest of Rosh Hashanah, no one dared stick his head out the door, but this was still tolerable.



#5) Rosh Hashana in Kolomyaa, Ukraine, in 1941

This piece (<http://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/kolomyya/kol325.html>) from the Yizkor book of Dkolmya, Ukraine, describes what happened on the first day of Rosh Hashana in 1941, immediately after the Germans took over the city.

Kolomya was in the Galicia province when part of the Austrian Empire. Between the wars, it was in Poland. Today, it is in Ukraine. In 1900, there were 16,568 Jews living in the town, which is 32 miles SSE of Ivano-Frankivsk (Stanislawow).

On the eve of Rosh Hashanah, 1941, the Germans took over the city and immediately began to persecute the Jews. On the first day of Rosh Hashanah, entire streets were emptied of Jews. The Germans drove the Jews out of their houses into the street just as they were. They didn't let the unfortunates take a single thing with them. The mood of the Jews was heavy and strained, and the suffering great.

They began to round up Jews for "work." They caught Jews in the streets, and with blows, mockery and insults, they drove them to the railroad station to unload freight trains and to switch rails.

Before starting work, they beat them with fists and sticks, and later they forced the Jews to unload heavy barrels and other things from the wagons with wild urgency. They hounded and wore out the unfortunates so much that they were left without strength and could work no more. Then the murderers began to scream that the Jews were lazy and did not want to work, and they took the exhausted ones and threw them into ditches filled with water and lime.

In the evening, when they finally let the tormented ones go, not one of them could stand up without help, and friends and acquaintances brought them home fainting, more dead than alive.

At the same time the Germans began to take Jewish women to clean their quarters. So the women fared a little better than the men. They were given no pay and no food, but they weren't beaten and they came home in the evening with unbroken bones. This "work" was done under the supervision and orders of a special group, which was called "Zonderdienst." The civil administration and the Gestapo came later.



#6) Rosh Hashana in Nowy Zmigrod, Poland, 1939

This piece (<http://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/Zmigrod/Zmigrodhnames.htm#FINALCHAPTER>) is from the Yizkor book of Zmigrod, Poland, and describes the period from a Rosh Hashana service just two weeks after the German Army entered Zmigrod, through Yom Kippur.

Zmigrod was in the Galicia province when part of the Austrian Empire, is 37 miles SE of Tarnow. It should not be confused with Zmigrod (former Trachenberg) in Lower Silesia. In 1880, there were 1,330 Jews living in the town, and 940 in 1921. which is 32 miles SSE of Ivano-Frankivsk (Stanislawow).

Rosh Hashanah [the Jewish New Year] was on September 14 and 15, 1939. On the first day of the holiday the Jews assembled at the synagogue and services began. My father, may he rest in peace, in his customary traditional New Year intonation [each holiday has a traditional intonation that is used by cantors in conducting services], led the congregation in reciting the opening prayer of Adon Olam [Master of the World] with great fervor.

He barely finished the first lines when a band of German soldiers burst into the place and began to beat mercilessly anyone in their way. The worshipers dispersed in every direction and considered themselves lucky that the incident had ended in such manner, since in other places such as Dynow, a small hamlet near Zmigrod, the Germans shot all the worshippers at the Rosh Hashanah service. Amongst those shot were a few Jews from Zmigrod who sought refuge there and were never permitted to leave the place after the Germans arrived. They were Moshe Shia Tzanger and his son from the village of Fristik and Israel Gross's son, Hozek.

Thus we spent the first day of Rosh Hashanah in Zmigrod.

Yom Kippur was on the 23d of September, 1939. On the eve of the holiday, some neighbors came and begged me to hold services in my place. I had ample space and a main gate that could be closed and watched. However the danger was there and I knew what to expect in case of trouble.

But it was the eve of Yom Kippur, the holiest night in the Jewish year and Jews everywhere would be reciting the Kol Nidrei prayers [special prayers for the eve of Yom Kippur]. I was still debating the question when my wife, may she rest in peace, entered the discussion and said that perhaps the recital of these prayers under these

circumstances would have the desired effect and all evil decrees against the Jews will be overturned. I was swayed by the argument since I too wanted to pray and open my heart to the Almighty and relieve the heavy pressure that had built up inside me. I gave my consent and we prepared ourselves to pray and open our hearts to the Almighty, especially, at the Kol Nidrei service.

