Israel Stern
My Survival

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Translated by
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The German original is published under the title
Mein Überleben.

First Printing, 2018

Credits can be found on the last page.

Editing, Design and Production
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Hofmeister Stauder. Büchermacher, Berlin
www.hofmeisterstauder.de

Printed and Bound by
DZA Druckerei zu Altenburg, Altenburg

ISBN 978-3-033-06567-3 (English)
ISBN 978-3-033-06047-0 (German)

Printed in Germany

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Foreword

An explanation of my motivation for writing this book

My Grandson David was forever asking questions about how I survived the horror of the Second World War, and about the persecution and eradication of Europe's Jews. He wanted to hear about the horrendous crimes that were committed, and how they were carried out. David's interest was great. He kept asking me why I would not record my story, urging me to write a book so the next generation would know what their grandparents and their grandparents' families went through during that dark period – so they would know of the atrocities, of the suffering, of the hunger and of living in fear of your life – all of which they had to endure before being murdered. I was not sure if I would be able to sit down, call up memories and reflect on the details of events that I had witnessed and experienced during the terrible years I lived through, the worst being the three years between 1941 and 1944, when I was only a teenager. Yet David was persistent in his encouragement, and I decided to find the strength to fully contemplate the horror of those times and to write them down. And so I began, although this was not an easy process. The strain of recalling the details of the crimes that we had to suffer was at times unbearable. I would write for one or two days before needing to stop for a few days just to not have to remember. It was also David's wish that his Bubbe Lili would write a book about how she survived the Warsaw Ghetto. He used to ask her constantly to describe it. Like me she considered this for a long time, although coming to the conclusion that her health was not up to sitting for hours concentrating on every detail of her nightmare in the ghetto. I have therefore decided to write a second part sharing the account of my wife's survival. I know the circumstances of her story as we have often talked of it during our long years together; indeed, there has not been a week where we did not talk

with one another about a memory or an event from this time. I am familiar with every detail of her experience and how she managed to survive from the outset of war to its conclusion. For those moments when I needed clarification of any particulars of her story, or had any doubts, Lili has given me a full account.

Translator's foreword

I am grateful to David for giving me the opportunity to translate this period of his family's history as part of my Master's dissertation.

It has been a draining and humbling experience to translate this narrative account of the dark chapter of European history, which Israel Stern witnessed and barely survived. For many months as translator I have had to absorb this story, visualising rural Galicia and living vicariously amongst the Jewish community, seeing the world through the narrator's eyes.

Accounts of brutality and the murder of loved ones are economically described, given more detailed accounts of random aspects of rural life. Our narrator was young, traumatised and caught up in a maelstrom of horror which no modern teenager would be able to comprehend. Indeed, thanks to decades of peace and relative civilisation, we have a more comfortable perspective from which to engage with the Holocaust – a perspective not enjoyed by the author.

Our narrator anchors himself to events which are often repetitive and seemingly unimportant to the overall narrative – but this is typical of traumatic narratives. He was a young man watching his neighbours and community slowly turn against his family, to the point they became vicious murderers. It is the stuff of nightmares, and language is inadequate to fully communicate the terror, the fear, the tragedy, the anguish.

Israel Stern's commitment to writing down the events as he remembers them is further testament to the courage he demonstrates in having survived. May he rest in peace.

Hannah Morris

Roots

Mielnice

Mielnice, as it was called in Yiddish, was a small Polish town on the Dniester river, which at the time was situated in the Southeastern corner of Poland close to the Soviet border (an area that is now part of the Ukraine). The Poles know it as Mielnica nad Dniestrem and the Ukrainians as Melnycia nad Dniestrem. It was part of the district of Borszczow, in the province of Tarnopol. This small town housed a population of around three to four thousand inhabitants, of whom approximately forty percent were Jewish, forty percent Ukrainian and twenty percent Polish. The Jews lived in the town's centre, with the Ukrainian and Polish inhabitants on the outskirts.

The nearest train station was situated in Iwanie Puste, a distance of five kilometres from Mielnice. Other villages and market towns in the area were: Ustie Biskupie, Filipkowce (Pilipsch), Michalki, Wolkowce, Chudikowce, Dziwinecke, Zielona-Olchowiecka, Kolodrupka, Kudrince and Olchowiec.

The local land was very fertile and was referred to as 'Podole', and the soil was dark and heavy. Temperatures in winter could reach up to minus thirty degrees with significant snowfall, often falling a metre high and with heavy drifts. Beyond the towns and villages, snowdrifts could reach up to four metres in height. Summers, by contrast, were so mild that apricots, grapes, walnuts and melons grew.

Despite the fertile local land, the population was poor. With absolutely no industry or work, there were no means of earning money. For the peasant population, without land of their own, the only opportunity for work was with the large landowners or the local gentry. These farm workers lived like slaves, enduring terrible working and living conditions. Rows of the most basic dwellings were situated on the edge of the farming estates. The buildings were constructed using loam and the roofs were made of straw. A door would lead into a single room which was used for

eating, sleeping and as a kitchen and living space. In this one room the whole family lived, and the families were often large. Every family member worked at the farm. The men worked the fields using horses, fertilizing the land with manure and bringing in the harvest, amongst other tasks. The women milked cows in the sheds, fed the animals and helped at harvest time. Payment was made with produce, not money. Depending on the number of working family members, a certain amount of grain, potatoes and wood for heating (more like kindling) was handed out. Every family was able to keep a pig near their home. The days were long, and people worked from sunrise to sunset.

The produce of sunflower seeds, walnuts, tobacco, grain, corn and apricots was delivered all over Poland and the rest of Europe. Despite the successful harvests, fertile land and favourable climate, even the independent farmers remained poor, with few exceptions. Any wealth a farmer had decreased substantially on the marriages of the children. For example, a farmer with ten *Morgen* of land (one *Morgen* = a quarter of a hectare) would share it equally amongst his four children, leaving only two and half *Morgen* for each child, and so it continued from one generation to the next. This was also the case for Jewish landowners despite their relatively larger holdings. My Grandfather, who owned several hundred hectares of arable land and forest in Pilipsch, split his land between his grown children as an old man, leaving only a portion with each. This went on through the generations, leaving families ever poorer.

Jewish families also lived in some of the villages throughout the area. The Jewish population of Mielnice comprised mainly merchants and tradesmen, with a smaller amount of farmers and landowners. The Ukrainians and most of the Poles were farm workers and the town officials were exclusively Polish. All trade in the town and surrounding areas was in Jewish hands, including trade with grain, eggs and agricultural products. Almost all of the farm produce, including animals, was bought by Jewish traders, who bought small amounts from the farmers and sold these on to wholesale traders in the town. There were three wholesale traders in grain who bought from the small traders and delivered it in wagons to exporters, who then exported it to countries including Germany and England. The largest of these traders was called Peisach Kümel.

The procedure was similar with the egg trade: small dealers would buy ten, twenty, thirty or more eggs from the farmers and sell the total to the wholesale trader in town. The wholesaler had a large warehouse

in which the eggs were packed for transport. As the eggs were mostly exported to Germany, the packing of them was a laborious task. The material used for packing was nothing like the shaped cardboard used nowadays – we did not have such things then – instead the eggs were packed in wooden crates of about one and half metres in length and about sixty centimetres wide and thirty centimetres high. The crates had gaps of about two centimetres between the slats of wood so that air could circulate. Straw was spread out on the bottom of the crates and the eggs were laid closely on top, one next to the other, so that they could not move during transport. Once a layer of eggs had been laid out the next layer was added using more straw, and so on, with several layers of eggs. Exactly how many layers there were in each crate I cannot recall, but there were always the same amount of eggs in each layer and every crate had exactly the same total number of eggs. They were packed in such a way that you could have thrown a crate without a single egg being broken. The men who did this work were known as the egg packers. The work was as follows: the packer was able to take eggs out of the container, three in each hand, and then lay them in the straw. The work could be done quickly and the packers were so adept that they could immediately position the eggs correctly in the crate, oval to oval.

Every Tuesday was market day. Farmers came from all around with carts or by foot and brought their produce of grain, eggs, poultry, fruit, vegetables and butter, depending on the season. The Jewish population, as well as some of the better-off Polish inhabitants, shopped at the market. Farmers' wives sold their produce, and grain, sunflower seeds, corn, beans, rape, walnuts were sold to the corn merchants. Most farmers sold their wares direct to those traders they knew and trusted, and from whom they could be sure they were receiving a fair price. Some farmers would go from one trader to the next selling to the one who offered the highest price, with grain prices being set daily.

In another part of town there was also a cattle market, where farmers offered cows, calves, sheep and horses for sale. Again the traders were Jewish, although most of the horse dealers came from the town of Borszczow.

Farmers from the entire surrounding area came to market with their wives and families and, after they sold their wares, went into the stores to stock up on things they needed, for example cloth, ironmongery or leather for shoes. The weekly market also attracted other dealers from places such as Krzywce, Skala and Korolifka, who sold general goods from their stalls.

As well as the traders, the Jewish population consisted of skilled tradesmen, tailors, shoemakers, carpenters, smiths, saddlers, bakers, butchers, hairdressers and plumbers. There was a Jewish pharmacy in the town and, of the four doctors, three were Jewish and one Ukrainian. There was one law court and two Jewish lawyers. There were three synagogues and a small *Stiblech*, for prayers during Shabbat.

On Shabbat and other Jewish holidays all shops and workshops were closed because the businesses belonged to Jews and the majority of them were practising. Even non-observant Jews closed their businesses on such days as they were too ashamed to open them. Because of this, Mielnice was almost deserted on Shabbat and other Jewish holidays. Business in the whole town respected both the Jewish and Catholic holidays. The Christian population used to be aware of the Jewish holidays and planned accordingly. The main synagogue was a substantial, heavy stone building with a large dome. Its walls were decorated all around with biblical scenes and imagery, which had been painted by a well-known artist before the First World War.

The 'Mielnicer Rebbe' (the famous Rabbi of Mielnice), who was a great scholar, had lived in the town before the First World War, and was either the son or grandson of the famous Rebbe of Czortkow. His followers, the Chassidim, renovated and maintained a relatively large house for him. It was a grand house with surrounding parkland where he lived with his family. There was also a building for employees, a communal kitchen, a small building for use as a Sukkah as well as a one-storey building with a large hall and different rooms; that later became the Jewish National building.

The Rebbe and his family lived in Mielnice, residing on their estate until the First World War, when the Bolsheviks occupied the area for a time. The Rebbe and his family, feeling vulnerable and threatened by the Bolshevik presence, moved to Czernowitz, never to return to Mielnice again.

After that the buildings stood empty and the property was sold – I am not sure by whom – and divided into three. One part was bought by Selik Finkeltal, who owned tobacco plantations, and another by the Menczer family, who owned one of the larger farms and into which my cousin Munio Mentschel was to marry. The central part of the site, where the single-storey dwelling stood, was bought by the Jewish population. It became the *Beit Holam* (Building for the People), a Jewish community centre serving also as a Hebrew school for boys and girls up to the age of about twelve.

There were two Rabbis: Rabbi Weis and Rabbi Mosche Rosenfeld, and two Schochtim (ritual slaughterers). Mielnice also had two churches, one Polish and one Ukrainian.

The large communal space offered by the Jewish community centre *Beit Holam* was used for events, plays, weddings, talks and for prayer during Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. On the ground floor, in addition to the main hall, there were different rooms where members of Zionist Youth organisations such as *Hanoar Hazioni*, *Gordonia*, *Bnei Akiwa*, *Freedom* and *Betar* met. The Hebrew school *Tarbut* was located on the first floor. The Hebrew school was a private school, which had been set up by a committee and was funded by a combination of donations and school fees. Pupils from the age of seven and above were schooled in reading and writing Hebrew, alongside *Tanach*, Zionist and Jewish history, all taught in Hebrew. The Headmaster was called Mordechai Worecek.

In addition to the Hebrew School there were *Chejders*, comparable with small, private Kindergarten, run in the homes of the teacher, *Rebbe*, who would teach the *Alef-Bet*, *Chumasch* and reading and writing *Luschen Kodesch* to boys aged between three and six. *Luschen Kodesch* is very similar to Hebrew and was the language of prayer used by Jews in Europe. The *Chumasch*, like the Torah, is a name for the five books of Moses. Other teachers also taught *Tanach* and *Gemara* to children older than six.

The Jewish population was organised in three distinct cultural groups. The largest group comprised of Zionists of whom the younger members were intent on emigrating to Palestine (Israel did not exist at the time). The majority of young people belonged to Zionist organisations and many of them travelled to 'Hachschara', where they were prepared for life in a Kibbutz. Emigration to Palestine was far from easy as it required a visa issued by the English, which were hard to come by as relatively few were issued. Those who applied for a visa had to wait years and not everyone got one. There was of course also the illegal emigration known as *Alija Bet*, which was a risky way of entering Palestine as it was considered illegal by the British, who sent any perpetrators they caught straight back.

Neighbours of my grandmother, Munie Walzer, a blacksmith by trade, his wife, two children and mother-in-law tried to get to Palestine illegally, because they had been unable to get a visa. The English intercepted their boat and sent the five of them home again, with the whole family ending up back in Mielnice. They told us everything that had happened to them and how difficult it had been. As it happened, the necessary paperwork

was posted to them by the *Sochnut* only a few months later, allowing them to emigrate legally. They ended up settling in Afula.

If it had been possible to travel freely to Palestine, our small town would have undoubtedly been drained of the majority of its young people. I certainly begged my parents to send me to an agricultural college in Beth Schemen, although they were unwilling to send a boy of fifteen away from home. Mosche Fischler's family was braver, sending their son to study at the Technion in Haifa. A significant number of Mielnice residents emigrated to Palestine, most to either *Kwuzat Schiller*, a Kibbutz near Rechovot, and to Afula. But others ended up in other places such as Haifa.

Another section of the local Jewish population was, like my family, religious although not strictly orthodox with peja, stramel and kippahs. They wore normal clothing but always kept their heads covered, and of course neither worked or smoked during Shabbat.

The third and smallest group was the *Jüdischisten.* They were not Zionists and were insistent on speaking Yiddish instead of Hebrew. They were either workers, Communists or Bundists.

The majority of the population was poor because of the lack of work I have mentioned. There was no industry or employment to speak of. Businesses belonged to families, who employed other family members. Tradesmen had small workshops and at best took on one apprentice. The future for young Jews looked bleak. Even gaining a trade or skill was difficult, as tradesmen passed their skills on to their own children rather than to external apprentices; besides which, there were already more craftsmen than there was work. The bulk of the work was on repairs of existing goods as opposed to new production. For example, the shoemaker mostly replaced worn soles or repaired holed or torn leather with a patch, and the tailors were always being asked to adapt existing clothing. People wore clothes until the fabric was completely worn through, then the item was taken apart and repaired with fabric from the inside. This was the main job of the tailor. Occasionally new shoes and clothes were made, but that was rare since there was so little demand.

Since studying required money, only the rich could afford such luxuries. During the last years before the war, even wealthier young Jews could no longer study in Poland as a *numerus clausus* was issued resulting in universities no longer accepting them as students.

Only the Poles were able to get jobs in local authorities. The only possible hope for any kind of future for young Jews lay with emigration.

Just getting by was becoming such a struggle for most of the Jewish population that even the merchants were losing hope of any improvement in the situation. A Ukrainian cooperative had been set up that started buying up all the grain. Their motives were nationalistic and they encouraged fellow Ukrainians to support each other. This was just a beginning, but threatened to be considerable competition in the long term which could have dire consequences for our community.

Anti-Semitism was prevalent in the large towns and cities. There were anti-Semitic organisations, which were tacitly condoned by the Government. The worst of these were the *Indeken*. Things had become so bad that, in some towns, Jews were no longer safe on certain streets. One of these was the Akademicka Street in Lemberg which was no longer used by Jews, since some had been set upon and badly beaten up there by the *Indeken*. Another consequence of rising anti-Semitism was the murder of a student in broad daylight. He came from Czortkow and his family name was Zelermeier.

Three or four years before the Second World War, the followers of the Mielnicer Rebbe brought the Rebbe's son and his family back to Mielnice from Czernowitz. As his father's large house had been sold a detached house with a large garden was rented, into which the family moved. A prayer room was arranged in the house for observing Shabbat and other festivals – all of which was financed by the Chassidim. The Rebbe was a slim, delicate and scholarly man, who was unfortunately not to reside in Mielnice for long. On 26 September 1942, during the so-called 'campaign' on the first day of Sukkot, he and his wife and four children were taken with other Jews and transported to the Belzec concentration camp.

My Family

My father Herman was the youngest of ten children. My grandfather, Jidel Stern, was a landowner who, before the First World War, lived in the village of Filipkowce (Pilipsch in Yiddish), which was five kilometres from Mielnice. He owned a large estate of several hundred hectares, including a large farm with horses, cows and agricultural machinery, and his land was farmed by Ukrainian workers.

Besides the fields he owned a forest in Dawidov, which was a small hamlet. A forest warden lived there and managed the forest.

During the First World War the area was occupied for a while by Bolsheviks, who burned down the buildings and stables, resulting in the family fleeing to the town, to Mielnice. Once the war was over, no one in the family wanted to move back to the village.

Some of my grandfather's children were already married at that time, in 1919, and others married later. Grandfather bequeathed the fields and the forest to his children, keeping a small part for himself. His children did not farm the land themselves, but rather let it to local farmers for half the income. In this way, each farmer worked the land, sowed the seeds and kept half the harvest, with the other half going to the owner of the land.

I was born on 15 January 1923 and I can only remember my grandfather. I did not know my grandmother, as she was no longer alive. He lived on the main street in the middle of the town in a two-storey house. The house was one of the tallest and most beautiful in the whole town. My grandfather lived on the ground floor and my uncle, father's brother Abraham, lived on the first floor. Grandfather, who was already very elderly at around ninety years old, had a white beard and was bedridden. He had been confined to his bed for a long time, which was the result of an accident whilst driving a horse-driven sledge in winter. His sledge had crashed into a long piece of timber on the side of the road and turned over.

1 My mother Miriam 'Mala' Stern (née Weinreb). Undated.

2 My father Herman Stern. Undated.

His leg had been broken and he had not regained the ability to walk; his leg was suspended on a weighted rope through a pulley. For years he was confined to his bed; in fact, my only recollections of him are in this state.

When he died I was left the Tefillin, which was a great honour. For my Bar Mitzvah these were restored and authenticated by a *Sofer*, in order to establish whether the script was still intact and legible. A *Sofer* is also someone who is authorised to transcribe the Torah.

My father's siblings who I knew from Mielnice were his sisters Malka and Pesia and his brothers Moses and Abraham. Malka's married name was Koffler, her husband was no longer alive and she had three children, two sons Mosche and Leib and a daughter called Inde. His second sister was called Pesia, whose married name was Mentschel. Her husband was also no longer alive. Pesia had four children, of whom I only knew Cunie and Mendel Mentschel. Father's brother Abraham was married to Adele without children, and Mosche was single.

A sister lived in Kolomyia with her husband by the name of Sternschus, and there were two brothers, one of whom lived in Vienna and the other in Lemberg.

My mother was the second of four children. I did not know her father, my grandfather Israel Weinreb. He died of typhus in the First World

War and I was named after him. Of grandmother Frimce's children her son Mosche was the eldest, my mother Mala (Miriam) the eldest daughter, Fancie the second daughter and Sime the third. I was always told that grandfather was a religious man and a great scholar of the Talmud, which he used to study during every free minute and often late into the night. My grandmother was also very religious and always wore her hair covered. On Shabbat and other festivals she wore a wig.

Before the First World War they lived in the village Olchowiec (Wilchewitz in Yiddish) which was also about five kilometres from Mielnice. Grandfather Weinreb was an employee of the large landowner Israel Hafner, who was a distant relative of his. The Hafner family was the largest landowner in the entire region. They owned the land in Olchowiec and an enormous farm with stables, storehouses and barns, as well as a large number of horses and cattle. They also ran a distillery, which made spirit out of potatoes in winter, with the by-product being used to fatten young oxen. The spirit was bought by a Polish monopoly.

The Hafner estate had over a thousand hectares of land, but they also owned another estate in the neighbouring village Zielona-Olchowiecka which was smaller than the one in Olchowiec, as well as a large forest of hundreds of hectares in the area around the town of Borszczow, in Moschkotawec. Altogether they owned more land and forest than the Count of Mielnice.

After the First World War my grandmother lived in Mielnice with her three daughters; my mother, Fancie and Sime. Her son Mosche lived in Vienna. He had been a soldier in Austria in the First World War and had stayed there.

As a widow managing alone with three daughters, life was hard. Without insurance, social support, pension or medical provision, she had to get by on her own. She sewed clothes for the local population, pleated skirts and made jackets. This was the type of clothing that the locals wore and this is how she earned money for herself and her family. With the help of her youngest daughter Sime, grandmother made the clothes and stockpiled them at home. Tuesday was market day, on which all the farmers in the area came to buy. Some farmers' wives came to grandmother to buy clothing. Some people also came to her on other days for purchases, however the main shopping day was Tuesday.

My mother's sister Fancie was educated, could speak Iwrit well and was a teacher at the Hebrew School *Tarbut* until she married Isaak Scharfstein, who had a successful grocery wholesale business with his brother Aron.

3 Starting from the left of the back row: My father Herman Stern with my mother Mala and my sister Zenja in front of him. Next: Mosche Weinreb, his wife Else and their son Ernst. Next: My mother's sister Sime, with 'Bubbe' Frimce Weinreb and me standing next to her. Next: Isaak Scharfstein with his wife, my aunt Fancie holding her daughter Lotka 'Locie'. Undated.

Our family lived next to the synagogues 'Schil' and 'Beit Hamidrasch'. There was a street between the synagogues and our house, on the other side of which, opposite ours, lived my grandmother with her daughter Sime. Fancie was already married and had left home. Later, four years before the war, Sime married the corn merchant Mottel Eisenberg. Mottel Eisenberg was actually one of my uncles on my father's side.

We lived in a semi-detached house. Rabbi Mosche Rosenfeld lived in one half and we in the other, that is to say my father, mother, and my sister Zenja, who was four years younger than I.

Zenja was very bright. She was doing very well at the local school, also went to the Hebrew school *Tarbut* and could already speak Hebrew. Zenja's school reports were always good, of which my parents were always proud.