Towards evening the worshippers began to filter in. Some women and children also came and entered a separate room. The doors were closed, the curtains were shut and the gate was bolted. My wife lit the candles [candles are lit on the eve of Sabbath and all the holidays]. As I recall this moment it throbs my heart, the tears swell my throat and I feel that I could cry at any moment. I will never be able to forget these moments in my life.

The congregation began to recite the Tefilah Zake [individual prayer recited before the Kol Nidrei service]. Now we needed a cantor to lead the congregation in prayer. We looked around, unfortunately, no experienced or professional cantor was available. The congregation demanded that I conduct the service and despite all my protestations, I had to accept the job. I approached the task with trepidation since I had to pray not only for my family, and myself but also for an entire congregation, and at a critical time.

Still I began to intone quietly the traditional Kol Nidrei chant intermingled with the tears and sobs that I could barely control. At any moment, the entire congregation would begin to cry and as we continued our prayers, indeed we heard the crying of the women and children for our suffering had exceeded all imagination. Thus the service continued, each person pleading with the Almighty to alleviate our pain and suffering and I began to recite the prayer Yaale Tachnouneinou, accept our begging, our lamentations, our prayers for forgiveness, please accept them, if not for our sake then for the sake of the small children.

So we prayed and cried and eventually finished the service. We all considered ourselves lucky that the service had ended without incident and all the worshippers left the place. Yom Kippur morning services couldn't be held as the Germans were grabbing Jews for work so everyone was trying to hide.

Thus we spent the holiest day of the year in Zmigrod



#7) The unique style of observing and celebrating Rosh Hashana in Pidhaytsi, Ukraine throughout the generations

This piece (<http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/podhajce/pod129.html>) is from the Yizkor book of Pidhaytsi, Ukraine, and describes how festivals in Pidhaytsi were celebrated with a unique style, and “with a spice whose secret was known only to the Jews” of that city. The author writes this, for “if someone from our city would celebrate the festivals in other cities, it would seem that the flavor of the festival of Pidhaytsi was removed. Therefore, I feel that our Yizkor Book should give over some impressions of the festivals in our city.” A description of the period between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur follows.

Pidhaytsi was in the Galicia province when part of the Austrian Empire, and is 28 miles SW of Tarnopil. In 1880, there were 4,012 Jews living in the town, and 3,497 in 1910.

As usual, the people of the city were busy with their affairs. Nevertheless, the atmosphere of the approaching Days of Awe could already be felt a few weeks prior to Rosh Hashanah. This was especially felt the week before Rosh Hashanah, when all the Jews of the city would arise early for Selichot.

According to tradition, the first day of Rosh Hashanah took on the characteristics of a festival and a Day of Judgment simultaneously. The day of judgement was set to judge all living beings, and therefore it was appropriate to worship on that day with awe and fear, more than any other festival of the year.

For us, even though the people gathered in the synagogue, which was filled to the brim, no joyous smile was seen on the face of the worshipers, who conducted themselves with more seriousness and somberness than usual. They knew and felt that on this day, they would be brought to judgement before the King of Kings. All of their activities were to ensure that they would be victorious in the judgement, and therefore they all prayed from the depths of their hearts with extra devotion.

A break took place after the Shacharit service. Some of the worshippers, men and women, left the synagogue, and would wish a good and blessed year to anyone whom they met. After the recital of “Lamenatzeach Livnei Korach Mizmor” the shofar blower

blew the tekia-shevarim-terua, whose sounds reverberated upon the walls of the synagogue. The sounds of weeping could be heard from the women's section. A holy silence enveloped the worshippers, who stood bent over before the Judge of the entire earth. During the Musaf service, the shofar sounds were divided into three groups: Malchuyot, Zichronot, and Shofarot. The sounds of the shofar frightened, but also excited and aroused, the hearts.

The content of the prayers also influenced us greatly, especially the moving Unetane Tokef prayer. Then, I was not able to overcome my emotions, and my eyes filled with tears. The authorship of this prayer is ascribed to Rabbi Amnon of Mayence, who was tortured and died in sanctification of the Name on Rosh Hashanah. During this prayer, we feel the suffering of the author, and the prayer from our hearts and the request that G-d have mercy upon his nation and that the shofar sounds would speedily herald the redemption and the coming of the Messiah poured out as if by itself.

At the conclusion of the service, the worshippers returned to their homes to partake of the afternoon meal, to rest and to regain strength, so that they could set out from their homes in groups to the rivers and ponds for the Tashlich service.

After a rest of a few hours, the movement began anew in the city. From all the streets and lanes, the Jews, men, women and children left their homes wearing streimels, hats, scarves and kerchiefs of various colors. They set out toward the rivers. The sound of the crowd, laughter and light conversation accompanied the walkers on their way to the Tashlich service. Some of the faces were bright and smiling, and others were serious and somber. Some were even sad to the point of tears.

The crowds of worshippers reached the river, and their lips uttered the Tashlich prayer, whose main theme is to “cast to the depths of the sea all of their sins”. In order to symbolize the casting off of sins in a realistic manner, people would overturn the pockets of their clothes and shake them out over the water.

The prayers of Tashlich expressed the state of mind of the believing Jew on Rosh Hashanah. How great is the meaning embedded in the verses of David the son of Jesse: “From the depths of despair I call out unto G-d, G-d answers me broadly”. No less exalted is the meaning of the words of the prophet Micha the Morashtite: “Who is a G-d like you, bearing sins and overlooking the transgressions of the remnant of His inheritance, He does not hold anger forever, for He desires mercy.”

The Tashlich prayers finished, and the personal oppression was lifted from the heart. However, the masses of worshippers remained standing at the banks of the river without moving. The last rays of sunlight lit up their faces. As I looked around, I saw the bent forms of those standing in prayer at the banks of the river straighten out. Their eyes shone. All of those people begin to show signs of life once again, as they turned their pockets inside out and scattered crumbs of bread upon the water. Their

voices echoed afar as they read the concluding verse of Tashlich: “They shall not shoot and not destroy on my Holy Mountain, for the land is filled with knowledge of G-d like the water that covers.”

Kol Nidre

It was the late afternoon of the eve of Yom Kippur. The Jewish stores were closed and locked. The concluding meal had ended – this ritual meal consisted of stuffed fish, soup, crepes (kreplach) of the kappores chicken, and a main course. During the meal, the piece of chala was dipped in honey, and the shehechenu blessing was recited over grapes from the Land of Israel.

At the end of the meal, the streets of the city were filled with Jews, old men and youths, and even old and young women – each of them setting out to their own synagogue: some to the Meir Hirschorn Beis Midrash, some to the Great Synagogue, and some to the synagogue on the Street of the Palace (Schloss-Gasse). During the latter era, my family and I worshipped there. We had seats that we had inherited (in Yiddish, “A shtot”).

The seats were on a long bench, with a reading platform upon one which could place one's Machzor (festival prayer book) and other items. The synagogue was well lit. Aside from the regular lights, there were dozens of wax candles burning. These were the memorial candles for those who had departed from the land of the living. A holy silence enveloped the synagogue. The cantor, wearing his white kittel and enwrapped in his tallis, stood before the teiva (reader's lectern) surrounded by a choir.

He read out the proclamation prior to Kol Nidrei, that starts with “With the permission of G-d and the permission of the congregation”, in holiness and purity. The words emanating from the mouth of the cantor moved the hearts of the listeners.

I glanced at the worshippers, looking for the “sinners” – however I saw before me only upright, honorable people of all classes, wearing white kittels and wrapped in tallises. My soul wandered about; it became clear to me, and I foresaw that that evening – the evening of penitence and forgiveness – the Judge of the Land will remove our harsh decrees, for the Jews of our city and also for the scattered Jews wherever they were.

When the time of Kol Nidre arrived, the congregation stood up in unison. Not even a low whisper was heard in the hole. Only from the women's section could be heard the sounds of stifled weeping. Then the sweet voice of the cantor was heard, starting the singing of Kol Nidre in the ancient melody. It is impossible to describe the holy awe that enveloped the congregation during the Kol Nidre prayer, which the cantor repeated three times, one after the other, raising his voice each time.