4 My sister Zenja Stern. Undated.

I went to a Chejder between the ages of three and six. From six I went to the local school, which was only until lunchtime; there we were taught Polish, Ukrainian and numeracy. In the afternoon, I went to the *Tarbut*.

I have already depicted my father's employment. Grandfather had left his land to his children, who did not directly farm it, but received half the harvest from those who did. And so my father spent entire weeks in the village of Pilipsch during spring and particularly during harvest in the summer and autumn, ensuring that he received his fair share of the harvest. My mother stayed at home and kept house and then father was at home through the winter.

My father also speculated with grain. The local gentry and large estate owners generally lived beyond their means. For example, they sent their children to large cities or abroad to study, which was not cheap. They travelled to expensive spas and spent more than the income they received. Thus their money often ran out before the next harvest was gathered in and sold. Some even ran into financial difficulties some months before harvest. In order to bridge this gap, they forward sold a percentage of their grain before the harvest at relatively reduced prices. Almost

5 Beit Sefer Iwrit. My school in Mielnice – I am standing in the back row (under the blue cross). Undated.

every Count had a trusted Jewish agent who would forward sell the grain on his behalf. Some would have to sell some land to their agent to raise urgently needed funds.

The agent of the Mielnice Count was Schimon Schifnagel. He became very rich through these dealings. He bought a large plot of land from the Count's estate and had a large house built there, in which a clinic was housed. He also founded a wood and timber trading business. Thanks to this agent as intermediary, my father often made trades, forward buying future harvests. These were purely speculative investments, the aim being to buy the harvest at as low a price as possible in the hope that the price would rise after the harvest. If the weather had been good there would be a bountiful harvest, and a poor harvest after bad weather. On a forward trade the profit came despite the less successful harvest because he would have bought it cheaper than it would then be selling at.

In addition, my father would buy grain during harvest time, when the price was relatively favourable, and would store it until the price had risen before then selling it on for a profit. In the autumn, he would buy crops of sweetcorn when they were harvested. The sweetcorn was already

mature, but the kernels of the cobs were too moist to thresh, and had to first dry out. We had a drying shed, which stood on the land behind my grandmother's house. In Yiddish these were called *Koschnize*. They were wooden buildings, approximately two and a half to three metres high and about one and a half metres wide, and of varying lengths. The walls were made of thin slats about four centimetres wide. Between each slat was a gap of about one centimetre allowing air to flow through the building. The sweetcorn was tipped in through a hatch on the roof, and on the floor was a door through which the cobs could be taken out. It took almost all winter for the sweetcorn to dry out in this drying shed before it was removed in spring and summer. It was then threshed, and the kernels sold either at that moment or stored a bit longer, depending on the price they were trading at.

This was how my father was able to earn extra money.

The local school took in boys and girls whether Jewish, Polish or Ukrainian. Up until shortly before the beginning of the outbreak of the Second World War, all three parties had a normal relationship without issue or anti-Semitism. In the time leading up to the Second World War, the Polish authorities began to populate the area with people from the west of Poland – with the intention of making the area more Polish, since the majority of the population was Ukrainian. Anti-Semitism was a direct result of this resettlement programme. Some of the settlers were nationalists (*Indeken*), who incited our Polish neighbours to anti-Semitism with their anti-Jewish rhetoric. Thus began increasing antagonism and fighting between Polish and Jewish youths.

During this time, my parents decided to open a textile business for piece goods. With money they had saved they rented premises from Leser Eisenberg, who was the brother-in-law of my grandmother. Her sister Tyle had been married to him. The business was located right next to the premises of my Uncle Isaak Scharfstein, who was married to my mother's sister Fancie. Isaak and his brother Aron managed a wholesale business in groceries and fashion accessories, which was the largest business in the town and the surrounding area. The family textile business only lasted about two or three years until the outbreak of the war.

I was a member of the *Hanoar Hazioni* Zionist Youth organisation. Members of Zionist organisations mostly met on Shabbat, and had lectures and discussions as well as courses on Zionism and Jewish history. Courses were offered in Hebrew and outings were organised. We wore a uniform similar to that of the Polish boy scouts.

In 1937, two years before the outbreak of the war, aged about fourteen, I went to the youth organisation's summer camp in the vicinity of Zalesczyki. Young people from different places met at this camp. I met and made friends with two boys from Borszczow, Schmuel Seidman and Izio Falkenflik. Later, during difficult times when we were resettled in Borszczow, they helped me out a lot. But I shall come to that later.

The Second World War

The Outbreak of War (1939)

I was a member of the *Hanoar Hazioni* organisation and, in the summer of 1939, I travelled to a summer camp for instructors and leaders. *Madrichim* were also trained there. The camp was based in Skawa in Tatra county. When the camp was over I returned home, having to change trains at Krakow. It was there I saw trains carrying army tanks for the first time.

War broke out on 1 September 1939, a few days after I had arrived home. Only a matter of days after that, soldiers of the Red Army were marching in. Initially, there was only a small number of Soviet soldiers. Local people questioned the soldiers and officers about life in the Soviet Union. No one knew what life was like there, since it was cordoned off to the outside world and the borders were heavily guarded; neither was travel to or from the Soviet Union possible. The soldiers described the country at its most glorious, as though it were heaven on earth. When asked if you could get work there, they answered that everyone had a job and that everyone lived in plenty. When asked whether lemons grew there, the answer was that they did indeed and that the factories produced masses. The soldiers were then laughed at, because they obviously didn't know what lemons were and had never seen them before in Russia. Regardless of what was asked, the response was always so positive that you got the impression that Russia was a paradise. Not long after, the army and civilian administration followed, as well as the security service and members of the Communist party, whose job was to observe all activity. Business remained relatively unchanged for another two or three months. Shops were still open to sell those goods remaining, but they were no longer able to buy new goods. The Russians bought everything they could get hold of and particularly required daily necessities such as clothes, cloth and shoes. The Germans occupied western Poland, and the Russians eastern Poland. Almost immediately the communists took over local government, with

land ownership being passed into the hands of the state. Farming collectives, *Kolchosen*, were established, and all large businesses became state-owned. Everyone received Russian papers, and Polish money was completely devalued.

As the Germans were occupying western Poland many Jews, mostly students and the young, fled to the Soviet-occupied area. Some of them ended up in our town. Civil administration and the communist party began to organise and form both the town administration and that of the surrounding area. In addition, the communist youth organisation *Komsomol* was founded. Boys and girls of up to 18 years of age were accepted by this organisation, providing their background was poor, rural or from families of small tradesman. Youths from wealthier farmers or business owners were not accepted.

Next, all agricultural business, shops and trades were seized. Managers and workers were employed for these businesses. Offices were set up to oversee these now state-controlled businesses and receive goods directly from them. There was an office for controlling every area, managed by Russians, most of whom were members of the Communist party.

One night, some months later, the *Miliz* (police) and *NKWD* (secret police) arrested Mielnice's landowners, and the refugees who had flown from the occupying Germans to us in the Soviet area. They were brought to the railway station and deported to Siberia in cattle trucks. The Hafner family were amongst those deported, which comprised Bubi Hafner with his wife and two children and Siome Hafner, Mendel Kopelman and Alter Kopelman – all respectively with their wives and children. The Hafner and Kopelman families were related to us. Amongst others, members of the Bartfeld, Fridman, Jamperler and Schifnagel families were additionally deported. Schifnagel was the agent of the Count of Mielnice. The Secret Police came to his home at night to arrest the whole family, however they only came across the husband, who was the only one of them to be carted off to Siberia. His wife and his twenty-year old son Munio happened not to be at home that night and so weren't arrested by the NKWD, and stayed in Mielnice. This was believed by all to be a stroke of luck, since one assumed that being transported to Siberia meant having little chance of surviving. Yet four years later, when our region was liberated by the Soviet Army, it became clear that they had not been fortunate at all. Those who had been deported to Siberia – like Schifnagel and the rest – survived the war, and

Mrs Schifnagel was murdered by the Germans. Her Son Munio was murdered by Ukrainians in Czortkow in a terrible and brutal way. But I'll come to that later.

In Mielnice we learned from a railway employee that the train carriages holding the deported were temporarily stationed in Wignanka. This was a junction station about 100 kilometres from us. When this was known, relatives and loved ones of those taken put together food packages as quickly as possible. Schizio Schwarz and I gathered these packages and took them by train to Wignanka. The train carrying the deportees was parked on a side track at Wignanka station. It was a very long train carrying people due to be deported from the entire area, and was guarded by the army. But the soldiers allowed us to approach the carriages and we went from one to the other, looking for people from Mielnice.

Once we'd located them, we were able to pass the packages to them through gaps and speak to them briefly. We were not able to stay long as the guards sent us directly away. The train was full of deportees and we were unable to find out the intended destination in Siberia. Much later letters arrived from them, and from these we found out that during the journey some men were taken out of the train in the area of Kiev, where they were used for forced labour. Mendel Kopelman was one of these, but his wife and his young daughter travelled on further to Siberia.

The forced labourers had heavy work under close surveillance. Months later, when the Germans attacked Russia and occupied parts of the Soviet Union, the Russian administration started to disintegrate and withdraw. One day the guards simply walked away, enabling the labourers to flee and be free. Mendel Kopelman came back to Mielnice. He was reunited with his father Herschel and his mother, who were too old to have been deported by the Soviets.

There was much rejoicing that Mendel had not ended up in Siberia. How could we have known he would be killed only months later when, during the first 'campaign', he and his ageing parents were taken to the extermination camp, Belzec. He would probably have survived in Siberia, as did his wife and daughter and his brother Alter and family.

Wealthier people had their passes stamped with 'unreliable', and were made to leave the town. Included in this were my Uncle Isaak Scharfstein and his family, who had to leave. They moved to Czortkow. The school for modern Hebrew was closed and a Jewish school was opened, in which Yiddish was taught as Hebrew was now forbidden. Isak Rosen-

blad became the Director of the Jewish School. Many young Jews from poor families, and children of manual workers, became members of the Communist Youth Organisation *Komsomol* and received various administrative positions. Also some adults, who had been communists before, got good positions.

On the other hand, merchants and people from the former middle classes were at a complete disadvantage. Families such as ours suffered most under this new 'order' since the Soviets termed all landowners 'exploiters' and *Kulaken*, who were not permitted to be employed in any positions of authority or state concerns. Since there was no longer private ownership of business and everything was now state-controlled, every agricultural worker was now an employee of the state. In addition, the only money we had, the polish Zloty, had been replaced by the Rouble and had become worthless.

Our land was taken by the State and we sold as much as we could from the textile business before liquidating it. We buried some of the wares in order to use it later to buy food. As a *Kulak* my father was not able to earn money or find a job, leaving me at sixteen to do what I could. Although it was not officially permitted lots of us traded where we could, since all kinds of necessities were hard to come by. Even the most basic things such as soap and sugar were scarce and only available on the black market.

In our area there were many tobacco plantations. In Poland, tobacco was under a state monopoly and it was therefore forbidden to buy untaxed cigarettes. However there was no tobacco monopoly in the Soviet Union, enabling the sale of tobacco, which was scarce in other areas.

In our town there was a good Polish locksmith named Spak, who built appliances for cutting tobacco. I also bought myself such a machine. I bought tobacco from the farmers and cut it with the machine, packed it in a case and went to Lemberg by train or to Stanislaus or Tarnopol. These were large towns, where I was able to sell the tobacco to dealers. With the money I made I then bought various things on the black market: patterned headscarves for women, large sheets of uncut cigarette papers, leather suitable for soleing, and various other items which were needed back home. I would bring the goods back home in small packages and would sell everything on to dealers.

As well as walnuts, sunflowers were also grown in our area, from which oil was extracted. The sunflower oil could be used to fill twenty-litre canisters, which I transported in a purpose-made, plywood case and took

6 My father Herman Stern, during the Second World War

to Lemberg to sell. Again, I used the money to buy various other goods which we just couldn't get hold of back home. I also bought walnuts locally, peeled them and sold them in the surrounding towns. In this way, I had no problems making some money.

However, such trade was only possible because there was officially practically nothing to buy.

I was only able to do this for a few months. In the long run it would have been too risky as trade was forbidden in the Communist system. People who traded were called 'speculators' and were sent to jail for it.

For this reason I decided one day to enrol for the technical school *Korkisuwka* in Lemberg. It was run by the State, as were all schools in Communist areas, which also meant it was free. My best friend at the time, Faiwisch Mentscher, and I both went to this school. There was also a boarding house connected to the school, where students had food and lodgings, which was at number 78 Janowska Street. After some months at this school we discovered that we would later, upon completion of the course, be obliged to work in a factory allocated by the state. These factories were mostly far away, deep in Russia. When we heard this we decided it would be better to leave the school and return home, which we then did.

Back in Mielnice, I needed to get a job quickly since the Communists required everyone to work. I went back to Spak the locksmith. He was known for being a good locksmith, was the only one in the area, and had also never taken on a Jewish apprentice. Under Communism,

Spak was no longer able to run an independent locksmith, and was forced to turn it into a cooperative. Since Jews could now also be members of the locksmith cooperative, Schmiel Koffler and I were accepted as apprentices and worked there until Germany invaded the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941.

German Invasion (1941)

When the Germans began on 22 June 1941 to invade the region, the Russians started to evacuate their administrative positions and party offices. Since the Russian side had heavy casualties from the German advance, Russian officials, workers and civilians, fled east to Russia. A portion of the local population fled with them – mostly young Jewish people or communists, or those who were active in the youth organisation Komsomol, as well as some people who were not involved in the regime at all.

I also considered whether I should flee; but what would I have done in Russia, and how would I be able to leave my family behind? Above all, nobody suspected how horrendous things would get and that they would one day try to annihilate all Jewish people. Such thoughts would not have occurred to us at all. At this point, everyone from our town would have been able to get out as we were only ten kilometres from the border. The river Zbrutsch, which was the border with Russia at the time, ran through the village of Kudrince and it was only about thirty minutes to the town of Kamieniec Podolski, which was already located in Russia. After the war it became clear that most of the those who fled had survived. Also those who had been forcibly evacuated to Siberia had mostly survived.

During the short time that the Germans were advancing and the Soviets had already begun retreat, there was a sort of power vacuum. In the absence of a ruling power, the Ukrainians carried out pogroms against the Jewish population, murdering many in the most brutal manner.

In our town, as in many other places, the Ukrainians raised a mound of earth near the church, known in Ukrainian as Magile; a sort of monument to those Ukrainians killed by the soviet secret service, NKWD. On these mounds rousing speeches were given, which were directed against the Soviets and the communists, and against the Jews for having worked closely with the Soviets.

The body of a dead Ukrainian man was found on the site where the NKWD headquarters had been – he had been shot by the secret police and was then dug up. Apparently he had heroically attempted to prevent the withdrawal of the Soviets. His body was carried around in the procession of demonstrators that went through the town protesting against the Soviet Union and Jews. Hundreds of Ukrainians from the entire area gathered at the market place. Some people even came from the other side of the Dniester – from the village of Probeikowitz, which was in Romania; they came intending to rob and plunder Jewish houses.

Fortunately for us, however, the Ukrainian priest and some decent Ukrainians, one of whom was my Grandmother's neighbour, Iwan Kamenezki, stood on the steps of Moische Mentscher's house, which was directly opposite the market square, and calmed the crowds down. They appealed to the gathered mass of Ukrainians to return home peacefully and not to do anything. They kept speaking to the crowd until they eventually dispersed. Apart from a few incidents involving stealing, the Jewish population were fortunately spared victims, pogroms or deaths. In other towns, however, there where pogroms where hundreds of Jews were murdered.

My mother's sister aunt Fancie had, with her husband Isaak Scharfstein and two children, returned from Czortkow, where they would have been forcibly resettled under the Soviets. They had not been able to stay in our town though because my uncle's papers had been stamped with 'unreliable', so they moved to Czortkow. As soon as the Soviets withdrew, they came back to Mielnice and stayed at my grandmother's in a small apartment. It would have been unthinkable for them to have got their own place at that time. They told us that Ukrainians had taken sixty Jewish men prisoner in Czortkow. The men were made to smash bottles on the street and were then forced to crawl naked over the glass. After this humiliation, they were brutally beaten to death. Among those beaten to death who were from Mielnice was Munio Schifnagel, the son of the count of Mielnice's agent, who had been deported to Siberia. Munio and his mother had not been at home the morning the father was arrested by the Russians, and had remained in Mielnice for a time before later moving to Czortkow.

In Grzymalow, a town about ninety kilometres from us, Klara Menczer lived with her husband Moses Uslip. They had a small daughter called Rena. Klara was the sister of my cousin Miriam who had married another of my cousins Mosche Koffler. Once the Soviet army had left their town, the Ukrainians carried out a pogrom. They rounded up a large number of

Jewish women, children and men and beat or shot them to death. Klara and her daughter Rena were amongst those who had been rounded up. The girl must have been about six years old but was somehow able to run away and save herself. Her mother was murdered. Rena was brought to Mielnice to her grandparents and aunts; she survived the war with her aunt Szyfra.

About five kilometres from our town, on the banks of the Dniester, was the village of Olchowiec. One day a farmer came from there and reported that dead bodies were floating in the river, and that one had been left hanging on the banks. There had already been rumours that, in some of the villages along the Dniester, Ukrainians had wrapped Jewish men, women and children in barbed wire and then thrown them into the Dniester river while they were still alive. A few of us got together and borrowed a horse and cart from Leser Eisenberg and went to the village. When we got there, we found a body and used a long stick to help pull it out of the river. It was the body of a women wrapped in barbed wire. We brought her to the town and immediately buried her at the Jewish cemetery.

At about this time, a group of about sixteen Jewish people arrived in the village of Wolkowce; men, women and children, all of whom wanted to flee to Russia away from the Germans. They were from Czernowitz in the Bukovina, in Romania. The Germans had caught up with them as they fled and they could not continue. They then tried to return to Czernowitz. They came to the village of Wolkowce, which was on the Dniester and represented the border to Bukovina, and wanted to cross it. Ukrainians offered to carry them across the river and, already intending to murder them, allowed them to first spend the night in a barn. They told them that they would do one trip each night, taking them over to the Romanian side in groups of four because the boat would not hold more than that. On the edge of the village there was a hill with a deep and dried-up well. This is where the Ukrainians brought their four victims, who believed they were being brought to the border. They were robbed of their remaining possessions and then pushed into the well, before rocks were thrown down on them. A farmer who had Jewish acquaintances in the town talked of this murder when he came. The perpetrators, who had believed that no one would ever find out about their misdeeds, then allowed the remaining four to go. It was the Sofer family, who only just missed the brutal murder that had already been planned for them. Dr Sofer, his wife and two daughters then came to our town. He had been the director of a bank and a doctor, and they had been a respectable Czernowitz family.

The Committee

In Mielnice respected citizens founded a committee, which was joined by Rabbi Lebisch Schwarz, Nute Sonenklar and Mosche Koffler amongst others. The committee was founded to help refugees and the needy because, at this time, it was already presumed that even harder times would be coming. The older generation had not forgotten the pogroms and events of the first World War.

In our region, it wasn't initially the Germans who marched in, but the Hungarians. It was generally known that the Hungarians were not as brutal as the Germans. We had heard, for example, that the Germans took about fifty Jewish men prisoner from the streets as soon as they marched into Czortkow, had them loaded into trucks, taken to a forest and shot. Amongst the victims was Lebzie Gutman, whose parents were our neighbours in Mielnice. He was married, a merchant by profession, and was employed by a wholesaler in Czortkow.

The Jewish committee in Mielnice decided to do everything possible to get the bodies of people murdered by the Ukrainians out of the well in Wolkowce; the aim was to bury the bodies at the Jewish cemetery.

It was generally known that the Hungarians didn't like the Ukrainians, and we hoped that the Hungarian commander would support the Jewish committee by providing armed protection on the way to Wolkowce. The Jewish committee therefore approached the Hungarian army commander who actually agreed to do this, and sent some soldiers as protection so we could haul the bodies out of the well without danger.

However, in order to be able to haul the bodies out of the well, we needed equipment. Outside our town, about a kilometre away, lived a Jewish man who had a farm and brickworks. He also made concrete pipes used for well construction. He put together some equipment, and the ropes that would be needed, and also lent a wagon and a horse. Ten to twelve young people put themselves forward to help, and I was

one of them. With several horses and carts we went to the village of Wolkowce, in the company of ten Hungarian soldiers who were armed and went with us on cycles. They made sure we were not ambushed, for which their commander received several 'gifts'. We had a barrel made of wood which stood on four legs and had a crank attached. We turned the drum, to which a rope was attached with a bucket on the end. In this way one of the lads was lowered into the well. He then had to somehow attach one of the murdered bodies to the rope so it could be lifted out. Thus, the corpses were pulled out one after the other. Once two or three of the victims had been hauled out we swapped, and another one of us went down. Eventually it was my turn to attach the rope around two or three of the dead. We recovered sixteen bodies. They were subsequently brought to our town in the cart and buried at the Jewish cemetery there.

The Hungarians were only in our town a short time, during which it was relatively peaceful. We had only to see to their demands of procuring various things for them, such as food and clothing.

During this time the Hungarian army was passing through our town with large groups of people on foot, each group consisting of about two to three hundred people – Jewish men, women and children. They were families from the Hungarian region of Karpatska Rusch. They were being taken to Kamieniec Podolski, a town in Russia about fifty kilometres from Mielnice. Germans were already stationed there, and shot the groups to death as they arrived.

When the committee heard what was happening to these people they immediately took action and bribed the Hungarian military commander. He then stopped one of the groups of people being taken through Mielnice and they were no longer driven through to Kamieniec Podolski to be murdered. The people stayed in our town. There were about three hundred of them, including children. We quickly established a kitchen to feed them, and Jewish inhabitants of the town, who were able to, took some of the refugees in.

As well as people from this group of Hungarian Jews from Karpatska Rusch, other refugees arrived in the town; amongst them were some who were caught up by the German army trying to leave Romania for Russia and so were trying to return to Romania but, unable to cross the wide Dniester river, ended up in Mielnice. Amongst these refugees was a young family from Bucharest by the name of Kagan; two brothers, Wowa and his wife Vera and the other brother Leidig Ilusche, as well as

their uncle and his wife. One of them, Iluscha was taken in by our family. He lived and ate with us. The married brother was taken in by the Menczer family.