Even though the content of the prayer is merely the annulment of vows, the historical background of this prayer – for it served as the release from vows and oaths for the Spanish Marranos – imbued it with its importance and awakened the holy awe in our hearts. The melody of Kol Nidre contributed in no small manner to the creation of that special atmosphere that even influenced any gentiles and moved them to visit the synagogue on the night of Yom Kippur. This atmosphere fell upon the congregation immediately after the serious and splendid declaration of “*With the permission of G-d and the permission of the congregation,*” that served as a prelude to Kol Nidre. For who among Israel can say with a full heart that they are not among the sinners...

After Kol Nidre, the cantor intoned thrice “And the entire congregation of the Children of Israel will be forgiven, and the stranger that dwells in their midst, for the entire nation has stumbled”, and the congregation repeated after him. The tension rose once again at the time of the recitation of the “Yaale” hymn. The sound of stifled weeping, strengthening more and more, burst forth from the women's section. The adage says “women's come to tears easily”, and this was particularly felt during the services on the Days of Awe. During the night of Yom Kippur, there were many fitting opportunities for the shedding of tears, especially during the recitation of the penitential prayers, during the recitation of the confessional “for the sin that we sinned”, etc.

The common factor of all these prayers was the theme of repentance and the begging of forgiveness. Tears are appropriate for these themes. Thus it says explicitly, “May it be Thy will, You who hearken to the sound of weeping, that you put our tears in your flask for preservation...”

One of the prominent characteristics of the atmosphere of the synagogue on the night of Kol Nidre was the heavy air and stifling heat that emanated from the dozens and hundreds of burning wax candles. At the end of the service, all of the worshippers went out to the fresh air of early autumn, with their faces aglow and their eyes sparkling, as they wished everyone “May you be sealed for the good” (Gmar Chatima Tova).

Even after I left the synagogue to set out for home, the echoes of the melody of Kol Nidre accompanied me, that moved the hearts of millions of Jews throughout the earth in the midst of this day, and united them in prayers for the realization of the desires of our souls, along with wishes for a good sealing of fate for the entire Jewish people.

Yom Kippur in the Synagogue of our City

Early in the morning of the day of Yom Kippur, the women prepared food for the entire day for their children, for most of them remained in the synagogue all day on this fast day, and only a few went home during the time of the Torah reading for the

break. The men would remain in the synagogue all day wrapped in their tallises and wearing their white kittels, without shoes or with slippers.

The girls would sit in the women's section and converse among themselves, while the adult women and old women would sit and peer into the book of Techinot (women's petitions) or one of the other books designed for women. The prayer leader, with his white, festive garb, would stand before the lectern near the Holy Ark, ready to begin the morning service, feeling the great sense of responsibility imposed upon him as the representative of the congregation on the Day of Judgement.

After the Psukei Dezimra service, the cantor and worshippers would move over to the main part of the Shacharit service. He would sing "The King Sitting on the high and loft throne" in the traditional chant, as the congregation and choir answered after him. The Shacharit service of Yom Kippur is very long, but the traditional melodies blow a spirit of life into the recitation of the prayers, and they are pleasant to the ear.

Those who were musically inclined among the congregation would assist the cantor by responding at set times. The Shmone Esrei of Shacharit is punctuated by hymns and poems that are unique to that day. In these prayers, the early generations bequeathed to us a long litany of traditional melodies and tunes, transmitted to us from generation to generation. Each year they sound as new, filled with the pleasantness and energy of youth.

After the Shacharit service, the Torah reading takes place from the portion of Acharei Mot, in which is mentioned the deaths of the two sons of Aaron the Priest, who were punished with the full measure of the law. The portion is read with the special melody for the Days of Awe. This melody is the cause of many debates among cantorial researchers who find in it remnants of centuries old Eastern motifs. Others disagree and say that this melody dates from the era of the First or Second Temple.

Of all the service of Yom Kippur, Musaf was dearest to us. We young people were interested with all the strands of our souls in the mysterious spirit that envelops this prayer, especially the wondrous segments of the Avoda section, which expresses the soulful embrace of the nation in its ancient glory at the time of the enactment of the holy service in the presence of large crowds and the glory of the King in the Holy Temple by the High Priest. The prostrations of Aleinu and the Avoda made a special impression upon us. The festive yet melancholy melodies penetrated the hearts, and the vision of the kneeling and prostration would move the thinnest strands of the heart, and instill fear and awe into it.