After a short time, in September 1941, the Hungarians withdrew and the Germans arrived. At this time the Ukrainian police was re-established. They needed uniforms but there was no material available. After two years of Russian communism there was nothing left. Since however orthodox Jews wore black coats, the easiest solution for the Ukrainian police was to take these coats. Jewish tailors were expected to make the uniforms. This is how the Ukrainian police got their black uniform; the Jewish committee had to supply the material and then finish the uniforms. Boots also had to be handed over, all unpaid – but they did it in the hope they would be left alone by the Ukrainians, who could make a lot of trouble. They saw themselves as superior to the Jewish population.

Jewish people were fair game to them, and not a single Ukrainian would be held to account.

German Occupation (1941–1944)

The Germans who came were from 'border control' and patrolled the border with Romania along the Dniester. The first order issued from the Gestapo in Czortkow was that Jews were no longer allowed to leave the town. Neither were we allowed to go anywhere nor receive any post, and we were thus completely cut off from the world. The German border soldiers moved into the buildings previously occupied by the Soviet secret police (NKWD) and the regular police. These included Dr Silberbusch's house on the corner, as well as the two adjacent plots of Jewish ownership; they were houses in the style of villas, and had large gardens. The buildings were situated opposite the Polish church, on the street leading to Kudrince, the Zbrutsch river and on to the Russian border, as well as being on the main highway which cut through the town and went on to Okopy Swientej Trujcy, where the three countries of Poland, Romania and Russia bordered each other.

The soldiers who arrived to control the border were middle-aged and in about their forties. In this role they were also stationed in other places in the surrounding area, including in the village of Wolkowce and in Ustie Biskupie. The border soldiers immediately adopted the role of the new Masters. The Jewish committee had to supply furniture and bedding and other furnishings for free. The soldiers were provided everything they needed or demanded. The commander, for example, demanded a horse and a saddle so that he could ride out.

The German presence signalled the beginning of a time of total insecurity. We had to work for them without pay, keep their lodgings clean and cut wood for the winter to ensure their lodgings were heated. Someone had to be employed to look after their horses and to groom and muck out the stables. Jewish girls had to clean their quarters and do their washing. The committee even had to send people to do the jobs for the border soldiers stationed in Wolkowce and Ustie Biskupie.

The Gestapo was much worse however. They had their headquarters for our area in Czortkow, a town of about thirty thousand inhabitants, approximately sixty kilometres away from the town. From these headquarters all orders relating to the Jewish population were issued. One day an order came that all Jews had to wear a white band with a blue star of David, about ten centimetres wide, above the elbow on their left arm. With the band Jewish people could be immediately identified. The band had to be worn by all men, women and children above ten; being without it was a punishable offence.

The border soldiers made life comfortable for themselves in our town. Since their task was fairly easy, they turned their attention to creating havoc in the town at night. They only had to patrol the Dniester so had plenty of time for disruption. Despite being aged between forty and fifty and so no longer young men, they would burst violently into homes, harassing and molesting women.

One night some soldiers went to the Rabbi's home. The Rabbi's wife was pregnant, and yet the German soldiers forced her to strip naked and dance on the table.

Following this incident, the Rabbi went to complain to the German commander, along with the Head of the committee and two committee members, Mosche Koffler and Sonenklar. The commander was only made angry by this and claimed that his soldiers were decent men, who would never do such a thing. The Rabbi and the two delegates were even beaten for having allegedly accused innocent soldiers.

The nightly sorties of the German soldiers induced an increasing fear and dread amongst the Jewish population, since they were always so unpredictable; they harassed us in whatever way it occurred to them at the time.

We lived opposite the Beit Hamidrasch synagogue. Between our building and the synagogue was a small street. The stairs to the women's gallery of the synagogue was opposite our house. Both the stairs and the walls were made of wood. One evening, we noticed that there was a fire upstairs in the synagogue. I immediately ran up the steps with a bucket of water and managed to put the fire out; fortunately, it was only a small fire. Had the fire spread, our building would have been burned down with the synagogue because our roof was made of wood. While I was putting out the fire, two German soldiers came up. They were probably the ones who started the fire in the first place. They were drunk but they didn't do anything to us.

The nightly harassing of the population by the soldiers adopted a kind of normality during this time, and we could do nothing to change the situation. One night the soldiers took a man from his home with no reason. He had a family and was a coal merchant. He was never to return and nobody know what had happened to him. There was talk that the soldiers had had a shooting competition using him; that they had put a pot on his head as a target and had tried to shoot the pot, that he had been killed during this and they had buried his body somewhere so no one would find out what had happened.

The committee, which had been founded to help Jewish people, was given the name Judenrat by the Germans. It was to the Judenrat that the Germans turned when they communicated the orders they expected to be carried out. On the other hand, it was the Gestapo which was responsible for any 'Jewish issues', and their headquarters were in Czortkow. The commander was a man called Kelner.

Kelner gave all orders affecting the Jewish population. The Judenrat negotiated with him and tried to influence him with gifts, in an attempt to tone down the strict orders he issued. Mosche Koffler was one of those who negotiated with him; within the Judenrat, Mosche was responsible for supplies, and undertook all necessary negotiations.

In addition to the Judenrat a Jewish police force was also established, whose job it was to ensure order in the part of town where Jewish people lived, as well as to collect the taxes and contributions expected.

One day the order came that all Jews had to hand in any fur they had, including small amounts; even fur collars. The Judenrat had to collect the furs and bring them to the authorities. Those who had valuable furs quickly tried to sell them to a Pole or Ukrainian or tried to trade them for food. My father owned a winter coat with a Persian lamb collar; the collar was removed and handed over to the Judenrat. Another order followed, demanding that Jews hand in all silver, copper and brass. Those who did not hand something in were threatened with heavy consequences. Thus, all the brass hinges and fittings were removed from the doors, along with everything in the house that was copper or brass. We tried to trade any silver items with the Ukrainians and Poles. Valuable things which could not be sold were buried in the ground for safe-keeping, and the less valuable items were handed in.

Forced Labour (1941–1942)

In November 1941, some months after the German invasion, the Judenrat received an order from the employment office in Czortkow, where the SS Commando and German administrative HQ were also based. The employment office required that young men put themselves forward for work in a distant factory, although no one knew exactly where it was. The Judenrat then sought to organise a workforce of mistrustful and relatively unwilling young people. Due to a simple lack of an alternative, about forty of us young put ourselves forward, including Iluscha Kagan, the refugee from Bucharest who lived with us.

The Committee hired horse-drawn carts and took us the approximately sixty kilometres to Czortkow. We had all brought enough food to last a few days. When we arrived in Czortkow we were directed to a large hall, where lots of young people from the whole region were congregating from every town or village where Jewish people lived. There were several hundred of us altogether. The SS arrived and arranged us into rows of four and then escorted us to the train station. At the station, we had to get into cattle trucks under the guard of the SS. We had no idea where we were going. We travelled for several hours through the night until, in the middle of the night, the train stopped. The SS guards opened the doors and we all got out, but were dazzled by lights so bright we could not see where we were.

Surrounded by SS men and Ukrainian police we had to get into rows of four once more, and were led to a camp a couple of hundred metres from the station. As soon as we moved off guards started firing into the air. We had no idea what was going on and were completely shocked, since it was pitch black and shots were being fired all around us. We made our way to the camp with this shooting going on. When we arrived the main yard was once again brightly lit. SS men from the camp were already waiting, as well as Ukrainian police, and wardens who had been chosen from

the prisoners themselves, known as 'camp wardens'. They were Jews from Lemberg who had arrived a few weeks previously and were the first group of Jewish people to arrive at the camp. The Germans had previously used the camp to intern around a thousand Russian prisoners who had been left so weak as a result of hard labour, hunger, inhumane conditions and brutal treatment that they were shot by the SS, and we were now to replace them.

Upon arrival, we were turned over to the camp administration and made to line up for roll call. Around us stood guards armed with batons, some of whom were Jewish. We were counted and then driven to the barracks with blows from the batons and yells of "Go! Go! You dogs…!"

The camp was made up of two large barrack buildings and a building housing a kitchen. In front of the barracks was a large latrine. Between the barracks and the latrine was a large square, the area used for roll-call. The whole site was surrounded by a high barbed-wire fence.

The barracks were very long and made of wooden boards. Inside, there were three flat bunks down either long side. The flat boards, which served as the beds we were expected to sleep on, were completely without bedding.

Once in the barracks everyone looked for a place to sleep, however just as we were driven into the building the SS men immediately turned up and started clubbing people and screaming: "What, are you tired already? You fucking dogs!" Terrified of further attacks, many of us tried to secure a resting place at the back of the building, away from the door. But since everyone was clambering onto the bunks at the back they broke under the strain, giving the SS men further reason to continue their brutal attack, until some prisoners were badly hurt and many were bleeding.

Iluscha and I were able to stay together. We finally got some rest on the hard boards but were unable to get any sleep that first night as we were preoccupied with our situation and what was likely to happen to us. The next morning, as every morning that followed, we were woken while it was still dark and made to go to the canteen and get our ration for the day. We were made to stand in line and were given a piece of dark bread and a broth resembling coffee, which had to last for the whole day. We had to drink as quickly as possible as we were expected to assemble again for roll call. After being counted, we were led to work in marching columns, overseen at all times by the SS and Ukrainian police. The march to where we worked was about three kilometres. We were in a marshy valley, which was frozen at the time and flanked a hillside. Tracks had been put

down for the kind of tipcarts used for mining and there was also a digger, a hut, and a smithy with a metal workshop.

Our work consisted of shovelling stone and earth into the carts, then pushing the carts along the tracks to the point where they were to be emptied, thus raising the ground level of the valley. The plan was to lay a second track between Lemberg and Kiev. At the time, Polish railway tracks were single and our work was to create a second track. There were other labour camps along this stretch of railway, in which prisoners like us had to work. In Kamianka Stromilowa and in Stopki, about fifteen to twenty kilometres away, prisoners were working in the same conditions in camps like ours.

It was a bitterly cold winter, the earth was frozen and the work was extremely difficult. We worked twelve to fourteen hours every day, from early in the morning until late at night. The work was part of Organisation Todt. This 'organisation' was a partially military operation. The guards were brutal, both Germans and ethnic Germans. They wore a bright green uniform with a red arm band displaying the Swastika. They showed their displeasure by arbitrarily attacking prisoners with clubs. There was heavy snowfall that winter, with many snow drifts, and we were required to form work parties from our camp to clear the main highway of the huge drifts. The highway was critical for the German military as it connected Lemberg with Kiev. The road was so heavily affected by snow that it practically resembled a tunnel; snow was banked on each side up to about three metres. We got on top of the snow each day, but overnight it continued to lay heavily.

All work was overseen by the SS and Ukrainian police. The guards were able, depending on their mood, to do whatever they liked to prisoners. One day, a guard maintained that five men had left the line to try to escape, which was not the case at all. They were five young men from Lemberg. The Commandant ordered that the five innocent men be executed. Every camp inmate was called to the main square and made to stand helplessly witnessing five young men being shot to death for no reason. The five were then left lying there for another twenty-four hours as a warning to the other camp inmates, who would then be too scared to entertain any thoughts of escape. After a time, the five bodies were thrown into a large grave behind the camp and some earth was shovelled over the top of them. It was an open grave, into which new victims could always be thrown. Once this was full, a new one was started next to it.

Each morning, we had to line up in rows of four on the square before being led to work. In this way, the workers were counted. Each evening, after being led back, we were made to line up and were again counted, to ensure that everyone had returned. In winter, in temperatures of up to minus twenty-five degrees, we were often made to stand in the square for hours at a time if, for example, the guards needed to work out how to organise prisoners into different groups for work. As well as shovelling for the train track, there was also snow clearing on the main road or loading and unloading military trains at the main station.

One day a prisoner managed to escape during work. The Commandant of our section ordered a roll call, for which all inmates had to be assembled. The Commandant went along the rows of prisoners and pulled someone out at random. We all had to watch as the innocent lad was executed. It was a boy from our home town, whose name I no longer recall. The Commandant claimed this was retaliation, and had the body thrown into the latrines used by the inmates as a deterrent.

Sometimes guards would shoot prisoners while they were working: this happened to Izio Kimelman, who was also from Mielnice. A Ukrainian policeman, who was a guard where we were working, fired at a raven out of boredom and hit Izio instead, wounding him. The policeman then grabbed him with the intention of shooting him to death. Izio begged to be allowed to continue working, claiming it was only a minor wound, but to no avail. The policeman shot him dead and had him thrown in the ravine that we were filling. Many murdered prisoners were disposed of in this way.

For his entertainment, the Commandant had developed a sadistic way of tormenting his prisoners. He would identify a victim, telling him that he was going to have to shoot him. He would shove the man's face against the wall and say: "…and now I shoot you!" The prisoner would shake in mortal fear, but was instead then smacked on the back of the head with a stick. This sick game was sadistically repeated until the defenceless victim was finally allowed to run.

In terms of food, we were given the warm brown water in the morning, which was supposed to be coffee, and roughly a pound of bread, which was to last the whole day. In the evening there was a warm soup, which sometimes contained horse meat; it was hard and tough like rubber. The horse meat came from the broken horses brought to the camp to be slaughtered.

We prisoners were given neither appropriate clothing nor shoes or gloves for the heavy outside work we had to do in harsh winter conditions. The clothing in which we had arrived at the camp was soon worn and ripped from the dirty and heavy work. This was particularly true for footwear, and many suffered from frostbite.

I worked for a time on the loading of the dumpcarts. Before that I had been assigned to snow clearing. I also had to spend a couple of days loading and unloading carriages; all was very physically demanding work.

One day a guard was asking whether anyone had experience with metal work. I put myself forward, being fortunate that I had some previous experience. I was put in the smithy shed, where carts and train tracks were repaired amongst other things. Since fire is always necessary in the smithy it was always warm there; and although the work was, once again, heavy, I suffered a little less from the effects of the cold. We didn't only have to work in the shed; carts, tracks and other machinery often needed repairing on site outside in the cold. The hardest part of the job was carrying the gas bottles used for welding to where a repair was needed. These huge steel bottles, which were hard enough for two men to carry, had to be carried by us individually. When I carried one of them I thought my shoulder would break. I couldn't complain because I wanted to continue doing this work.

Since we were in a relatively small labour camp the camp Commandant was susceptible to bribes. It was possible to receive packages from home containing clothing and food. The Judenrat from our town hired a horse and cart from a Ukrainian by the name of Michaschko Jazkiw in order to deliver such packages. He came a distance of about 120 kilometres and delivered around every two weeks. The packages made the horror of the camp slightly easier to endure. We were mostly sent dried foods, as they kept better. My parents always sent two packages; one for me and one for Iluscha.

Not everyone was lucky enough to receive additional provisions, and those who didn't really suffered. Those inmates from Lemberg who had arrived first received nothing from loved ones, since their loved ones had, in the meantime, been shut in a ghetto and were themselves desperate for food.

Others who, like me, came from smaller towns had a certain advantage, because there were not yet ghettos for Jewish people at this point. Outside of major cities, the Jewish population was still able to move around freely. This was at least the case until the first *Aktion*, in which

almost half the Jewish population was taken prisoner and transported to the death camp of Belzec in train trucks. The Judenrat kept in touch with the camp inmates. The camp Commandant accepted bribes in exchange for the release of prisoners, who were effectively having their freedom bought.

After several months, the first six lads from our town had their freedom bought in this way. I should have been part of this, but it didn't happen because they wouldn't let me go after I made a mistake. Those who were released were supposed to pretend they had a specific illness, which was really just a formality. The camp doctor, himself a prisoner originally from Lemberg, would then carry out an examination. When I feigned an illness, he asked me what the matter was and I pretended to have pains in my appendix. When he asked me which side, I pointed to the wrong side. Due to this mistake, I was unable to be part of the first group of six to leave. Iluscha made it out but I didn't. The disappointment at home when I did not return was indescribable. The pretence of an illness was a pre-agreed charade, since the SS Commandant was paid for every prisoner he let go. If anyone had actually been ill, he would have simply had them executed instead of allowing them to leave.

Mosche Koffler, my cousin and a member of the Judenrat, negotiated for the freedom of inmates. My parents pleaded with him to ensure that I would be part of the next group to be released. Two weeks later, Mosche again travelled to the camp Commandant at Borki-Wielki to buy freedom for some of the prisoners. He came with the farmer who carried the packages for the prisoners. He was not able to come by train as these were forbidden to Jewish people. He was able to buy freedom for five men, including myself. For this the Commandant received diamond earrings, which my father had given my mother as an engagement present.

As soon as we were free, we travelled back with the Ukrainian farmer on our way home. It was very cold and everywhere was covered in snow. I went half the way in the sledge and half of it on foot beside it. There was enormous rejoicing when I returned; my parents, my grandmother and my aunts were all so thrilled they hardly knew how to express it. All the time I had been away I had pictured my father as a strong and healthy man with a round face. Now, however, the anguish and fear he had experienced during my absence had altered him so completely that his face had become haggard and almost unrecognisable.

From our reports of the camp it became clear to the Jewish population what Borki-Wielki entailed and what conditions inmates had to en-

dure. A short while later, when the German employment office in Czortkow demanded another load of workers for the camp from the Judenrat, no one put themselves forward voluntarily. The Judenrat was unable to place any workers, so the German Authorities then undertook 'raids' and seized Jewish men from the streets and from their homes indiscriminately. They were taken to the main square under guard and were then sent on to Borki-Wielki. During one such raid my uncle Mottel, to whom my aunt Sime was married, as well as my cousin Isaak Eisenberg, were picked up and sent to the camp.

My father was also arrested one day during one of the raids. He was taken to the square, where all those taken prisoner were gathered and which was part of a site where the border soldiers were stationed. However Mosche Koffler was able to free him, claiming he was an old man and therefore unsuitable.

Survival

No wages were ever paid for all the work the Jewish population did for the Germans. The Judenrat had to provide both the material and the labour for all the work the German occupiers demanded. With this set-up, the Germans just kept the work coming.

One day, the German border police demanded that their courtyard be plastered with the headstones from the graves at the Jewish cemetery. The Judenrat had no choice but to gather labourers for this task, who had to dismantle headstones and load them onto carts to bring them to the border police's site, where they then laid the headstones as paving for the floor of the courtyard. Afterwards, the Hebrew inscriptions were easily recognisable on the new floor.

Back at home, it was clear that I urgently needed to find a job of some sort. Some of Iluscha's family had found work at the farm in Zielona-Olchowiecka; I think his brother, the wife and his uncle and his wife. The premises belonged to the Hafner family, who were distant relatives of ours and who had been forcibly sent to Siberia by the Russians. Everyone tried to find employment, since otherwise the danger was of being transported off to a labour camp during a raid. We especially tried to find jobs which we assumed would be relatively safe, and from which we would be unlikely to be taken. We could either work for the German soldiers, for example chopping wood or cleaning the yard, or work on the farm, which had previously belonged to Count Borkowski but which was now state property and was under German administration. I began work at this farm. It was called Borosufka and was situated about one to two kilometres outside the town. It was a huge farm with horse yards, cow sheds, various barns, a smithy, a carpenter's workshop and a large house for the manager – close to which were cottages for the workers, and the fields beyond. The Judenrat had to arrange workers for this farm, men and women who worked both in the yard and out in the fields.

I was able to get a job in the smithy at the farm. I thought that it would be better to do a job where some level of skill and experience was required, as opposed to any manual labour. I decided that this work made my position relatively safe. A master smithy worked there, and a Polish lad about my age. The work consisted of the usual tasks, mostly repairing horse carts and ploughs and farrier work, amongst others things. One day, the master smithy explained that his father had been a blacksmith as well and had worked for the Stern farm over in Pilipsch. It had been my grandfather's farm and I told him this.

The summer was hot and dry and there was hardly any rain. The iron edging on the wooden wheels of the farm's horse carts was all very worn down from use, and the wooden parts had mostly dried and shrunk. As a result, the iron edging would no longer hold to the wood and had to be adapted in the smithy. We had to take the edging off the wheels, forge the iron wheels and shorten and fashion them slimmer, in order to attach and secure them to the new wheel.

The manager of the farm was a Polish agronomist who reported to a German who had overall control of all farms in our area. The German wore a military uniform and always carried a whip in his hand. He carried out regular inspections of all the farms, going around and checking that everything was satisfactory.

During one of these inspections he also came into our smithy. On this particular day, the master smithy hadn't come in to work, so I was alone with the Polish lad. Many carts with defective wheels stood outside waiting to be repaired. The German came in and asked us why so many carts were still waiting to be fixed. He raised his whip with the intention of whipping the Pole, who then sprang over the anvil and fled. Instead, he whipped me twice on the back until I ran away – leaving two red welts on my back, which hurt for weeks afterwards.

Back at home, the family had no income. We had to either exchange or sell household items, valuables or some of the wares we still had left over from the textile business and which we had hidden, in order to get some food from the farmers. My father had not been able to earn money for two years. The Soviets had labelled him a Kulak; a rich landowner, who was not allowed to be employed. The Germans employed him for a time as a labourer making highways, but he wasn't paid for it.

Our need for food was such that I tried wherever possible to obtain food for the family at the farm where I was working. I remember creeping into a field of potatoes to dig up a couple of kilos to take home.

During the grain harvest, I was able to secretly gather barley and wheat by pulling it out of the top of the stalks. I gathered handfuls each day and almost always managed to take a kilo home with me. This was only possible in the brief window of harvest and it was never easy. I had to be very careful not to get caught, because I wouldn't have known how they would have punished me – should a Jew be caught stealing 'German property'.

The grain which I was able to smuggle home was ground with a quern. My uncle Leser Eisenberg, who was married to my grandmother's sister Tyle and had three sons Shimon, Isaak and Mosche, owned a quern which he had built himself. The machine was a miniature version of a mill. My uncle had owned the water mill in Pilipsch, the village where our fields were, and knew all about milling. At his house we were able to grind the few bags of grain I was able to get hold of. With the barley we had pearl barley as used in Switzerland to make the barley soup famous in the Graubünden region, and we got dark flour from the wheat. This small milling machine was known locally as a zhorna. It was made of two round stones of about sixty centimetres diameter; the lower stone had a screw in the middle, above which was a conical rounding. In the stone there were grooves from the middle to the outside. The stone above was the same size as that underneath, but had a hole of about ten centimetres with a steel stick in it. In the middle was a round cavity where the screw was. Both stones had the same grooves and the lower stone was surrounded by an iron rim in which it could be turned. This useful machine was mounted on a wooden stand. With the stick, which went in a small hole with help of an iron pin, the stone above could be turned and, since the lower stone had a small cavity, small amounts of grain could be introduced. As the stick was turned, the grain was pressed and then ground and dropped into a container positioned underneath.

I hoped that the workers in the smithy would be safe from being taken away to the work camp. Everyone sought work which was considered 'safe'. However, since nobody was now putting themselves forward voluntarily for the camp at Borki-Wielki, the Germans started organising raids, taking whoever they could prisoner to then send them to the labour camp.

At this time it was relatively quiet in the town. Only the Judenrat was busy all the time, fulfilling the requests of the German border soldiers who were not only stationed in our town but also in Ustie Biskupie, a vil-

lage six kilometres away, as well as in Wolkowce, a town a further ten kilometres from Mielnice. People from our town worked in these other villages for the border soldiers. As well as the demands of the border soldiers the Judenrat also had to satisfy the demands of the Gestapo in Czortkow, which was responsible for our region. All raids and arrests were ordered from there and the Jewish prisoners were taken to the camp at Borki-Wielki. For this reason, the Judenrat tried as much as possible to bribe the Germans and meet their demands.

The head of the Gestapo was called Kelner, and he also received so-called presents from the Judenrat the entire time: jewellery, watches, fabrics, boots, everything he fancied at a given moment. For this, he made promises to the Judenrat that nothing would happen in Mielnice and that we would be largely spared. He took the gifts gladly, but he didn't stand by any of his promises. All items that were 'gifted' to the Germans, including sums of money, had to be found by the Judenrat amongst the Jewish population, which was not easy. The Judenrat had trained up a Jewish police force, and about ten policemen had the task of procuring the presents and the taxes.

And this is how life was up until 26 September, the first day of Sukkot.

Despite it being a holiday, I had to go to work as usual. My mother had packed me a type of cake made of beans and sweetened with sugar, which she had baked for Sukkot. I took my usual route to the Borosufka farm, along the main street through the town. Our main street was part of the connecting street to Czortkow and led to the point where the three countries of Poland, Romania and Russia met, at a place called Okopy Swientej Trujcy. At Dr Silberbusch's place, opposite the Polish church in which border police now lived, I would take a right to get to work. However, this morning, I noticed trucks on the main road with Germans in uniform. A soldier jumped down off one. I continued on my way assuming they were commandos who were taking grain from farmers who hadn't handed over enough. I didn't think anything unusual was happening and, once at work, the day started as any other.

A Romanian refugee, Jewish, worked on the estate as coachman. Every morning he had to drive to the Judenrat in town to collect the estate workers. That morning, he drove to the town as always but returned without a single person. He reported that the town had been besieged by Germans who were rounding people up, whether young, old, male, female or children, and taking them all to the market place where they

7 My cousin Lotka 'Locie' Scharfstein. Undated

were made to wait. He was only able to drive back because he didn't wear an armband with the Star of David, so the Germans had not considered him Jewish.

When I heard this, I left the estate immediately with a few others. We went out into the fields and hid. We stayed in hiding all that day and all night for fear the Germans would come to the estate taking Jewish workers.

The next day we heard from the farm workers that things had quietened down in the town. The Gestapo had left and the people they had taken prisoner were taken to the train station at Iwanie Puste around midday. On hearing this I went back to the town, where the extent of the horror became clear. I went straight home, where I found my sister lying on our mother's bed, crying. She told me that our parents had been taken away. Together we went to granny's, where those of us who were left had gathered, distraught. There I learned what had happened.

My granny and aunt Sime's eldest child had been taken away by the Germans. Lotka 'Locie', aunt Fancie's eldest child, had also been taken away. Everyone was crying because we had no idea what would now happen to them. I threw myself on the bed next to my sister and cried. I just

could not come to terms with my parents being gone. I was convinced that they would come back at some point.

On the day this *Aktion* was carried out, my aunt Fancie, her husband and their small daughter Jezie had been at granny's. Aunt Sime, whose husband was at the labour camp of Borki-Wielki, was also there. At the time my sister happened to be visiting, as we only lived on the opposite side of the street. My parents were at home with Aunt Fancie's eldest child Locie and her friend, the daughter of our neighbours the Gutman's. Once the raid began and they started capturing people, everyone at granny's had quickly gone out the back door into the garden. Through a gap in the fence, they managed to get into the neighbour's yard where there was a barn and stables, and where they were able to hide behind bales of straw. This neighbour was a decent man, a Ukrainian, who probably allowed this because he got on well with my granny and our family. This is how the group were able to escape the raid – including my sister. My granny also hid in the barn, but she came out of hiding too soon, to check what was going on. Sime's eldest child, who was about five years old, ran out behind her. They were spotted by the Germans and were both, grandmother and granddaughter, taken away.

There was however no way of leaving my parents' house without being seen, since it was a detached building with roads and open space on all sides. My aunt's daughter Locie and her friend tried to hide on the roof, and my father tried to hide behind a wardrobe, but they were all discovered and taken.

During this *Aktion*, the following members of my father's closest family were taken: his brother, Mosche; his brother Abraham with his wife Adele; his sister Pesia, as well as cousin Mentschel and his wife and their two children. From my mother's family, my aunt Tyle, my granny's sister and her husband Leser, who owned the mill, were also taken.

These were the victims amongst our immediate family living in Mielnice. Besides these we lost an even greater number of relatives at this time, who lived in other places. A brother of my granny, and his family, who lived in Zaleszczyki and Dolina. My father had a sister, who lived with her family in Kolomyia, and brothers living with their families in Lemberg, all of whom were murdered. We had other relatives who lived in Mielnice, all of whom had been taken by the Germans, with the exception of my cousins Shimon and Mosche. The two of them had not been caught as their hiding place was undiscovered during the many raids in the search for workers for the Borki-Wielki labour camp. Since their brother Isaak

had been taken for the camp some weeks before they had built their own hiding place. At the side of their house, in a horse's yard, there was a small toilet room which was separated by a partition. Under the floor of the toilet was a bucket which could be taken out, and under this bucket Shimon and Mosche dug a hole in which they could hide. Whenever there was a raid they fled into this hiding place.

This is how an *Aktion* mostly went: The German Gestapo and the Ukrainian police surrounded the centre of town, where the Jewish population predominantly lived. The German border guards, who were stationed near us, were also heavily involved in blocking off the streets and capturing people. Any Jewish people encountered on the street were immediately taken as prisoners and made to sit at the market place. Then the Germans and the Ukrainians would go from house to house searching thoroughly. Every Jewish person they found, man, woman or child, was detained at the market place.

As well as the Gestapo and police, Ukrainian youths would lead the Germans to the homes of some of the Jewish families who lived outside the centre of town, although these areas were predominantly inhabited by Poles and Ukrainians. Once located, these people were also taken prisoner and brought to the market place. If someone tried to make a run for it they were shot. Those who were ill, weak or less mobile were also shot.

Old Mr Distenfeld who lived next to granny's shook quite badly and had problems walking: he was executed immediately.

The Finkeltal family lived next to the Jewish House of Culture (Beit-Am). They were arable and tobacco farmers and their fields stretched along the route to Iwanie Puste, where the local train station was and where they had a building for drying the tobacco. Their married daughter, who had just given birth to her first child, lived there. When the Germans found her in bed with her baby, they shot them both.

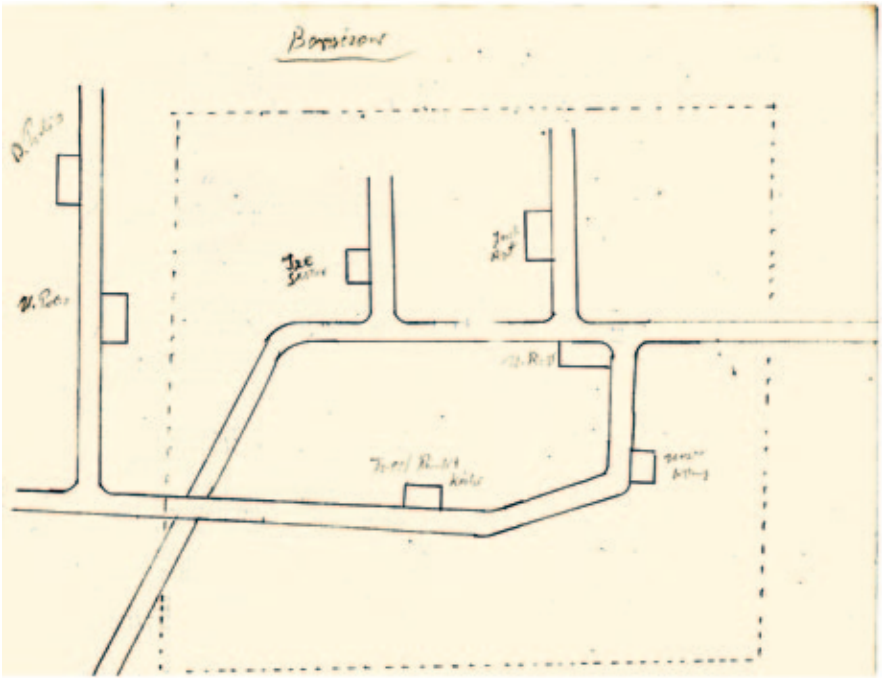
During this first *Aktion* seventeen people were shot and killed, and more than half the Jewish population of Mielnice was taken. The young were the most affected. They took about seventy-five percent of young Jews prisoner and transported them off. That it was possible to remove such a large number of young people was inconceivable.

Members and employees of the Judenrat and the Jewish police were entitled to move around freely, even during the *Aktion*, and nothing happened to them. A friend of mine called Melech Blumental was initially arrested, but it occurred to him to spontaneously claim that he worked for the Judenrat, so he was released. He was therefore able to move around

with relative freedom while the *Aktion* was in full flow. Later he told me that, because of this, he had seen how small children amongst the detained at the market place were crying because they were hungry and thirsty and their mothers had nothing to give them to comfort them. It had been an awful sight to witness. Members of the Judenrat were not able to give the children anything to eat or drink either.

Around midday all the people arrested were made to walk the five kilometres from the market place to the train station in a convoy under the guard of Germans and Ukrainians. They were loaded into cattle trucks and carried off.

No one knew to where.



8 My sketch shows Borszczow and the dotted line depicts the ghetto. Undated.

Forced Resettlement (1943)

After these events, I worked a few more days at the forge on the farm. Two or three days after people had been taken, the master smithy told me he had heard from one of his acquaintances, a train driver, that they had been moved to Belzec. I wasn't sure where Belzec was or what went on there. Absolutely no-one would have imagined that it could have been a concentration camp. A few days after the traumatic transportation of so many, an order came that all remaining Jews move to Borszczow – the district capital, about twenty kilometres away from Mielnice. The remaining Jewish population was told to leave town by 22 October. Only doctors and the few who were termed 'useful Jews' were allowed to stay behind; in other words, people who had special permission from the Germans, and who collected scraps of iron, brass, textiles, used rags, paper, and aluminium. As it turned out, they were only allowed to stay in the town a little longer until everything had been collected and there was nothing left. Then they were shot.

There were no Ukrainian or Polish doctors in Mielnice and the entire surrounding area, only Jewish doctors. For this reason, three Jewish doc-

tors were told to remain in three towns covering the area; Dziwinecke, Kolodrupka and Ustie Biskupie. Some Jewish families tried to cross over to Romania with the help of farmers who lived on the Dniester river. The Dniester river was also the border to Romania and the farmers knew exactly where to cross this with the least amount of risk; they knew when the guards finished their shifts and when they changed guard, and thus when the border was not patrolled. At such times it was possible to cross in relative safety. Mosche Koffler managed to escape this way with his wife and three sons, as well as Isaac Fischer and Gabriel Waldmann, both with their wives and two children. They fled to Romania and went to Czernowitz. Gabriel Waldmann arranged the contact with the smugglers who brought them over the border. He lived in the village of Ustie Biskupie on the Dniester and owned a large water mill there. He knew many locals and therefore knew who could be trusted. Other people tried to cross the border to Romania in this way. Azio Birkenfeld, a young doctor and a distant relative of mine, tried to cross with his mother; the smuggler first robbed them and then drowned them in the Dniester. The refugee Ilusche, who had first lived with us and who was with me in the Borki-Wielki labour camp, managed to get to Romania with his brother, his uncle and his uncle's wife. A farmworker, who had worked with them at the farm and liked them a lot because they were pleasant people, helped them get out by involving relatives of his living on the Dniester. He didn't even accept money for doing this, which was just as well since Iluscha's family no longer had any to give. They made it to Bucharest, where they were originally from. I know all of this because I met for dinner with Iluscha's brother and his wife years later in Haifa, where he told me exactly what had happened. Iluscha had been killed in an accident in Bucharest.

Since everyone had to move to Borszczow, families paid local farmers with horses and carts to take them there with the few remaining belongings they had left. Beforehand everyone tried to sell bulky items or swap them for food. Our remaining family went together; I with my sister, aunt Sime and her child because her husband was already in the Borki-Wielki camp, aunt Fancie with her husband Isaak and their seven-year old daughter Jezie, and our cousins Shimon and Mosche Eisenberg. We made our way to Borszczow in two or three carts. Before we moved, one of us – I think it was aunt Sime – had organised a flat. I say flat, although this was in no way an appropriate description for where we were to stay. It was obviously incredibly difficult to find a place to live at all, at a time when Jewish people from all neighbouring towns had to move into the

same neighbourhood allocated for us. People were arriving from Skala, Jezezane, Korolifka and Krzywce. The so-called flat we moved into was on the ground floor. The entrance was a tall and wide wooden door, large enough for a cart to pass through. This front room was as high as the rafters and there was a wooden staircase to the attic. Behind the stairs were steps leading down to a cellar. A small space was sectioned off in the corner by boards making a small room for the so-called toilet; this consisted of a tin bucket, which had a board positioned on top of it with a hole cut out. When the bucket was full, someone had to be contacted to take it away, empty it and bring it back – all of which had to be paid for. On the left side of the front room was a door, which led into the so-called apartment. There were two rooms, one of which contained an iron wood-burning stove, which had to sleep nine of us: me; my sister; aunt Fancie and her husband and their child; aunt Sime and her child and our cousins Shimon and Mosche. There was a bed for me and my sister and one for our cousins Shimon and Mosche in one room, and in the other a bed for Fancie, her husband and child and one for aunt Sime and her child. The rooms were very small. Apart from the beds, there was only the iron stove on which we cooked whatever we could find to cook and which served as our heating in the winter. Today it is incredulous that people would be made to live in conditions barely fit for livestock.

The first thing we did when we moved in was to build a place where all of us could hide in the event of a raid. We lived in fear of being taken to the Borki-Wielki camp to work. My cousins Shimon and Mosche and I started to look for the best place. We discovered that a space in the cellar led to a cavity on the right. The space was about two metres wide and five metres long. It was a cavity dug out of the earth, as tall as the cellar, which looked like a catacomb and had circular walls. Only the floor was straight and consisted of yellow clay – which is probably the reason the room didn't collapse. It was very damp. We decided to build a bunker down there for hiding in. The cellar was deep and there were stone steps leading down into it. The cellar itself was very small. It measured perhaps one and half metres by one metre and twenty centimetres. The cellar walls were made of stone and had spaces similar to window seats fashioned into them. These recesses were also made of stone and we used them for storing barrels of food. On the right there was another stone recess but it was not bricked up; it was open and there was a tunnel of stone about eighty centimetres wide and one and half metres tall behind it. This tunnel was two metres long and led to the space. We didn't know what the space had

previously been used for – possibly a farmer had lived in this building and stored potatoes or vegetables down there.

In order to turn the cellar into a hiding place which would not be discovered we first needed to do something to ensure that air could get in and out, otherwise the risk of suffocation when hiding for a longer time would be too great. Also, we needed to do something to the entrance of the space so it would not be seen. The space was so long that the end of it was somewhere under the road above. Our first job was to try and create an air hole between the hiding place and the road. It was a difficult and arduous job and we didn't have suitable tools, only very primitive instruments like a spar which was about ten centimetres thick and pointed at the end. Shimon, Mosche and I agonized over this for several days until we finally managed it. We only managed it because the earth was damp clay. If it had been hard and stony we would never have been able to create an air hole. Uncle Isaak was too weak to help us with the work, as he was a broken man since the loss of his eldest daughter Locie. The hole which we dug went up to the exact edge of the street. We had to be especially careful that no one would notice it so, at night, we tried to widen it and then immediately partially fill it with the same stones, which covered the street, so that air could get through without the hole being noticeable. This air hole couldn't get enough used air out and let enough fresh air in at the same time, however there was some fresh air from the cellar which reached the bunker – although probably not enough to sustain a large amount of people hiding for a long period of time – but at least the problem was partially solved. Our next job was to ensure that the entrance was hidden from sight. We therefore piled up about a metre of earth at the entrance and created a new recess. Behind the stone wall of this recess we dug out the entrance to the tunnel about one and a half metres up, which could be accessed by a small entrance up in the ceiling of the recess, and led down to the entrance to the bunker. This hole above and the tunnel were so slim and low that you had to crawl on all fours to reach the hiding place. It was done deliberately so that it wouldn't be discovered. There were a few raids, whereby workers were being rounded up for Borki-Wielki. German and Ukrainian police came down into our cellar looking for men but they didn't find the hiding place.

Life in Borszczow was difficult. We were not locals. In the evening no one was allowed to go out. It was not a closed-off ghetto, but was an area where only Jewish people were allowed to live. The living conditions were dreadful; the Jewish population from the entire surrounding area and

9 Schmuel Seidman (left), Jonas Lindenbaum (right) and I in the military. Undated

from neighbouring towns, who had survived the *Aktion*, were now forced to be here. There was a room in one of the buildings where young people met up every day when nothing was going on. Help was available to those who needed it where possible, for example soup was cooked there for the disabled. These efforts were financed by people such as Lebisch Schwarz, who was from Mielnice and who had been a member of the Judenrat and was now in Borszczow with his sons Dziumio and Schizie. Also from our town were Friedzie Weitman, Jetke Sonenklar, Motel Scharfstein, Munio Berman and myself. There were people from other towns in the area. We kept discussing this difficult situation that we were now in; considering how we could get out of it, perhaps by fleeing to Romania or trying to disappear in a large town, to be picked up as an Aryan and then sent to Germany for forced labour. In Borszczow, the Judenrat and the Jewish police were made up of locals. In Borszczow I had two good friends, Schmuel Seidman and Izio Falkenflik, who I had met at the summer camp just before I had been to two or three years before war broke out. It was a summer camp of the Zionist organisation Hanoar Hazioni. Many members of this organisation from different towns had taken part in this summer camp and these two had also been there. Izio Falkenflik's brother-in-law was in the Judenrat and so I at least had a small connection to the locals in this otherwise unfamiliar town. I think that I also had some help from them at the time. They organised a spade and a shovel, a saw, hammer and

nails for me. Without these tools we would never have been able to build a hiding place. I know they also helped in other ways but I can't remember exactly how. Schmuel Seidman survived the war; I have a photo in which I am pictured with him when we were in the army later.

In order to buy food we had to sell or trade any household items or jewellery that we still had left. Essentials were still available, because we weren't living in a closed-off ghetto. Shimon and Mosche earned their money and food; they had a quern, which stood in the corner of the cellar. They had an obligation to send food to their brother Isaak, who was in the Borki-Wielki camp. The Judenrat continued to send a delivery to Borki-Wielki every two weeks, even from Borszczow, and everyone was able to include their packages in this. Aunt Sime also kept sending packages to her husband. In quieter moments, when there were no raids, we could move about freely, although we were always careful and had to keep looking around and checking that there wasn't perhaps an unexpected raid happening after all. Some people also traded with food, necessities and so on. Things were sold, bought and swapped.

A cobbler from our town of Mielnice ran a relatively successful workshop with some companions. He was called Izie Schister. He earned quite good money. We sold him leather and he repaired shoes, and also made new boots and shoes for the German and Ukrainian police. I often went to his place because his son was the same age as me and his daughter was the same age as my sister. Because I was often in his workshop I got to know a Ukrainian policeman called Lubko, who was the son-in-law of the Ukrainian Police Commander, Semenczok. German police also went to Izie Schister, who enjoyed an element of protection from the Ukrainian police. This acquaintance with the policeman Lubko may have also saved my life. At the end of the year, in the winter of 1942/1943, I went back to Mielnice to get some grain. I went with the Ukrainian who brought the packets to Borki-Wielki for the Judenrat. He also went to Czortkow with Mosche Koffler, who negotiated the demands the police placed with the Judenrat. So I returned to Mielnice and got hold of about twenty-five kilograms of wheat from one of the farmers, whose name I no longer remember. During this trip I ran into Leib Koffler, Mosche's brother. He was also a cousin and had remained in the town after Jewish people had to leave. He was one of the people allowed to remain and collect materials such as iron, brass, copper and so on for the Germans. As soon as I had the twenty-five kilograms of wheat I went back to Borszczow with the farmer. It was winter and there was lots of snow on the road, so we took a horse-

drawn sledge. About ten kilometres outside of Borszczow two Ukrainian policemen came out of a side road which led from another village, also on a horse-drawn sledge. They were behind us and noticed immediately that I was Jewish. They stopped us and asked who I was and what we were carrying. When they saw the wheat they made me join them on their sledge and took me straight to the Ukrainian police. Once we arrived at the police station they took me inside, took away the wheat and led me straight to the Commander. They told him that they had encountered me travelling with the wheat. The Commander saw this and said to me "Pidesch na Himmelfahrstkommando." Which means: You are now going on a suicide mission. To which I replied: "Jaktreba piti topedu": If I have to go, then I will go. After a while the policeman Lubko came in, the son-in-law of the Commander, who I knew from the cobblers. I winked at him and he winked back. The Commander told one of the officers to take me into a cell. They took me to the cells and locked me in one. Someone had, in the meantime, informed my aunts at home that I had been arrested. Someone had seen that Ukrainian police had taken me to the Police Commander and had informed my aunt immediately. She went straight to the Judenrat so they could try and get me out. I was only locked up for about an hour, then the door was opened. It was Lubko. He came in and said: "You are free to go, but it will cost you a pair of boots." I went straight home. My aunt and sister could not believe that I had got out of prison this way.