Prior to Musaf, after the Torah reading, the memorial service (Yizkor) was announced. It is the custom to pray for the souls of the dead and to pledge to charity in memory of their souls. In the Av Harachamim prayer, the souls of the holy martyrs who gave up

their lives in Sanctification of the Divine Name, and the victims of the Holocaust are also mentioned.

At the time that Yizkor is recited, those whose parents are alive leave the synagogue, so as not to create an opening for the Satan, and not to arouse the evil eye. During the Yizkor service, many women saw it as a propitious time to express their personal prayers. A middle-aged woman sat near me. Among her other petitions, she asked the Dweller On High to have mercy upon her daughter who had reached marriageable age, and send her match to her, so that she should not remain Heaven forbid as an old spinster.

Another woman who sat near me asked the Dweller On High to grant her strength to sustain her orphaned children honorably, so that she would not Heaven Forbid require the assistance of flesh and blood. Heartrending cries were also heard from the old women, who pleaded with all the warmth of their souls, "Do not cast us away at the time of old age, as our strength fails do not abandon us". In general, during Yizkor, the crowding in the synagogue increased due to the presence of orphans and widows who came to recall the souls of their dear departed. People who were not seen in the synagogue all year would come to this service.

A certain disarray pervaded in the women's section during Yizkor and thereafter. Not all of the women were familiar with the Machzor, and many required the assistance of their neighbors who were more expert than they. There was no small number of women who also prepared appropriate equipment for the services: Machzors, the Korban Mincha Siddur, Chumashes with Yiddish translation, and also Tzena Urena. With all the trees, the forest could not be seen.

The Unetane Tokef prayer aroused a stormy spirit with the women. Its tragic content would touch the hearts of all the worshippers, especially the hearts of the women. Fear and trepidation overtook the worshippers during the recitation of this hymn, which was recited by everyone with emotion, and at times with wailing. The weeping was great during the time of the recitation of the section, "On Rosh Hashanah it is written and on the fast day of Yom Kippur it is sealed, who shall live, and who shall die, for none merit before Your eyes in judgement". On the other hand, the shepherd's melody of "Kevakarat" (As a shepherd..) was enchanting and refreshing. On more than one occasion, women fainted in the midst of this hymn from the great emotion, and the doctor or their relatives had to be summoned. This accentuated the serious spirit of the moment, but on the other hand, it disturbed the service and impinged on the holiness.

The Avoda section came toward the end of the Musaf service. This describes in a dramatic fashion the service of the High Priest on Yom Kippur during the time of the Temple. The congregation of worshippers, already tired from the fast and the long service, became alert once again during the Avoda service. The cantor sang "And the Priests and the people gathered in the courtyard.." in the traditional melody, and as

he arrived at “They would kneel and bow down”, all of the worshippers would fall on their faces as during the days of yore in the Temple. The content of the Avoda service was filled with warmth, and it appeared as new in our eyes each year. With natural longing for the splendid life of days gone by, the worshippers sung the concluding stanza: “Indeed, how splendid was the High Priest as he left the holy place in peace”.

With this, the Yom Kippur prayers with all their experiences were not over. After the Mincha service came the Neila service as a conclusion to the prayers of Yom Kippur. The day turned into twilight. The wax candles cast a gloomy light, and all the worshippers felt as if a new spirit entered into their beings, and new powers were granted to them. Since this service was the last of the services of the day, one says “and seal us” instead of “and inscribe us”. Here, we also take the Dweller On High to task, and complain to Him about the disgrace of his nation that has been pillaged and displaced, and the disgrace of His holy city of Jerusalem, “I recall G-d and am astonished, as I see every city built up on its base, and the city of G-d lies lowly to the pit”. The Neila service concludes with the recitation of Shma Yisrael, the blowing of the shofar, and the declaration, “Next Year in Jerusalem!”

After the weekday evening service, the congregants disperse. The women and children hurry home, while the men remain next to the synagogue to recite the Sanctification of the Moon in groups.