The Kasirer family from the town of Skala also had to resettle to Borszczow. Before the war they had a small candle factory. The family was made up of the father and two sons. The father traded gold amongst Jewish people and sold jewellery for them. His sons were in the Jewish police; the youngest was in Borsczczow and the eldest was in Borki-Wielki, not working in the camp but free to move around there; he made sure the packets were delivered to the right people and he had good contact to the camp Commander. In this way he was able to pay for people to be freed from the camp in exchange for payment. My aunt Sime got in touch with the Kasirer family in the hope that the son would be able to pay for her husband to be freed from the camp. This was made possible after she paid. I do not know how much she paid or what valuables she gave him to do this however, after a short time, her husband was freed and joined us in Borszczow. We all continued to live in fear of being caught and taken to the camp.

One day, the Judenrat announced that the tobacco company was looking for paid workers. In Borszczow there was a large storage building

from the Polish tobacco monopoly. Tobacco plants were grown in the entire region, as they were in Mielnice, and the raw tobacco was brought to Borszczow, where there were delivery yards as well as a sorting factory. Since the tobacco business had always employed workers and was a civilian outfit, many people volunteered for this work. Upon starting work, people were made to clear up, transport goods and other jobs, but then, after only a few hours of work, the German police surrounded the whole site and everyone was taken prisoner and brought to the Borki-Wielki camp. With similar tricks they kept trying to capture people for the labour camp. The Germans, in other words the Gestapo in Czortkow, continued placing new demands on the Judenrat, requiring different items, household goods, etc. The Judenrat were always expected to procure these for free and within a very tight time frame.

It was while we were in Borszczow that the Germans started their programme to eradicate the Jewish population. On 13 March 1943 there was another *Aktion*. The Germans, consisting of the Gestapo from Czortkow and the SS, were joined by the Ukrainian police. They surrounded the Jewish part of town using barricades, and took anyone they managed to seize on the street. The people they caught were made to assemble at the square and sit on the ground, where they were guarded by some of the SS and the German police to prevent anyone from escaping. The rest of the German and Ukrainian police and SS went from house to house looking for people. If they did not find anyone they searched for hiding places or bunkers, because they were of course aware of the existence of hideouts. Whoever did not have a safe hiding place was going to be found. Once discovered, people were made to come out and were led to the square. While the *Aktion* was underway the Gestapo selected some of the detained men and took them to the Jewish cemetery where they had to dig out a grave for the people who had been captured and who were all to be shot. They were effectively digging their own grave. The *Aktion* lasted five to six hours. Whoever tried to run away was shot. Those who were weak or ill were also shot. After waiting five or six hours at the square, people were then made to walk to the Jewish cemetery, guarded by the Gestapo and the Ukrainian and German police. At the cemetery, people were made to undress, lay their clothes in a pile, and queue up in front of the grave that the men had just dug. One after the other, everyone was shot. Several hundred people. I do not know the exact number. The men who had been digging the graves were the first to be shot. The people who had already been shot in the town during the *Aktion*, about a hundred, were

piled into horse carts and brought to the cemetery to be dumped in the grave. The Judenrat were to take the clothing that people had removed before the executions and store it, before packing it in sacks and sending it to the Gestapo in Czortkow. The Judenrat had also been expected to be on hand during the *Aktion* to carry out any of the Gestapo's instructions. The Jewish police were also expected to be on hand, and some Jewish policemen were even taken into houses by the Gestapo to search for other Jews. During this *Aktion* the lives of the Judenrat and the Jewish police were spared, because they were still needed. Providing the Gestapo could extort money, valuables, suits, boots and other things from the Judenrat, then they were useful and tolerated.

Kelner was the Chief Commander of the Gestapo in Czortkow. He organised when and how the raids and shootings would happen. He extorted gold, money and valuables in the value of millions from the Jewish population covering the whole area. He always promised not to do anything bad, then immediately carried out raids. He spared the members of the Judenrat right up to the end, but then had them murdered during the final raid. Someone recognised this Kelner after the war. He was arrested and put on trial in Saarbrücken. One of the witnesses was Mr Winter from Czortkow. He had been in the Judenrat and knew exactly what a criminal he was and how his crimes were committed. Someone told me that he was given a life sentence. Whether that is true or not I'm not sure. Mr Winter survived because he was able to hide. After the war he became a member of the board of the Jewish Community in Vienna. I assume that these raids were carried out by the SS. I assume this but I don't know it exactly. The raids were initiated by the Gestapo with the Commander Kelner. The teams involved were Germans in uniform. I did not know from which units they exactly came. At the time we were aware of the Gestapo, because they had so many dealings with the Judenrat, as well as the German police and other uniformed Germans.

After the *Aktion* was over and the Gestapo and SS had finished executing the people at the cemetery, they went back into town, to a Ukrainian tavern, where they proceeded to eat, drink and sing songs, all of which had to be paid for by the Judenrat. The Judenrat were also expected to reimburse the Gestapo for the cost of the bullets they had used. The Chief of the Gestapo who had led this *Aktion*, Kelner, demanded that the Judenrat pick up the tab at the tavern for the food and boozing for the group that had just perpetrated this crime. He even described the Jewish contribution as paltry, given the taxing work his team had just put

in. For him, it was a given that the Judenrat would have to pay for everything, including the bullets. He said he had been generous and should probably be demanding a far higher amount of money. It is hard to imagine the miserable, desolate and hopeless situation the Judenrat and all remaining inhabitants found themselves in, they who had to pay for the murder of their own brothers and sisters, relatives, friends and acquaintances. And then there was this criminal, who was not ashamed to describe his actions as generous.

The tavern in which the murderers had been eating and drinking was not far from our flat – it was just around the corner. The *Aktion* had lasted from morning until the early afternoon. Once this criminal band had finished eating, they left town and went back to Czortkow. As soon as they were gone, people slowly began to come out of hiding and return to the streets, to find out who had been taken and whether relatives and friends had been murdered. The mood was terrible. What on earth were we supposed to do? Having a good hiding place no longer offered any security, since we heard that people had been discovered and hauled out of hiding places they thought were good enough. After a few days however the panic started to subside; what alternative did we have? We were powerless to help ourselves, struggling with how to save ourselves from the next, inevitable raid.

Sure enough, on 19 April 1943, on Erew Pessach, there was another one. As with the one five weeks before, the Gestapo and the SS drove in from Czortkow and, together with the Ukrainian police, again surrounded the Jewish part of town, arresting people on the streets. Whoever was unable to go with them, or was ill, was shot on site. There were far fewer people picked up on the street this time as we had become more careful and our hiding places had become more secure in the meantime. Because the Gestapo and the SS did not catch so many people they went around and searched the houses more carefully, knocking on floorboards and walls to see if there was a hidden cavity. They looked more intensely in the cellars and loft spaces and, if they suspected a hiding place, they even used hand grenades. Hiding places were discovered as a result of these more thorough investigations, after which people were hauled out and brought to the square.

During this particular *Aktion* two mothers suffocated their own babies. Because they were hiding so long, the babies began to cry, then scream and could no longer be comforted. The mothers suffocated their babies so as not to give the hiding place away to the Gestapo, and to save the people who were hiding with them.

For this *Aktion*, which was carried out in exactly the same manner and in the same order as the previous one, Jewish policemen were taken along to search houses as well. Again, the Jewish police and the Judenrat were permitted to move freely. The Gestapo needed them, as long as they could provide useful things for them: gold, jewellery and valuables, but also the payment for the bullets used to murder people. As before, people had to assemble at the square, to sit and wait until there were enough of them. Again, a number of men were collected to dig a grave at the cemetery under the Gestapo's guard. As the men started to dig the grave four tried to run away, but were shot down by the Gestapo, killing all four. One of the men was the son of Kümel, the largest corn merchant in the area, who was from our town of Mielnice. Late that afternoon, the people were escorted by the Gestapo and the Ukrainian police from the square to the cemetery. Again they were made to get undressed and put their clothes in a pile, but this time they were made to undress much faster. The Gestapo yelled incessantly: "quick, undress, *schnell!*". The Gestapo were in a rush, as it was already quite late in the afternoon. A few, who were not undressing fast enough, were instantly shot. Amongst them was a woman, also from our home town, who had lived opposite our house, and whose husband was a furrier. Although seriously injured the shot had not been fatal. Apparently she did not move but lay still between the bodies of those who had been executed. In the evening she had got on her feet and returned to her house, covered in blood from the wound near her neck.

On this day as well, everyone was executed at the grave side. Again, a couple of hundred people were murdered. This time the Ukrainian workers hastily covered the grave, which was overfilled with bodies, although some of the victims were not yet dead. Gases started to build up as those people barely alive struggled to breathe in this inadequately constructed grave, actually lifting the earth above. The next day, the earth had lifted further to the point that blood seeped out and the stench was vile, at which point the Judenrat received an order from the Gestapo that they should open the grave and reinter some of the bodies. This order was to be carried out immediately…the sick and the immobile, already executed on the spot in the town, were gathered up and brought in a horse and cart to a mass grave at the cemetery.

Two or three weeks after this *Aktion* the Ukrainian police carried out a raid of their own, following the same example as the Germans but in a smaller number. The representative of the Ukrainian police commanders, a really brutal young thug, spearheaded the *Aktion*. Following the exam-

ple of the Gestapo and SS, these Ukrainians surrounded the Jewish area, capturing everyone they came across. They went from home to home searching for and taking Jews. This representative gathered the Ukrainian police to carry out this raid, also calling in policemen from the surrounding area. They met in front of the Ukrainian tavern, where the ringleader stood on the steps and rallied the men with his diatribe. He claimed that Jews needed to be wiped out because they were all communists, and ended his speech with the call "Slava Ukraini!" (The honour of Ukraine). That the Ukrainian police would carry out an *Aktion* in the same way as the Gestapo and SS was something that none of us would have ever imagined. It came as a huge shock.

I was able to hear some of the *Aktion*-leader's speech to the policemen, as the tavern was only around the corner from us; about two houses along, on the main street running from Czortkow, through the town, to Krzywce and Mielnice, but also through the Jewish part of town. Thanks to this location, we were able to observe from our windows when the Gestapo and SS were approaching the town and this gave us the opportunity and time to get to our hiding places.

Because one of us sat daily at the window keeping watch over activity on the street, we had also had warning of the previous *Aktion* at Passover, on 19 April 1943. On that day I had seen the arrival of a horse wagon carrying several Germans in uniform and saw Russian machine guns sticking out of the cart. It was obvious to me that something was about to happen. Every time uniformed Germans arrived in the town something terrible and harrowing occurred. Now, with so many Ukrainian police assembled, we were immediately alerted and all of us went downstairs to our hideout. I stayed at the window a little longer watching what was happening on the street. When I saw the Ukrainian officers herding people along I went down to hide. My sister had a slight fever that day and we suspected typhus, as there had been a few cases in the Jewish quarter at the time.

We were in hiding for several hours. Zenja felt very ill. I came out of the hiding place carefully and went up to our lodgings, noticing that it was quiet in the street. I could not hear any police so was convinced everything was over. The others stayed in hiding as a precaution but I brought Zenja upstairs where she got into bed. I lit the fire to make her tea because she was feeling nauseous, which was a big mistake since smoke was now coming out of the chimney and could be seen from the street, indicating that the flat was inhabited. Almost at once the door opened and a Ukrainian police officer came in. I immediately started to negotiate with

him, offering him material for a uniform so that he would leave us alone. He seemed satisfied with this and left us. The *Aktion* was nearly over anyway, although a few policemen still wandered the streets. The officer who had come into our place was clearly new and probably one of those drafted in from a nearby village to bolster the town's police force. Many of them were new to all this. Had he been one of the many embittered officers, he would have shot us without hesitation. About a hundred people were murdered that day. In the afternoon, everyone came out of hiding.

In Hiding (1943–1944)

After this *Aktion* it was clear to all of us that we would have to get out of town if we were to survive; either by approaching a farmer for a place to hide, or by trying to build a hiding place in the forest. I decided to go to Mielnice and try to find someone – amongst the farmers I knew from the area – who might be prepared to hide me. One evening I set off towards Mielnice, which had to be attempted at night, because I couldn't risk being seen. I would have to cover about thirty kilometres from Borszczow to Mielnice in just one night. There was a risk of being discovered as the route involved going directly through the middle of two villages: Krzywce, fifteen kilometres after Borszczow, and Germakiwke, ten kilometres before Mielnice. There were other villages on the way but they weren't situated on the road itself. I managed to get through these two villages and then wanted to go to Dawidof, where we had our forest. My intention was to go to the forester who had previously looked after our forest, and who lived in a small hamlet where only a couple of families lived. To get to the place you didn't need to go all the way to Mielnice because it was about five or six kilometres outside the town. Once you arrived in Iwanie Puste, where the train station was, you turned off the road and had to find the track which led to Dawidof.

When I got to this spot it was still dark, and there was more than one track. I wasn't familiar with the way and didn't know in the dark which track led to Dawidof. I went up and down several tracks trying to work out which one it was when I was suddenly aware of the shadow of an approaching person. I wanted to hide as I didn't know who it was. I hid behind a tree watching carefully. As the person got closer I recognised the livestock merchant from our town, waited until he was close then asked him which track led to Dawidof. He showed me the way since, as a local livestock merchant, he often came to this area. He himself was

on the way from Borszczow and, exactly like me, was looking for somewhere to hide. Once I knew the right way I went to the hamlet, only about two or three kilometres further.

When I arrived in the hamlet I had some difficulty identifying the forester's house, although there were only a few small dwellings in the whole place.

It was starting to get light but I wasn't sure where to go. Eventually, I noticed the forester come out of his home and make his way to an outbuilding.

I recognised him immediately from a distance, because he was a very tall and thin man. I had never been to his home so hadn't recognised it and only knew him by sight, as he had often been to our house for meetings with my father to discuss the forest and his work. I knew he would know who I was. I approached him and he was very nice to me. He gave me some food and I spent the day at his. I asked him if he would hide me. He told me that he couldn't because he wouldn't know where to hide me and said the hamlet was so small that it would be impossible to remain unnoticed by others. That evening I went on my way, this time to Pilipsch, to the village where we used to have our farm. It was another two or three kilometres away. There were no proper roads between the villages, only farm tracks suitable for horses and carts. Once in Pilipsch I tried my luck with some farmers who had previously worked our fields, sharing half the profit, but not one of them was prepared to take me in. One of them, a childless man who knew my father well and also used to work our land, didn't even open his door to me. I just wasn't ready to give up and was still desperate to find someone to help. The overwhelming instinct to survive is hard to imagine, and almost impossible to describe. Since this man would not open his door to me, I went on to the house belonging to his mother. She lived a bit further away with an unmarried son. I knocked on the window but no one answered. I kept knocking but still nothing. Either they heard but didn't want to open up, which is what I suspected, or they slept too deeply to have heard me.

I was so tired by this point that I just couldn't continue. I was only able to search for a hiding place when it was dark. I found a shed with a cow in it. The doors were open so I went in and lay down behind the trough and slept a bit.

When I awoke it was still dark and I got up and made my way back to the forester. To get to his I had to go some of the way through the

forest. Despite the darkness of night I believed I was on the right path, but then realised I had taken a wrong turn. I went back on myself a bit, looking for the right direction. I considered the possibilities carefully and went again in the direction I thought was correct. Again it proved to be wrong. I had to go backwards and forwards, eventually going back to the place I did know, realising where I had gone wrong, to set off yet again. But at night, pitch dark amongst the trees, it was impossible to identify anything and get my bearings. I was exhausted and could not walk any longer. I laid on the ground and slept. When it was light, I was able to find the way to the forester's house. The forester lived next door to his brother-in law, who I also knew as he had been to our home a few times for meetings with my father where they discussed timber and forestry. The brother-in-law was also decent to me, and gave me some food. He let me stay three or four days, sleeping in a shed. Every evening I made my way to Pilipsch looking for somewhere I could hide with my sister. I approached several farmers but without success. I had not found anywhere so I returned to Borszczow.

I arrived back at our lodgings by the morning to find a terrible scene. Everyone was devastated. The colour had drained from their faces and they were transformed by shock and grief. Two days before my return, on 5 June 1943, there had been another *Aktion* by the Gestapo, the SS and the Ukrainian police. As well as our family from the house, other people had used our hiding place. They had been on the street when the *Aktion* started, and fled into our house, joining the others down in our hiding place. Among them was a familiar young man from Mielnice who was deaf-mute, and my uncle Mottel's aunt. I did not know who the other people were. This *Aktion* lasted much longer. The fact that more people than usual were hiding, and for longer, meant there was not enough air in the hideout and they had started to suffocate. Ventilation had been a problem from the beginning that we had been unable to resolve. Aunt Sime's child, only four years old, suffocated to death. Sime had now lost her second child; the eldest had been taken away from her, along with its grandmother, during the *Aktion* in Mielnice. And now the youngest had perished through oxygen starvation; she had now lost both her children. Uncle Mottel's aunt also suffocated. Everyone else lost consciousness and so were unable to get themselves out. Only cousin Shimon somehow managed to get out and go for help. Others came to his aid and attempted, with great difficulty, to drag everyone out.

During this *Aktion*, my uncle Isaak's (Icie) brother Aaron Scharfstein and his wife and two children were killed. They had a good, seemingly reliable hiding place, but for some unknown reason it was discovered. They had hidden there with others but they were all murdered. The assumption was that someone had informed. This final *Aktion* was the beginning of the complete liquidation of the Jewish population of Borszczow.

I remained in the town only one day longer before deciding to leave again, with the intention of looking for a hiding place somewhere outside of Mielnice. I had not given up as I had absolutely nothing to lose. I suggested to Zenja that she come with me but she was reluctant, knowing that I didn't even have a place for myself at the moment, let alone for her. She said she would come with me after I had found a hiding place. In the evening I left on foot to Mielnice with Dudel Sterenberg, a photographer about ten years older than I. After a distance of about ten kilometres near the village of Sapehi, which was next to the road, some men suddenly came out of a field carrying torches and demanded that we hand over our clothes. We removed our jackets and shoes but kept our shirts and trousers. They wanted to force us to remove our trousers, but I refused to do this. It would still be possible to go on without a jacket and shoes, but not without trousers. This is how they left us. We had been lucky that they did not kill us. We still had to walk approximately another twenty kilometres to Mielnice – and this without shoes.

The road was a simple road made of pressed gravel, and walking on it without shoes was not easy. The farmers went around barefoot most of the year and were used to it, having developed hard soles. We found it incredibly difficult to walk but had to reach our destination quickly before it got light. I managed despite the pain but it was much worse for Dudel who had to keep stopping, saying he couldn't keep it up. He had a bag made of braided bast with him in which he had brought some food. We ripped up the bag and tried to band his feet with it. This held for a while but not that long. He was in agony but we had to keep going and get there before the morning. We were both really suffering from the pain but managed to get to the edge of Mielnice in the dark. One kilometre before the town we separated, each going our own way. Dudel went into town to farmers, who he hoped would hide him, and I took a shortcut across fields to Dziwinecke. This was the village where the master smithy lived, with whom I had worked

in the smithy on the estate before we were resettled. I went to him in the hope that he would perhaps hide me. Although I knew where the village Dziwinecke was, I had never actually been there and had no idea where the smithy lived. I remember him mentioning that he lived on the outskirts, where his cottage was by a pond with fish and a watermill. I took the track in the direction of the estate where we had worked. About one kilometre past the estate was the main road leading to Dziwinecke.

This slight shortcut meant I didn't have to go through the middle of town which would have been very risky, since the road to Dziwinecke ran through the middle of it and the German border soldiers and Ukrainian police lived on this road. I followed the line of the road without going on it, until I arrived at Dziwinecke, where the master smithy lived. It was starting to get light and I tried to make out where a house on the edge of the village with a pond could be. As I stood there, I noticed a small stream flowing to my left. I guessed that this might feed into his pond so I followed the stream until it reached a pond, at the end of which I saw a mill. I also heard the sound of the mill so knew it was a working mill. I went to the house and the master smithy was very nice to me. He gave me food but would not hide me, explaining that he only had his small home and the mill, but no shed or barn or outbuildings. Besides, local farmers came to use the mill to grind corn for flour and so it would be very dangerous to stay there. However, he did tell me that a Jewish doctor with the surname Deutscher was staying with the landowners of a neighbouring farm. He said he would go round and enquire, and that I would perhaps be able to stay on that farm. So off he went to the doctors and explained the situation to him. The doctor spoke to the owner of the farm, who gave permission for me to stay in the barn. The master smithy took me over to the farm and Doctor Deutscher showed me the barn. The doctor brought me some food and a blanket, so I could get some much needed rest.

Before the *Aktion* Doctor Deutscher had also lived in Mielnice. He was originally from the town of Przemysl and had married Peisach Kümel's daughter, who had also studied medicine. Her father had been the largest corn merchant in the area. After the *Aktion* in Mielnice on 26 September 1942, on the first day of Sukkot, and after the forced resettlement of the remaining Jewish population to Borszczow, only so-called 'useful' Jews were allowed to stay in the town; those who gath-

ered metal, iron, textiles, rags, etc. In order to get a pass as a so-called 'useful' Jew, you needed to pay a certain amount of money as protection money. Those who did this thought they would be safe, but the Germans just used this as another excuse to extort money from them. The materials were gathered for nothing by Jewish people, who even paid for the privilege of doing the work. Amongst those who stayed behind to gather materials was my cousin Leib 'Lebcie' Koffler – Mosche Koffler's brother. He did not survive. I don't know exactly how he was killed. Apparently, he had hidden at a farmer's, who had robbed him before murdering him. There were many such cases. Jewish doctors were also allowed to stay behind as there were no Aryan doctors in the entire area. Three Jewish doctors covered the region, which is how Doctor Deutscher came to the village. The lack of doctors, and the fact that there were only three doctors in the whole region, did not however change the fact that they were only tolerated for a while and were ultimately also murdered.

I was so relieved to be in the barn, where I was able to rest and sleep. Doctor Deutscher's wife still had a sister living in Borszczow. One day after I arrived, Mrs Deutscher sent a farmer with a cart to Borszczow to collect her sister. A couple of days later however he returned without the sister, and told us that when he arrived in Borszczow a large number of Germans had begun shooting everyone on the streets in the Jewish quarter. This was the last *Aktion*, and the murder of the entire remaining Jewish population. It began on 9 June 1943 and lasted a few days until there was not a single living Jewish person left. Everyone was executed apart from the few who managed to escape.

I only found out what happened to my family after the war. Aunt Sime managed to escape and later told me what happened. After I had left for Borszczow there was an order; the part of town designated for Jewish people was to be made smaller, forcing everyone to move into the middle of the Jewish quarter. This had to happen within two days. The intention was to force people to move together in greater numbers, making it easier and quicker for the perpetrators to capture people and to kill them. In these circumstances, there was no time to rethink hiding places. This was the Gestapo's strategy and it impacted directly on our family, who were forced to move. The house that they moved into had no suitable hiding place, only one which was too small and easy to find. As soon as the *Aktion* was underway they ran out of the

house. Aunt Sime ran with my sister and hid herself behind a tin tub leaning against a wall, and wasn't discovered. My sister ran in the other direction and was shot to death. Aunt Fancie, uncle Isaak 'Icie' and their child Jezie were all shot by a Ukrainian policeman. Aunt Sime witnessed all of this since she could see from behind the tub. The policeman shot my aunt's daughter first, right in front of her. She barely had time to scream after her child before both she and my uncle were shot dead.

After liberation, aunt Sime told me how my sister Zenja, my aunt, uncle and my niece were killed, having witnessed it with her own eyes. She told me that the perpetrator had been a Ukrainian policeman from the village of Germakiwke. He had always been considered a decent policeman, who tried not to do anything bad. Now his 'decency' was revealed.

Before this last *Aktion* aunt Sime's husband, as well as cousins Shimon and Mosche, had already left Borszczow and were hiding in the area outside Mielnice. They were looking for places to hide. Later I will explain how aunt Sime survived.

Meanwhile I was in Doctor Deutscher's barn. He came and told me what had happened in Borszczow. He was very unsettled since he was not sure what would happen to his family and how this would affect their situation. I was given food but it was clear that I would not be able to stay here much longer, since the doctor's situation had become more precarious. I stayed in the barn another three or four days. Apart from the doctor and the farmer's wife no one else knew I was there. On the third or fourth day I was walking around the barn when a farm worker came in to get straw for the animals. He saw me and so I had to leave this hiding place. This man could have told others in the village about me, which would have threatened the doctor and the farmer's wife. I had to leave that evening. Doctor Deutscher brought me two rolls and I believe also a blanket and I left that evening, taking the same route I had arrived on. I went in the direction of Iwanie Puste with the intention of going from there to the forester in Dawidof. I had to go to the road connecting Mielnice with Iwanie Puste and followed it, since it was the main route. There were drainage ditches on both sides of the road and, between these and the fields, was a small path for people on foot. This is the path I used. It was pitch dark. I was suddenly aware of a person on the path the other side of the ditch. I greeted the person using the Ukrainian greeting of 'Slawa isusa chris-

tu', meaning: praise and glory be to Jesus Christ. This is how Ukrainians usually greeted one another and the person responded to me with 'Slawa na wikiw' (glory for ever). I continued on my way. After a time, another person came along the path. I repeated the greeting and was given the same answer. It seemed strange that farmers would be using this path in the middle of the night. About five hundred metres further on the opposite side were the tobacco drying sheds, which used to belong to the Finkeltal family. Some people were coming from the opposite direction. This time I looked more closely at them. At first I greeted them as usual with: 'Slawa isusa christu', and got the usual response; however, ten metres ahead, a couple was approaching. I looked carefully at them and recognised that these were acquaintances; a man called Feiwisch Menczer and a lady, Riwka Brukner. I crossed the ditch over to them and they told me that everyone I had passed had been acquaintances from Mielnice, the last one being Dudel Blecher, and that they had all miraculously escaped their hiding places and the Jewish quarter unnoticed. They told me what had happened in the Jewish quarter over the last days. There was no hope that anyone had now survived in Borszczow. They themselves had been on the road for two days and were very hungry. I gave them one of the two rolls which Doctor Deutscher had given me. They were on their way to look up a farmer they knew.

The entire Jewish quarter had been surrounded by the Gestapo and the Ukrainian police, who were on patrol day and night shooting anyone they saw. This was not an *Aktion* like the previous raids, where people were captured and then executed at the cemetery. In this case, the whole Jewish area was 'cleaned' of Jews and whoever was spotted was killed. These people who I met thought it was a miracle they had managed to survive and escape. They couldn't believe their luck. Later, after liberation, I learned that not one of these people survived. How and where they died, I do not know.

This meeting with these people confirmed to me the story told by the farm worker that Doctor Deutscher had sent to Borszczow to collect his sister-in-law. He had also described shootings, and that all Jewish people were shot on the street. Having now heard this from eye witnesses it was clear to me that returning to Borszczow was not an option, and that I would have to look more intensively for a hiding place since I no longer knew where I should go. If I hadn't heard this, I would have thought there were still people living there and I would

have eventually ended up trying to get back there to see my family, which would have been the death of me. Now that everyone had apparently been murdered, there would not have been a single place where I could have gone. It was either by accident or good fortune that I heard this at Doctor Deutscher's, and then later from these eye witnesses. But whatever it was, it was my fate to have the Borczczow events confirmed.

My thoughts were still very much occupied by Borszczow and my family, and the uncertainty of what had happened to my sister; where she was, where she was living, whether she was alive or dead, whether she had been shot. Also, what had happened to my aunts, uncles and cousins. I tried not to think the worst and hoped that they were all still alive. My thoughts were racing. I had to keep going and find a place where I could stay, where I could survive. The will to survive is overwhelmingly strong – I cannot put it into words. The more my life was in danger, the stronger my will to survive. I put up a fight despite the hopelessness of the situation. I didn't give up and kept hoping that I would get through this.

I continued in the direction of Dawidof, to the forester, which, from where I was, was about another four kilometres. I didn't meet anyone else on the way. I had to take the main road for about one and a half kilometres, and then take a country track until the hamlet of Dawidof. When I arrived at the forester's smallholding it was still dark. It was night and I didn't know the time because I didn't have a watch. I looked around at where I could lie down to rest and wait until it was light again, when the forester would come out of his house and go to the cow in the shed. I wanted to talk to him about my situation and ask him if he could hide me after all. At the edge of the farm I saw a potato clamp, where the farmers stored their potatoes in winter so they wouldn't freeze. It was basically a pit, covered on the top with straw. Earth covered the straw on top and there was an opening on the side, which was the way in. I climbed into this cold and damp pit and, as I lay down on the cold, wet floor, a dog came and started barking. I still had some bread left over from Doctor Deutscher, although I had given some of it to the people I had met on the road. I broke off a bit of the bread and threw it to the dog. The dog calmed down and ate the bread but then started barking again, so I threw him a bit more.

The dog was quiet once again but then started up once he'd finished eating. This went on until it started getting light. I was very care-

ful with the bread and only threw the dog small pieces so I would be left with some of it for myself. I had no idea when someone would next give me something to eat. The dog had to be quietened though, so that the forester and his neighbours would not come to see why the dog was barking, thinking there might be thieves. Day broke and I got out of the clamp and hid so no one could see me. I waited until the forester stepped out of his home to go to the yard and feed his animals. I didn't have to wait long before he and his wife appeared. She went to milk the cow and he went to the animals. When she was finished, she went back into the house.

While the forester was looking around his yard, I went up and spoke to him. I asked him whether he would be prepared to hide me. I cannot exactly remember what he said to me but he refused. I stayed there the rest of the day. He gave me some food, which already helped me a lot. As it started to get dark I made my way to Pilipsch – to the village where my grandfather used to have his estate and where my father and his siblings had their land. I had already come to this village the first time I left Borszczow looking for a hiding place – trying with some farmers, who weren't prepared to help me. I just wasn't ready to give up so went to try with other farmers, since I had nothing to lose and didn't know where I should otherwise go. I wasn't that familiar with this village. I had only been there two or three times with my father. He was never that keen to take me and, although I always wanted to go with him, he wouldn't let me. It was about two and a half kilometres following country paths from Dawidof, where the forester lived, to Pilipsch, where I wanted to go. The village was situated in a valley surrounded by hills. The river Nitschlawa flowed through the valley and powered two water mills in the village. One of the owners was called Schreiber, a Polish man and an ethnic German. This mill was right at the beginning of the village and you passed it as you entered the village. You also had to cross the river using a wide plank which was next to the mill. The second mill was situated at the other end of the village but I never saw that. Its owner had been my uncle Leser Eisenberg – he was married to Grandmother Frimce's sister and his two sons, Shimon and Mosche, had been living with us in Borszczow. They had the quern we had used to grind flour. Their brother Isaak was in the Borki-Wielki labour camp.

The ground at the centre of the village was higher, with various smallholdings as well as my grandfather's larger farm with outbuild-

ings, barns, a house and garden. Everything had been burned and destroyed by the Bolsheviks during the First World War. This was then turned into arable land for growing grain. There used to be fruit trees and vegetable patches. This land was then split into three, between my father and his brothers Abraham and Mosche. I went to Pilipsch in the dark, with the aim of approaching the neighbouring farmer Kaladrupski who lived directly behind the site, where the farm had been. I knew this farmer and where he lived, and he was well known to my father. He had also been to our house a few times. This farmer had seen something of the world as he had spent some years in Canada. He was also a tailor and had been mayor of the village. When I arrived in the village it was dark but, as it was still relatively early in the evening, I went straight to his house. I went into his parlour and everyone was fairly surprised, as they didn't know where I had come from. The family was made up of three people; the man, his wife and their daughter, who was about the same age as me. They gave me something to eat. I told them I had one wish, and that was that they hide me. I was prepared to overwrite them all my land if they would do that. He told me that he couldn't. I can't remember what his reasons were, but he told me I could stay there a night but I would have to go the following evening. They showed me to the barn and I spent the night there on straw. In the morning, he gave me some food and I asked after other farmers I knew of. He didn't know where they lived. I also asked him about random people, because I didn't want him to work out where I actually wanted to go. Amongst the names mentioned I asked him where Petrik lived. This Petrik was the most well-off farmer in the village. I also asked him where Prociuk lived, who was another acquaintance of my father who had often been to our house. He told me where Petrik lived, which was the first road to the right, straight on and on the second farm on the left. Prociuk lived in the same street, you just kept going until there was a fork in the road, where Prociuk had his farm. That evening, as it got dark, he gave me some bread and I left, with the intention of going to Petrik. These nightly sorties were very risky. Firstly, when you came across someone from the village, they immediately knew you weren't local and wondered what a stranger was doing in the village. The majority of the population were anti-Semitic, especially the young. They mostly belonged to nationalist parties, such as the *Bandera*, which organised pogroms against Jewish people and had murdered Jewish people in

the time between the Germans invading and the Russians leaving. In this vacuum the *Bandera* organisation had undertaken brutal murders. They were called the *Banderowcy*, after their leader Bandera. Their aim was an independent and self-governing Ukraine. The Ukrainian police was also made up of members of the *Banderowcy*. These nightly sorties were thus risky – even more so since I wasn't exactly sure where the families lived that I wanted to get to, and was having to guess. It was extremely fortunate that I did make it to the families I meant to get to, and not other families, who would have almost certainly reported me. They would have undoubtedly contacted the police immediately, and this would have meant certain death for me. I took the road Kaladrupski told me to take and, at the second farm on the left, at the gate, I stood a while and looked around. Lights were on in the house and it was very loud inside. Suddenly a dog came running up to me and started leaping and barking at the gate where I stood. Straight away I started again to throw bits of bread to the dog, to distract it. At this moment, the owner of the house, Petrik, came out of the house. He approached me at the gate and silenced the dog. I told him that I wanted to stay in his barn. He told me that this was not possible as there were lots of young people in his home, as his son or daughter – I don't remember which – were having some kind of gathering. He said he wasn't able to let me set foot on the farm since he feared that one of the young people would discover me. With this, I had no choice but to continue about fifty or sixty metres further until the fork in the road, where Prociuk apparently lived. When I got to the corner, I looked around to check that no one was watching me or if anyone was around. In the distance I could see someone approaching, and wasn't sure whether this person just happened to be passing or whether they were perhaps following me. It was uncertain and I assumed the worst so I decided to hide, and went quickly up the left side of the fork in the road until it ran out; it was a dead end. I went into someone's garden, near a farm, went through it and ran until I reached the Nitschlawa river. I went along the river to get back to the road which led to Prociuk's house. Before I went to the road, I hid another half an hour in some bushes and didn't come out until I felt sure all was okay. There was no one on the street so I went back in the direction of Prociuk's, past Petrik's house to the fork in the road. Without actually knowing whether this was Prociuk's house, I went to the gate and opened it.

It was a farm with a small barn to the left, with a lean-to and the farm house in the centre, opposite the barn. I went to the front door of the house. The door was open and a couple stood in the hallway talking; a young man and a girl. In Ukrainian, I asked "Tato jest?", which means "Is your father here?" The girl answered that he was in the sitting room. This girl was Prociuk's eldest daughter. I went in to the room, where Prociuk sat with his wife and younger daughter. They looked shocked to see me and asked me where I had come from. I briefly explained what I wanted, and Prociuk told his wife to get me something to eat. They gave me a plate with a piece of Mamalige, which is similar to polenta, and some Werenig that they had already started, which is a potato puree wrapped in pastry, shaped in a triangle and then cooked. They told me they were unable to give me much more as the Germans had taken away a large portion of corn and they themselves hardly had enough to eat. They were waiting for the next harvest.

By this time, the eldest daughter, who had previously been in the hallway with the lad, came in. After I had eaten I proposed that they hide me, and offered to sign over all our land if they did so and I survived. Were I to die, then I would not be able to sign over the land and Prociuk would get nothing from it. He considered this and then said to his wife Nastia: "Get a blanket and take him to the Padobrie." This was the barn's open lean-to, and where the ladder led to the loft of the barn where I was to sleep. I can't remember exactly whether he or his wife took me up to this loft and showed me where I could sleep. I laid down but was unable to sleep all night, since it was so overwhelming to have got a place so quickly. My thoughts were racing and I considered that he had perhaps let me sleep here with the intention of informing the police, since it seemed so suspicious that he had agreed so suddenly without taking time to mull it over.

The next morning, he came up very early to see me and told me that the whole family was going out to the fields to cut corn and only his eldest daughter Nastia would be at home, and that she would bring me some lunch around midday. His family was made up of five people; the husband Petro, his wife Nastia, a son Jakiw, who was about my age, and daughters Nastia and Marika. Now I found myself lying on the floor, thinking constantly about how unbelievable it was – a miracle – that I had got a place relatively easily; a place where I could stay. I still couldn't shake off the suspicion that they might yet inform the

authorities. At midday, Nastia brought me some potato soup. I passed the day until the farmer came to me in the evening and spoke to me, explaining that he was now just waiting for harvest, since they had absolutely no grain left from which to make flour. He was considering harvesting some of the wheat early, although it wasn't quite ready, so some of the grain could be threshed from the husks and that, at least, small biscuits could be baked on the range to bridge the time before the harvest. This farmer was not wealthy – just an average farmer. He owned about seven or eight Morgen of land, a small farm yard, a cow, a pig, some hens and some black sheep, as well as ducks. He used to have a horse, but didn't have it by the time I was there and managed by hiring his neighbour's horse when he needed it, for which he compensated him by doing some work for him. This was quite usual between farmers in the villages.

Most farmers had very little money and were mostly self-sufficient, meaning that they produced everything themselves, apart from tools and iron goods. They made their clothing from flax which they grew themselves and then soaked in water for two to three weeks before drying and smacking it, until only the fibres of the flax were left. In winter, when the women had nothing to do in the fields, they sat indoors and spun these threads by hand. These threads were woven on a handloom. It was a strong and thick linen, from which men's shirts and trousers was made by hand. The shirt doubled up as a kind of shirt and jacket, and the trousers were underpants at the same time. They were essentially undergarments and overgarments in one. For the women, long calf-length tops were made from this linen. These shirts were a kind of dress, and were gathered at the waist with an embroidered belt. On Sundays and holidays, similar shirts were worn, only with embroidered arms and front panels. The mens' shirts were knee-length and the waist was held with a belt about ten centimetres wide. The belt was made from spun wool. In the winter, the wool from black sheep was used to produce hand-spun yarn. With the yarn, black wool was woven and this woven fabric was fulled. The watermills were also equipped to full this fabric. This woven fabric was a think felt, from which mens' winter trousers were made, as well as loden coats and blankets. Clothing was produced from the sheep's fur. The fleeces were worn in the traditional way, with a large collar over the shoulders with triangular detail. They were also embroidered. These fleeces were made by Jewish furriers – there had been several of them in Mielnice – and

all the work was done by hand. Each and every one of the farmers were dressed the same way. They even made their own leather shoes. When a cow or calf was slaughtered, the hide was tanned in a primitive way with primitive instruments. Although it wasn't as good or waterproof as factory leather, it was still the leather they made their shoes with.

This rural life of self-sufficient smallholders made the locals independent in critical times, in which there were no consumer goods. Their lives continued as normal, which was admirable. During the months I was hidden, I observed and envied this life and thought to myself that I, as the son and grandson of a landowner, who owned nearly as much land as this whole village and – on top of it – also a forest, was now reduced to lying in the attic of a barn. And the workers, who were employed by my grandfather and father, were free people. For this I had to be grateful and happy: that I had found a decent farmer at all who had taken me in.

I had been in the barn attic for about four or five days and always got to eat what the farmers themselves had – it was mostly potato soup, *Mamalige* and polenta. There was absolutely no bread, since the farmer had no more grain for flour after the Germans took most of it off him.

The farmer came to talk to me from time to time. I still had some money left and a woman's watch on me, which no longer worked. I hardly had any money to talk of and I'm not even sure if it was still in a valid currency. The money and the watch were in a small pocket at the front in the waistband. In those days, trousers had an extra pocket on the waistband for pocket watches. The only reason I still happened to have the money with me was because it had been in this small pocket the whole time. When I was robbed on the road previously the thieves hadn't noticed this small pocket, so I still had the money. After I had spent a few days in Prociuk's barn I realised that his intentions towards me were not bad and that he was generally decent. I wanted to help him get through the war and so offered him the money and the watch, to enable him to buy wheat. He accepted this and took the money and, on Tuesday, went to the town market in Mielnice and bought wheat. When he returned, it was milled and baked into flat breads on the range. We could get by with this bread until the harvest.

I spent day after day in the attic. I was given food and so was unlikely to starve. The fear of being accidentally discovered took up most of my waking moments.

My thoughts were also dominated by my sister Zenja; where she was at that time, whether she was alive, and what had happened to the other members of my family – whether they where still in Borszczow or had been murdered. All I could do was lay in the attic preoccupied with my thoughts. I had no idea what was going on in the outside world, generally or with the war; I had no idea how long this would go on and was thinking that it couldn't go on that much longer. I would lie there taken up with these thoughts.

The end of August was harvest time. The farmer's family helped with the harvest and were out in the fields. I had to remain lying hidden in the barn, which had open gables on both sides. There was no one around during the day and so I was lying in this spot open on both sides. I was permanently fearful that someone would come around or that there might be someone trying to steal something, and because no one from the family was there they might discover me in this attic. I had neither access to a newspaper nor any kind of news. Even the farmer seemed to have little information. One day he went into town to get something and brought a Ukrainian paper back with him. He gave this to me and I read that heavy fighting was going on at the time outside Kiev, and that a small unit of the Soviet army had crossed the Dnieper river. I then realised that the Russians were on the offensive, and the Germans in retreat. I read this paper every day over and over again, hardly able to believe that the Red Army had already crossed the Dnieper at Kiev. Thanks to the paper, I was now also aware of the month and the date, which I had been unaware of and had been unable to guess during the time spent in the barn loft. Now I had hope that the war would not go on much longer and that I might survive it. I lay there day after day on the attic floor, thinking about all sorts of things which came into my head. It is hard to describe how this was; how you nearly went mad with the slow passing of time. One day passed like an eternity and I had been here three months. It felt as though I had spent years stuck in this barn loft.

Roughly around the beginning of September, Prociuk told me that his daughter was about to be married and they would need to start preparing for the wedding. The news of an imminent wedding made me extremely anxious. I was aware that Ukrainian weddings lasted three

days, and the men were mostly drunk and that fights often broke out between drunken guests, while I would be lying in the attic of an open barn during the whole thing. This made me very nervous and, during the time leading up to the wedding, I could think of little else, worrying that I would be discovered during the wedding and that this would be the end for me.

At the end of September it was the daughter Nastia's wedding. The calf in the shed next to the cow was slaughtered, as well as a pig. Before this they also made schnapps called *Samogon* from potatoes. I was thinking about this and worrying that there would be lots of people coming to the farm during this time; and that during such a celebration everyone would be drinking the home-made schnapps and many of the guests would be drunk and might start fighting – and during all this I would be stuck in the attic of the open barn. I thought to myself, if a drunken guest takes only three steps on the ladder and looks in the loft then they would see me straight away. But what was I to do? I could only hope that no one would notice me and that the wedding would pass without incident.

Prociuk came up to the attic to see me on the first day of the wedding. He wasn't sober and told me I should come down and join the guests. I felt sick with fear and wasn't sure I was hearing him right. I told him that would never work. People would see me – it was impossible. He would be putting himself and his family in danger. He wouldn't take no for an answer and insisted that I be a guest at the wedding. I talked him round and promised him that, once the war was over, I would definitely come to the weddings of his remaining daughter and his son, bringing large presents with me. I kept talking and repeating this until he finally gave up. I was lucky that he didn't boast to the wedding guests that Stern's son was hiding in the attic of his barn. Almost everyone got really drunk at these local weddings until they no longer knew what they were doing – because they drank the home made schnapps in large quantities, which was extremely potent.

For three days and nights there was singing and screaming on the farm and in the house, right next to the barn in which I was hiding. Young people from the village could be seen singing, dancing and leaping around for three whole days in drunken celebration. I was shaking with fear that perhaps a young couple would have the idea to climb up to the attic and discover me, or that some might want to play hide

and seek. I cannot describe how terrified I was. These three days were almost as bad as hiding during the raids in Borszczow, because now I had a chance and, miraculously, found somewhere where I could hide and with it the possibility of surviving. This wedding could have put paid to all that – increasing the chance of being discovered and then killed. I hardly made it through these three days and was a total nervous wreck. I cannot believe I didn't completely fall apart under the stress and fear.

The wedding was eventually over, and the groom, the man Nastia married, had no idea that I was hiding there. The family didn't tell him and Nastia was also forbidden from telling him and did actually keep quiet. It was usual amongst the farmers that the man was the head of the family and made the decisions; you had to do what he said without protest. Nastia kept this secret until the end without telling her husband. It was also fortunate that Nastia moved away after the wedding to where her husband lived. Had it been the other way round, the man would now be living at Prociuk's and then I'm not sure I would have been able to stay. I had no idea how he felt about Jewish people. I can't imagine he would have agreed to a Jewish man hiding at the farm, given that most young people were members of the *Banderowcy*. Neither did Prociuk's son, Jakiw, agree to keep hiding me. However, his father had made a decision and he had no choice but to live with it.

It was the beginning of autumn. Grain was gathered in to be threshed. The potatoes had been dug up from the garden, and the straw stored in the barn and laid down in the stalls. The family went out to the field every day digging up the remaining potatoes and someone always stayed at the farm or in the house to cook, either the daughter or Prociuk's wife. At midday the person who stayed behind brought the food out for the family, and I also got something warm to eat. It wasn't as though I ate well, but I didn't starve.

The start of autumn was lovely, with great conditions for growing mushrooms. Early in the evening, everyone came back from the fields with the baskets – usually full from gathering potatoes – now filled with mushrooms. They cooked with mushrooms every day, indeed I had them twice a day and they were good. I think they were chanterelles. To this day I love the taste of mushroom.

It was a beautiful autumn. Once the potatoes were harvested it was time to harvest sweetcorn and sunflowers. The family went out to the

fields every day to cut these. The work was arduous, as every stalk had to be held by hand and then cut with a sickle, bundled up then tied together with straw. When everything in the fields had been cut and bundled, the harvest was brought to the farm on a cart. This harvest was the last of the outside work before work moved to the farmyard. Each single sunflower stalk was smacked with a stick to release the seeds. In larger farms, the seeds were removed direct from the bundle with a beating stick. The sweetcorn was also brought in from the fields in bundles and the corn cobs had to be removed from the stalks. This required cutting open the bundle and holding each stalk in one hand while freeing the cob from the leaves with the other, using a wooden needle as sharp as a carpenter's pencil. The cob was then thrown on a pile in the middle and the stalks were bundled again. The cobs were taken from the pile and put into sacks, and the bundles of stalks were stored in the barn or under the roof of the barn's lean-to as feed for the cows; later this would be cut up and fed to them.

Because the autumn was so lovely I came down from my attic one night to go into the garden. The house had a large garden where vegetables and potatoes were grown. There were also some plum trees. It was like a dream, after weeks in the attic, to suddenly stand on the ground, walking around in the open air. I only stayed a short time in the garden before going back to the attic. I didn't tell anyone that I had gone down. Only later I realised how stupid it had been to leave the hiding place – even though it had been during the middle of the night, you never knew whether someone would happen to be passing and might have noticed.

It was now the end of October. I say this although, in reality, I wasn't exactly sure which month it was at all. I knew the week days because the family always went to church on Sundays, enabling me to work out the days from that. I was only roughly aware of the months, helped also by the stages of harvest – as I knew the months we harvested corn or potatoes. Towards the middle to end of October, during a wonderful moonlit night, Prociuk and his son rented a horse and cart and went into the forest to steal wood – they had probably even gone into our forest. It was normal for farmers to collect firewood from the forest. It was a mild evening and I lay down, on the edge of my loft, between the straw, with my head stuck out, looking at the beautiful moon. Suddenly, a friend of Jakiw came out of the house and shone a torch directly on my head. I pulled myself in quickly and lay very still. He stood there for

a while with the torch held in my direction, before going back into the house and telling everyone there was someone in the barn's attic. The wife and daughter told him that this was impossible and it must have been a cat or a shadow. However he insisted that he had seen the head of a person. The women said they would wait until the men came back from the forest, and the friend with the torch went home. When Prociuk and his son came back from the forest and unloaded the wood, the women told him what had happened. The next day, Jakiw went round to his friend's to ask what had happened. The friend told him that he had seen the head of a person under the roof. Jakiw explained to him that this couldn't be the case and that it must have been a shadow or an illusion of sorts. He remained convinced that he'd seen a person's head. The next morning, Prociuk brought my food and explained that his son had visited his friend, who was convinced of what he had seen. He was scared that people would come to check whether someone was hiding in the barn. For this reason, he felt I needed to leave that evening, since this friend of Jakiw was the Mayor's nephew.

When I heard that I had to leave the farm that evening, I thought to myself: This is the end. I held it together and said to Prociuk: "bring me a piece of paper and a pen and I'll sign over half my land since, if I go, I don't know whether I will survive and, if I die, you'll get nothing. However, if I find someone who will hide me, I need to be able to give him something – so I'll give you half the land and keep half for someone else." He said to me however that he didn't want me to sign anything over now. He believed me and that I would sign over the land if I survived. When I told him that he wouldn't get anything if I was killed, he thought about this and I noticed that this possibility gave him lots to think about. Why should he get only half the land when he could have it all? Then he said that he would send his son once again to the friend and discuss the issue, to see if his friend was persistent in insisting that it was a person who he had seen. Prociuk went away. I couldn't fully appreciate the food because of the shock and worry about the prospect of having to find a new hiding place – I could barely cope with the panic that this induced, and almost broke under the stress. Prociuk came back about two hours later and told me that his son had returned from his friend, with whom he had a long chat and persuaded him that he was perhaps mistaken about what he saw; that it was impossible that they would have a person staying in the attic of the barn.

Prociuk suggested a different hiding place; that I should go to the other side of the farm where the stable was. He wanted to store straw in the attic – all around where I would be, so that no one would ever think that someone could be up there. Obviously, I had no issue with this as I was pleased and felt that, if this worked, I would be delivered from death. Where would I have otherwise gone? It was already autumn and it would soon be cold with snow.

It was a very lovely sunny day; midday. The sun was shining in the sky and the whole family started to stack straw bales on the farm. They stacked the bales tightly up to the entrance of the stable. They did this so I would be able to go from the stable to the barn without being seen, so that no one would notice that a stranger was crossing the yard. The two daughters watched the street outside, each looking in a different direction. They were checking that no one was coming and I was thus quickly able to cross to the stable between the bales. In the stable, I went up a small ladder to the so-called loft. The stable was a building without windows or a ceiling. It was made of two rooms; in one was a cow and some sheep – the other was empty and there was enough space for one or two horses. The building had a thatched roof. About two and a half meters up, stretching from one wall to another, were wooden boards, spaced about eighty centimetres apart. The straw bundles were stored on these boards and tightly packed together, two or three layers high. So that the hiding place was safe and would not be noticed as such, the whole attic was tightly packed with straw. In the corner, a space had been left – about two and half metres by two metres. This space was my hiding place.

Jakiw's friend, who had seen me in the attic, was presumably already convinced that he had seen a cat or something at the Prociuk family's as he probably would never have imagined that they would have been hiding a Jewish person. For this reason, he probably didn't pursue it. It was all forgotten and it was fortunate for me that I was hiding with the Prociuks. Like the son, Jakiw, most young Ukrainians were very nationalistic. Most were primitive and uneducated and believed in their leader Bandera. They followed whatever he said blindly. And if he told them to murder Jews, then they went and murdered Jews. Because Prociuk's son belonged to one of these nationalistic groups, no one would ever have imagined that a Jew would have been hiding at Jakiw's of all places. I only found out later that Jakiw was a member of this organisation, after I left the Prociuk family upon lib-

eration and went into the town and then had to return. I will describe what happened then later.

The barn in which I was first hiding stood on the side of the garden. The stable, where I was now to hide, stood directly on the road. The farm was situated between the barn and the stable, so I had to be extremely careful. I had to ensure that anyone going down the road didn't notice anything suspicious.

For several months I had to be extra careful; even so careful not to cough, for example, despite the extreme cold. The family also had to be careful when bringing my food. Earlier they were able to bring me food from the front of the barn, which was just opposite where they lived. Now, to get to the stable with my food, they had to go through the farm. They had to remove two or three bundles of straw to pass me the food before putting the bundles back, so that no one could see there was an opening there. This space of two metres by two and a half metres was where I ate, slept and went to the toilet.

The floor of the other barn was made up of boards the same as here, which lay alongside each other. There was no real ceiling as such but, before, I was able to move a bit, since I had the whole attic for myself – whereas now, above the stable I had now only this hiding space amongst the straw. Despite this I was happy to have a hiding place at all. The gable ends were partially boarded with wood, with gaps in between so that light could come in and I could see what was going on outside, including people coming and going from the house.

Autumn seemed to last quite a while, but winter was on its way. I had no idea what was going on in the rest of the world, where the front was, how far the Russians had made it. It was a long time since I read the last Ukrainian paper and I had heard nothing new since then. I always knew exactly when someone was going along the road. If two people went along the road talking to each other, then I could hear what they said. It was particularly distressing when it was young people I heard passing, who would be singing their Bandera songs loudly. The words went: "following the call of our leader, Bandera, line up and we will liberate the most beautiful towns." Often, whole groups of young people went along the road in the evening, singing this song at the top of their voices and I lay terrified in the straw, hoping not to be discovered. All the time thinking about how things would pan out and how long I would have to lie here, and whether the war would soon come to an end or whether it would go on much longer. And if

it went on longer, I couldn't be sure that Prociuk would continue to hide me here.

It started to get cold. I wasn't sure of the day or the date, but soon I could see the first light snowfall through the boards.

One day Prociuk came to me and explained that the two Eisenberg brothers, whose father had owned the water mill, had been discovered. Once discovered they were executed on the hill, not far from the mill. Prociuk didn't realise they were my cousins. Hearing this was a big blow for me – these were my cousins Mosche and Shimon with whom we had just been living with at the place in the Jewish quarter of Borszczow. I had no idea they had got out of Borszczow and had been hiding in the village. They were still in Borszczow when I left. My fear of being discovered increased by the day. It was winter and the cold and snow had arrived. The locals stayed inside and only one person ever came out to do the important chores in the farm, to feed the animals, carry in some wood, and so on. The women stayed in the parlour the whole winter spinning flax and doing other chores. Most farmers only possessed one or two pairs of boots for the whole family. They went around barefoot most of the year until the winter, and whoever had to leave the house got to wear the boots.

I had to lay in the space made for me in the freezing cold. I had no warm clothes and nothing really to use as a cover. Since some of my clothes had been stolen from me on the way, I was still wearing the same shirt and trousers I arrived in and this was all I had against the cold.

In this region, temperatures could reach up to minus twenty-five or thirty degrees and the snow was about a metre deep. I had to do what I could not to freeze to death. On the one blanket that I did have, I piled it with as much straw as possible and then crawled under it, surrounding myself by straw. In this way, I managed to protect myself from some of the cold. When I think back to this now, I can hardly believe it – that it would be possible for a person to survive in the conditions and the cold in which I found myself, without getting ill and perishing. I didn't wash myself during this whole time, neither did I change my shirt or trousers or cut my hair or beard. I wore the shirt and trousers every day, day and night. There was no shortage of lice and I was riddled with them. The winter dragged on but I had to get through it. The will to live was overwhelming. The more life-threatening and dangerous the situation, the more determined I was to survive. The cold

was relentless, and every day of that winter lasted an eternity. I started to doubt whether I would manage to make it through this winter, which seemed to have no end. I daren't ask Prociuk to give me something warm to wear. Firstly, I was aware that they didn't have a lot of warm clothing themselves. Secondly, I lacked the courage and chutzpah to ask something of the family, after they had already put themselves in so much danger on my behalf. I had no choice but to suffer the cold and be thankful for every minute the family kept me. It was incredibly difficult to bear this cold; I tried as best I could to survive the freezing days, always hoping that spring would come and that the war would soon be over.

I was oblivious to the fact that the Red Army was successfully gaining ground against the Germans and were moving closer to where I was. Somehow, I had the feeling that it would not be that long until I would be liberated. Spring was not far away, the weather started to feel milder and the snow started melting. My hiding place was no longer as cold as it had been – I could bear it without feeling I was about to freeze. With every passing week the weather got milder and then the snow was gone. In the village, tension was building amongst the Ukrainian activists who belonged to the *Bandera* party, and amongst the Germans. The Red Army was already very close, although I still did not know this. The activists feared revenge, because there were some in the village who had been communists before the Germans had invaded and who had good positions when the Russians were in charge. Now the activists and those who had worked with the Germans were scared; scared that, when the Red Army arrived, the communists would denounce them and they would be arrested. This led to a kind of civil war amongst the Ukrainians; with some shooting amongst them leading to some being killed on the outskirts of the village. Prociuk told me about this, and I saw bodies lying outside as I looked through the boards of the gable end. Prociuk also told me that the Red Army were advancing and were no longer that far away. I did not know which month it was. Neither did I want to ask Prociuk as I didn't want to annoy him with my questioning, and I wasn't sure whether he even knew himself what month it was since he was unlikely to have had a calendar.

One day there was a lot of loud noise from passing planes overhead – the non-stop drone, all day long, of the engines of squadrons of transport planes as they flew over the village in the direction of Rus-

sia The noise was such that I had to cover my ears. I saw them flying over us through the wooden slats of the barn. They were heavy planes with four engines, some with six, and they flew very low. This made me think that the front must now be quite close. The squadrons were flying in the direction of Russia but then returned West after a short time. After liberation, about two or three weeks later, I learned that the Red Army had surrounded seventeen divisions of Germans in the region of Kamieniec Podolski, about sixty to seventy kilometres from my hiding place. These planes were dropping munitions, supplies, explosives etc. to the encircled German troops. This back and forth of planes lasted about six or seven days and then there were no more planes to be heard.

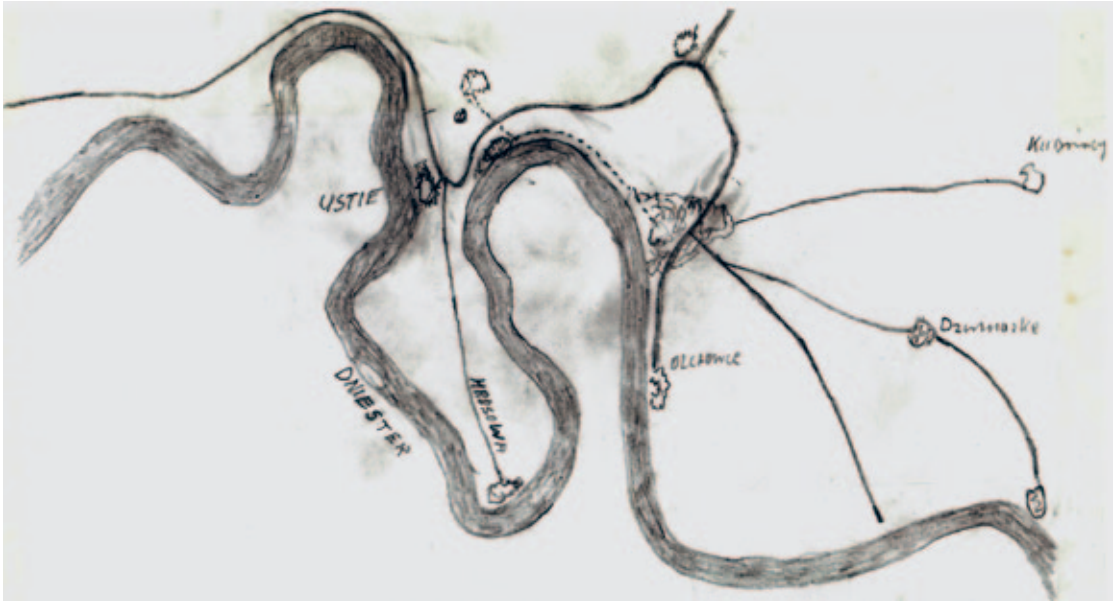
A few days later, the Soviet army arrived in the village. Shooting involving machine guns suddenly ensued, which lasted about an hour and moved through the village, from one side of the valley to the other. This first liberation happened on 6 April 1944. I didn't know this date at the time, I read about it later in the lexicon at Yad Vashem. Only a small amount of Red Army soldiers came into the village itself. Three or four of them were quartered in the next room of the Prociuk family, which was uninhabited. Although the Red Army was now there and I was practically free I was too scared to leave my hiding place, and waited another three days. As the army was still there on the fourth day, I went into Mielnice early one morning. I arrived in town but didn't see anyone I knew. I had no idea where I should go or to whom. The house where we had lived had been torn down and the area had already been completely cleared. The house opposite, which had been Grandma Frimce was still standing. No one was living in it and it looked very run down. I wandered between the houses where Jewish neighbours had lived, to see if I could find anyone who had survived and to find out whether there were any Jews left at all. I wandered between the houses that were still standing since many had been torn down. I didn't encounter anybody. Neither was there anyone there I could have asked. Since I met no-one I went to Iwan Kamenezki's, who was the farmer and neighbour of my grandmother, in whose barn my aunts, uncle and my sister had hidden on the first day of the Mielnice *Aktion* during Sukkot. He invited me in, gave me some food, and told me that my uncle Mottel, aunt Sime, Buzie Goldig and a few others were still in the town – although he didn't know where. Next to the farmer's land was a large and empty site. I heard some shooting, then im-

mediately after German soldiers and lorries carrying tanks drove onto the empty site. It was still light and snow was beginning to fall, making it darker. When I saw the German army arriving so close I left the house immediately, going through the garden, and then through various gardens and plots in the direction of Chudikowce – a village two kilometres away also on the Dniester. I wanted to get back to Pilipsch, to Prociuk. The quickest way to Pilipsch was a rural track, which could only be driven by horse and cart as it was not metalled or fortified and was therefore unsuitable for heavy vehicles. This way was twice as quick as taking the main road.

It continued to snow lightly and the countryside was white. Taking this way to Pilipsch involved crossing the main road, which led from Mielnice to the town of Zaleszczyki, with Pilipsch about two kilometres off the main road. The German army had now gone from Kamieniec Podolski, via Mielnice, in the direction of Zaleszczyki. There were long convoys of tanks, lorries and horse carts. They were all using the main road, which I now had to cross. I hid the moment I saw the German military convoy from a distance. I hid in the ditch so they wouldn't see me. Since the countryside was white, visibility was quite good, even from a distance. The danger was that I would be shot at, should someone spot a person moving on the path. I hid in a ditch, crawling my way through the undergrowth close to the highway.

I went to where some bushes were growing in a ditch and hid amongst the foliage, waiting for the military traffic to quieten down and an opportunity to cross. Crouching in the bushes, I watched and waited for the right moment. It was sleeting the whole time and I was barefoot in the cold slush. My shirt was soaked and I was shivering from the cold and the wet, waiting to be delivered through this military convoy.

I would not have been able to continue like this for long. Convoys of soldiers and vehicles continued to pass on the road. I heard that the telephone wires on the road had been cut. I waited and waited but there seemed to be no break. I thought that was it for me. Suddenly the traffic eased up and there was a break where there was momentarily no vehicle. At that moment, I jumped up and ran over the main road and picked up the way to Pilipsch. When I was a few hundred metres on the other side, I heard the approach of vehicles and the convoy picked up once more.



10 The dotted line along the Dniester shows the way I took from Mielnice back to my hiding place in Pilipsch after I thought I was liberated by the Soviet Army in April 1944 – only to then be surprised by the German Army when I was back in Mielnice.

I went very quickly so that I wouldn't be seen from the road. I arrived back at the edge of the village and cautiously made my way back. I had to be particularly careful not to be noticed – even from a distance – since I had long hair and a considerable beard, having been unable to cut them this whole ten months. I would stand out as the only person in the village to walk around looking like this and thus could have been spotted also from a distance. I surveyed the village carefully to check there was no one to notice me. It was already dark, although still early evening, when I got back to Prociuk's farm. I looked through the window into his living room to see whether any one else happened to be there, and then tapped on the window. They looked out and I went inside. I told him what I had seen and what had happened. The son Jakiw said to me: "What did you think then? That the Bolsheviks had already won the war?" When he said that, I felt sick. I thought I was dealing with a member of the *Banderowcy*, which confirmed my suspicions that he, like all young Ukrainians, was nationalistic and a member of this group. He only put up with me hiding in their farm through deference to his father, which was usual amongst

the locals; the family always respected the wishes of the father. Despite the German's defeat, the nationalists weren't ready to accept that Germany had lost the war. Prociuk was a little reluctant to continue hiding me. He said this was because he was concerned that someone from the village would have seen me. He maintained that it was quite early in the evening and that people were still out and about and I could easily have been noticed going to his farm. I told him that I had been extremely careful not to have been seen, and was persistent to the point that he agreed to let me continue hiding in the space amongst the straw in his barn attic.

I was soaking wet, and so shattered that I fell straight asleep on the straw and slept like the dead. The next morning there were gun shots, which were again fired over the village. There was shooting from one side of the village to the other, which lasted about fifteen minutes before it stopped. As soon as the shooting finished about a hundred German soldiers arrived in the village and started cutting telephone lines and setting up field kitchens; they occupied the farmers' houses, forcing the farmers to move out and sleep in the barns. In the yard where I was, they set up a field kitchen. Horses were put in the stables underneath me. There was a crowd of soldiers at the farm and on the road. For three days the family couldn't get any food to me; I was practically in the Germans' hands, although they didn't know it. I lay on the straw above the horses. If a horse had reached up to nibble the straw and then accidentally pull down a bundle, which would have been perfectly conceivable, I could have fallen down into the stable. The farmers and the women were absolutely distraught, because the soldiers took all the chickens and pigs; slaughtered, cooked and ate them. On the fourth day, Prociuk somehow managed to bring me something to eat. The German army were stationed in the village for about six days. They were units of the seventeen divisions, which had been surrounded by the Russians.

At this point, I would like to explain how it was possible that the Soviet Army had already liberated this area four or five days ago to then have the Germans return. The Germans were being driven West from Kiev to the Kamieniec Podolski region, and were being surrounded and closed in about seventy kilometres from the village of Pilipsch, where I was hiding. This encircled army still had huge reserves of military equipment including explosives, which they deployed to try and break out of this encirclement. In order to prevent them breaking out

and deploying this material, the Soviet Army left a corridor for limited withdrawal, so that a large amount of the munitions would be used up and the fighting power of the Germans would be weakened. The corridor which the Soviet Army had allowed was about a hundred kilometres long and went from the area near the town of Kamieniec Podolski towards the town of Zaleszczyki. The village where I was hiding happened to be about half way along this corridor. Large amounts of ammunition were used up during this retreat and there were no replenishments because they were still effectively closed in, despite their retreat. These seventeen divisions had no choice but to surrender before the town of Zaleszczyki and were taken prisoner.

After six days, the German military left the village where I had been hiding. There was still machine gun fire coming from the other side of the village, which lasted about fifteen minutes. When the fighting ended, Soviet soldiers came into the village, and some remained. Although I was technically free and Soviet soldiers were about, I stayed hiding another eight days. I was still traumatised from coming out of hiding prematurely the last time and encountering German soldiers. I was now a lot more careful, so waited another week before going back to the town.

Liberation (1944)

I set off very early in the morning, taking the same path I had taken the last time. As I crossed the road I saw the bodies of dead horses which had been shot, abandoned cars and a lot of equipment. When I arrived in the town I went straight to the centre, where the Jewish population had formerly lived, hoping this time that I might encounter someone who had managed to survive. As well as military equipment, German tanks and trucks were left standing on the streets. I went to the building where Buzie Goldig used to live and actually met him there with his wife and child. He told me that my aunt Sime and her husband were alive and living in my uncle's mother's house. I went there immediately; when my aunt saw me, the joy was indescribable – everyone assumed I was dead. My aunt and her husband were living in my uncle's parents' building, which was next to a farmer's house on the edge of the town, on the road leading to the neighbouring village. I was able to live there too, since our house had been pulled down.

Abandoned tanks, trucks and personnel carriers stood about on the town's streets and, just outside the town, there was a huge field where there were, as far as the eye could see, multiple vehicles and various military equipment, as well as piles of spare parts – all unbelievably left behind by the Germans. In every part of the town, military equipment lay around including tin canisters, which still contained various ammunition and had been dropped by air support day and night for about two weeks as backup for the divisions as their position became increasingly precarious.

The first thing I did at my aunt's house was to wash myself. I had gone almost a whole year without washing, cutting my hair or shaving. Even at hers, I had to wash in a tin tub without soap, because there wasn't any. I had to wash myself several times with warm water until the dirt finally left my body. I can no longer remember who it was who cut my hair and

beard. The shirt and trousers that I had been wearing day and night continuously over around ten months were riddled with lice. I can't remember what we did with them. I think my aunt may have washed them before I put them on again, or perhaps I had different clothes to wear. I can't remember what I did about shoes, whether I somehow got hold of a pair or if I went around barefoot.

The next thing I did was to get hold of a German gun which fired rounds. From then on, I wouldn't leave the house without it. It wasn't hard to get hold of one since lots of them were lying around, having been left by the Germans. Getting a licence for a gun was not an issue for a Jewish person. Of the two thousand or so Jewish population who had lived in the town, only twenty-eight of us managed to survive. I will presently come to the names of those survivors whose names I recall.

The arrival of the Red Army meant that civil administration was established after only a matter of days. In addition, there was the national security authority and the secret police (NKWD), both of which immediately started cleaning up and arresting members of the *Banderowcy*.

Since the Germans had left so many weapons and ammunition behind, the Ukrainian nationalists and members of *Banderas* got hold of a lot of it and used it to attack the Red Army and soviet provisions. They tried to fight the Soviets. An official of the NKWD asked me whether I knew any Ukrainians who, when the Soviets withdrew and the Germans invaded, had assisted with the building of the *Mogile* or monument, or had spoken out against the Soviet Union. I wanted to tell him who had committed crimes against Jewish people, but he didn't want to know about that and only wanted to know who had shown themselves to be opposed to the Soviet Union.

There wasn't one shop in town where you could buy anything. I can't remember what we did for food or how we got by. The twenty-eight surviving Jewish people had either hidden in farms, in the forest or survived in dens or hollows. My uncle Mottel and my aunt Sime survived by hiding at a farm. My aunt had hidden herself, as I already described, behind a tin tub which was propped against a wall. Then at night, she fled the Jewish area in the direction of the tobacco works. She knew a tobacco worker called Strateiziak who was originally from Pilipsch, where I was in hiding. This man, his brothers and his whole family were communists. He took my aunt to Pilipsch, where she hid a while with his family. Meanwhile her husband, my uncle, had already returned to Pilipsch from Borszczow and was also hiding there for a while – although they didn't both know this at

the time. Only after some time did they find out about each other from other people and were reunited. In Mielnice, in the town, they knew a Polish farmer, who hid them until they were freed.

Szyfra Menczer and her small five or six-year old niece Rena also survived by hiding with a farmer. Before this farmer hid them in the roof of the chicken shed, they had been living in the forest with the Mentschel family, in a ditch covered with leaves. The new hiding place was in the loft of a chicken coop. The loft was so small and short that there wasn't enough room to stretch out their legs and they had to lie with their legs up the whole time – for almost a year. When they finally got out, Rena couldn't walk, since her knee joints had not been able to move and they had grown in the wrong way.

Then there was the Mentschel family, made up of Cunie, his wife and daughter. Cunie was a cousin; his mother, Pesia, was my father's sister. They were the ones hiding in the ditch covered in leaves in a forest near Dawidof, the same forest that had belonged to my grandfather. Cunie himself had also inherited a part of the forest. Only his wife and his daughter Minusche survived; he himself died shortly before liberation. One night, he had walked about two kilometres to the village of Iwanie Puste to get some food from a farmer he knew. He didn't take the path for fear of being discovered, and walked into rusty barbed wire; the injury was so bad he got septicaemia. He made it back to the forest but died two or three days later. His wife and roughly twelve-year old daughter had to bury him in the forest.

Doctor Deutscher, with whom I stayed the first three or four days after I escaped, had hidden – with his wife and child – in the village of Dziwinecke, with a farmer who had a very sick child. The farmer hid them because he wanted his child to be cured.

Jonas Lindenbaum and his sister Lotke had hidden in a bricked up cellar of a butcher, along with Jidel Selzer, his wife and twelve-year old child. Food was lowered down to them on a rope via the chimney.

Mottel Kubert, who was nineteen years old, and a girl of about twenty-two or twenty-three called Ezie – I no longer remember her surname – hid on the roof of the Jewish National building, where the Hebrew school and Zionist organisations had formerly been housed. The building had a flat roof with no obvious access. Behind the building was a hatch through which you could crawl out onto the roof. If you didn't know about this, you wouldn't have noticed it. Also hidden on the roof with Mottel Kubert and Ezie was Labisch Andermann, who was about twenty-four years old.

One evening, when it was dark, he went out to try and get some food but never came back. He had been discovered and shot to death.

Dudel Sterenberg, who had left Borszczow with me that time, and his sister Rose managed to survive by hiding in a den in a forest not far from Mielnice.

Buzie Goldig, the brother-in-law of Doctor Deutscher, was also in hiding at a farmer's with his wife and child – although I'm not sure in which village they were hiding.

Jerme Falkenflik, a friend of mine, and his brother were hiding with a local lady in the village of Pilipsch.

Faiwusch Menczer, my best friend, hid himself in a hollow in the so-called gypsy forest with a friend, her father and others from Borszczow. They managed to survive. Additionally, three from the Mielnice surroundings: a girl with the surname of Apfelbaum from Germakiwke, as well as a lad and a girl – brother and sister from a village, whose name I forget, survived. Mosche Koffler with his wife and three sons and Gabriel Waldmann with his wife, daughter and son, who had fled Mielnice after the first *Aktion*, survived in Romania, in Czernowitz. Mosche Koffler, his son Herman and Gabriel Waldmann were arrested in Czernowitz and put in prison. Relatives bribed the authorities to ensure they were given a long sentence instead of being handed over to the Germans, which would have meant certain death. They were sentenced to twelve years and remained in prison until their liberation by the Red Army. Had they not been sentenced to twelve years, they would have undoubtedly been turned over to the Germans.

Isaac Fischler and family, who had fled together with the Kofflers and Waldmanns, were arrested in Czernowitz and handed over to the Germans. They were executed.

The newly arrived Soviet civil administration started to bring a kind of order to things – in a Soviet fashion. The military administration and the secret service began cleaning up and pursuing the *Banderowcy*. They carried out a number of acts of sabotage and made the whole area unsafe; for example, they carried out armed attacks on Soviet provisions. The Jewish girl who had survived with her brother in a village, started working for the administration. One day, she received instruction to walk or travel to the village of Olchowiec to find something out for the authorities. She went to the village and never came back. *Banderowcy* members murdered her and nothing could be found out about her fate. This happened while I was in the army – my aunt told me about it much

later in Berlin, when she told me many other things that had happened around this time.

The administration immediately started calling people up for active service, and we young Jewish survivors went to the army: myself, Jonas Lindenbaum, Mottel Kubert and Jerme Falkenflik. My aunt and my uncle were against it and tried to dissuade me; they wanted me to join the *Istrubke*. This is a Russian word, and applied to a fighting unit set up to hunt down the *Banderowcy*. This unit was put together locally and was to fight the Ukrainian mobs. The young lad who had survived in the village with his sister, who then lost her life, stayed in the town and joined the *Istrubke* unit instead of the army. He joined this partly-military unit, which reported to the security forces and secret service. Their task was to catch these nationalists and either arrest or kill them. The *Banderowcy* were armed and there were often skirmishes between them. This lad lost his life during one such a fight between the *Istrubke* and the *Banderowcy*.

Fighting under the Soviet Army (1944–1945)

I wanted to join the army. A large group was put together, made up of Ukrainians, Poles and we four Jewish lads. We had to go to Tarnopol on foot, which was a hundred and twenty kilometres away. We could not have gone by train as the Germans had blown up the tracks as they retreated. We needed about three days, and were accompanied by soldiers who were there to protect us in case the *Banderowcy* attacked. On the way we slept in barns belonging to farmers. Once we arrived in Tarnopol we were put into new groups made up of people from the entire region. There were thousands of us. The Ukrainians were in one area and joined the Soviet army and we few Jews were put together with the Poles to join the Polish army. We were sent to Sumy – a Russian town situated near Charkow – in freight carriages because the Polish army was assembling there. This was the communist Polish army under the leadership of General Berling. In Sumy, we four were to join the artillery unit, an independent brigade of the 122nd artillery howitzer, and were put up in former barracks.

The four of us, some others, and two Russian officers who wore Polish uniforms drove into the valley at Sumy in a truck. There was a village by the forest which had been destroyed and burnt down by the Germans. The population of the village were living in Zemlankes, a sort of dug-out about one and half metres deep, covered with tree trunks like a pitched roof. Grass or straw was laid on top of the wooden beams, with earth covering the top. On the front we built such Zemlankes when we had to be somewhere for any time, because they were safer than tents against gunfire and shelling. There was a large number of American trucks in this valley along the forest edge, mostly GMC and Studebaker and also artillery pieces. We were allocated some of the vehicles and equipment, an amount usual for a division. We then

11 In the army: I am standing at the back on the left. Undated.

returned to the barracks at Sumy, where we were given Polish uniforms. The place was full of Polish soldiers and a surprising number of Jewish soldiers. This was because many young Jews had fled the Germans to eastern Poland, which had been occupied by the Soviets who then deported them to Siberia. The Soviets had deported them to Siberia, along with the landowners and the wealthy. When war was declared between Germany and Russia and the Soviets withdrew, many young communists and other young people fled to the Soviet Union. Those who had been deported to Siberia, or had been living in the Soviet Asian Republics, now wanted to join the Polish army. The officers were mostly Russian, and some of them were Jewish Russian officers. They had added 'ski' to their surnames, so had names like Adamski, Polanski, etc. Since Polish surnames mostly end in 'ski' these officers were often deployed in the Polish army to create the impression they were Polish instead of Russian, even though they often couldn't speak a word of Polish.

The commanding officer of our unit was Jewish, a colonel called Parchamowski, and the Chief of Staff, named Baranowski, was also

Jewish. There were also other Jewish officers in our regiment; the Commander of our battalion was called Zuckerman, and the head of the chemical unit was also Jewish. We had our basic training in Sumy as well as specialist training, depending on the role allocated. In the artillery division there were various tasks, including topography, wireless transmission, telephone operation and reconnaissance. The topographers reported direct to the Regiment command. They had to go ahead of the battery, move into position, measure the location in order to communicate with the battery from an observation point, and then advise on how and which target should be fired at. Transmitters were trained at the transmission stations. Telephone engineers were taught how to set up and maintain the lines. The scouts learned how to observe the enemy from an observation point and measure the distances of the attacks with a scissors telescope in order to correct the direction of the guns and thus maximise the impact of an attack.

Our regiment consisted of a regimental command leading three battalions, and three respective battalion commanders. Three batteries with their respective commanders were attached to each battalion. There were three guns in each battery so each battery commander was in charge of three guns. The battalion commander was in charge of three batteries and therefore nine guns, as well as other departments, such as telephone operations. Telephone engineers had to ensure that cables linked every small unit, the observation point and the main command, and that connections were not lost. I was to join the transmitters and was the staff's main transmitter, responsible for wireless transmission between our regiment and the brigade and between our regiment and the three divisional commands, as well as with the observation point. The safest connection was with the telephone, as the radio transmissions were unreliable and often interrupted.

After three months of training, the whole, fully-equipped unit, as well as the Polish army, was sent to the Kowel area near the Bug river by train. This was the location of the front. The Germans were on one side of the river, with the Russians on the other; and this is how it remained for a couple of months. We took up position in the forest, building Zemlankes in the earth, because we expected to be there for some time. The Commander of the regiment lived in the town of Kowel, about fifteen kilometres from our position. We had to be very care-

12 In action as a wireless operator (I'm lying on the ground), undated.

ful and vigilant since the Ukrainian nationals, the *Banderowcy*, were known to carry out attacks on military posts and Soviet army facilities. Our commander always went between his unit at the front and Kowel accompanied by a patrol armed with machine guns. The Red Army concentrated its efforts along this section of the river Bug and stored replenishment material for the offensive. At this part of the front, the first white Russian army was fighting under Marshal Schukow and our army fought under it. We spent about four weeks in this place, preparing ourselves for the offensive. The guns were put in position and the scouts identified targets at which we would later fire. During the four weeks I was given radio operating training for sergeants, which was given by the general staff. Large units were also supported in the use of Katyusca rocket batteries.

These rockets were known as Stalin's pipe-organ by the Germans because of the very loud and unusual noise they made when fired; they were loaded on normal trucks and were made up of eight racks. There were two rockets on each rack, one above and one below. Upon launching, sixteen rockets would fire one after the other. The Germans were scared of these rockets. The Soviet army gathered a considerable amount of munition in the forest during those four weeks to ensure a substantial tank formation and artillery of every calibre.

After four weeks the day of the offensive arrived. At first, the artillery began heavy firing for several hours at enemy positions. The Russians, as well as our artillery, fired incessantly at the German positions, pounding the entire area. The Germans put up fierce resistance but even this was not enough against such concentrated firing. Eventually the strong German counteroffensive was broken and large sections of German artillery and tanks were silenced. Late that evening and throughout the night, special units crossed the river Bug with dinghies under the cover of heavy artillery fire. The soldiers were then able to secure a bridgehead and, the next morning, sappers began to build floating bridges as well as provisional wooden crossings over the river. As soon as these crossings were robust enough, tanks and motorised units were able to cross to the other side and could thus fortify the bridgehead. When enough troops had crossed – our unit was also part of this manoeuvre – we started a concentrated attack on the Germans until they were forced to retreat. The firing was so relentless that the Germans had no time to organise themselves defensively. We continued this until we reached the outskirts of Warsaw, Praga and Gruckow, on the eastern side of the river Weichsel. Our regiment followed the army, and in particular the Russian troops, and kept firing at the retreating Germans, so they had no opportunity to regroup and organise their defence. Despite our advance towards Warsaw, and the German retreat, there was some heavy fighting. As we pushed forward, we passed through many villages and towns until we reached the town of Lublin, which was taken after a brief skirmish. The death camp Majdanek was not far from this town, and we passed by this place without knowing what it was. We saw a huge camp with many barracks surrounded by barbed wire and watchtowers but thought it was a military installation so we passed by, since we were fighting and had to continue our advance. None of us had heard of death camps and it did not occur to us to ask the local population. The commander of the regiment and the head of the division also knew nothing of such camps. Only after the war did I realise what it was. We continued through Lublin on our way to Warsaw. The population of Lublin rejoiced at our coming and declared us their liberators. It was late autumn and the nights were getting cold. We were mostly sleeping in the forest but our clothing was more appropriate for summer, and the winter coats we had were not thick enough. We were not given any other winter clothing and only had thin blankets to cover ourselves

at night. We had a square of canvas to protect ourselves from the wet, and used it against the rain and even as a kind of tent, when we were sleeping in the open in the forest. Mostly it was used as a ground sheet upon which we slept.

The German resistance was weakening and we were approaching Warsaw. We were only about twenty kilometres from the city when we arrived at a wood where we were to spend the night before advancing on the city. It was so cold that we could not sleep at all, and instead walked and jumped about to try and stay warm. We were not allowed to make a fire in case we were attacked from the air. I will never forget that night.

The next morning, we made our way to the outskirts of Warsaw. There was a further short and bitter artillery and tank battle. However, by evening, we had reached the suburb of Praga. It was already dark. People took shelter in their cellars because the Germans were firing from the other side of the Weichsel. The locals were pleased to see us; to see Polish soldiers and the Polish army. They ran out of their cellars to see if it was indeed the Polish military passing. They were amazed by the vehicles and the weapons, they asked questions and could not believe that a Polish army actually existed. In reality, this Polish army was only a puppet of the communist Soviet Union; but the people did not realise that at that time. We only stayed in Praga a day before crossing over to neighbouring Gruckow – another suburb of Warsaw. Both Praga and Gruckow are situated on the eastern side of the Weichsel. We started to get settled in Gruckow and prepared ourselves for a longer stay. The men stayed in local houses with families. Gruckow and Praga were left relatively unscathed and only the houses near the river were badly hit, because they had been regularly fired upon by the Germans from the other side. No one lived in the area near the river because the buildings were so badly damaged. The guns were positioned outside the residential area and primed ready for battle. There was often artillery fire. The reconnaissance units set up their observation points and got ready for action, in case of a German attack. I was the radio operator with the strongest portable transmitter in our regiment. There were a further nine operators in my group, who all reported to me. As I was a sergeant I had to undergo regular training, which was organised by the brigade.

There were nine radio operators in our staff because the station had to be manned day and night, and always by two operators. We had to

take notes of the many messages and write them down. My task was to maintain contact between the brigade HQ and our command, as well as between our command and the various battalion commands. I also had to ensure contact between the observation points and the commanders. The colonel often visited the observation points, in order to ascertain which bases the Germans held. He needed a permanent and direct connection to the chief of staff. The officers were all Russian and spoke in Russian. They mostly couldn't speak any Polish. I was able to get by in Russian and had no real difficulties communicating with them, since I spoke Ukrainian and it is very similar to Russian. The two languages are similar when written, although some Russian expressions are different from Ukrainian. I was thus able to fulfil my duties as radio operator without problems. Our staff command took over a three-storey house. It was a fairly nice building, and relatively modern for the time. For security reasons the office was on the lower ground floor, partly in the basement. They took the rooms on the east side so that command would not be hit if there was a skirmish. Now and then, the Germans would fire at positions on our side and we would retaliate.

This was the time of the Polish uprising in Warsaw – an uprising against German occupation. It was led by the Armeja Krajowa, shortened to AK, essentially a home army. This AK was anti-communist in orientation, made up of Polish nationals and opponents of the Soviet Union. The AK was anti-Semitic, since it did not accept Jewish members into its underground army despite needing any fighting resource it could get its hands on against the German occupation. They had themselves been oppressed and badly treated by the Germans, and knew that Jewish soldiers would fight with them loyally against the Germans, since Jews were also considered enemies. However, the inherent anti-Semitism was such that they would have rather accepted losses than Jewish soldiers. The AK had an underground army, made up of supporters and sympathisers of the Polish Government exiled in London.

There was a second underground organisation in Poland, the Armeja Ludowa or AL, the people's army. This underground army, which was sympathetically disposed towards the Soviet Union, was made up of socialists and had some Jewish members. Both underground organisations were completely opposed politically. There was considerable fighting between the AK and the Germans during the

uprising. The AK needed help desperately and thought they would get it from the Soviet Army, but the Soviet Army did not come to their aid. The reason for this could have been political – that the Soviets wanted the AK to bleed because they were nationalistic and opposed to the Soviet Union. Or the reason could have been strategic, because the Soviet Army itself needed replenishment. A significant proportion of the munitions were brought from Bug to Warsaw for the offensive but the replenishment was minimal. The railway tracks were destroyed by the Germans as they retreated and all the platforms had been blown up. It was therefore uncertain why the Soviet Army didn't come to the aid of the AK and the uprising. It was assumed that the Soviets did not want to help Polish nationals, essentially opponents of the Soviet Union, with a victory against the Germans in the Polish capital city of Warsaw. Had this uprising been organised by the AL, the Red Army would have almost certainly come to their aid. Our unit was a Polish one and we were located on the other side of the Weichsel, exactly opposite the uprising happening on the other side. The Soviet leadership wanted to show politically that the Socialist Polish army was supporting the Polish uprising. It was thus decided that our regiment would send some scouts over to Warsaw. This mission was made up of about ten men, led by a Jewish soldier from Stanislaw named Senek Stein. He had survived German occupation by hiding with a Pole. The group's task was to spy on the other side of the river and to ascertain how our artillery unit could support the uprising. The group crossed the river by boat and was kitted out with a portable radio station. It was my job to maintain wireless contact with them. In order to get and maintain a decent connection with the reconnaissance mission and a clear and undisturbed signal, I took my radio station to HQ, went up to the third floor and opened a window. I stayed positioned there for some time until I eventually established contact, which was not easy due to the high number of other frequencies in the area.

I was standing there with another wireless operator with whom I was manning the station when a redheaded girl of about six or seven years old went up the stairs. She was singing a Russian melody and I started talking to the child and asked her how she knew the song. She told me that she lived upstairs in a loft apartment. I told the girl to ask her mother if she would mind frying some liver for me. I had a large piece of liver with me, which I had from our provisions store. I had

been there to get provisions of fuel, technical equipment and food, and to collect batteries for the radio equipment. The man in charge of the food provision, Oizelek, was Jewish and from Lodsch and I knew him well. When he saw me he told me that fresh meat had arrived and some fresh liver, and he gave me some.

The girl went on up to her mother and then returned telling me that her mother would fry the liver. I gave her the meat and, when it was cooked, the girl came and called for me. I went upstairs. Their whole flat consisted of one room under the roof and a toilet. I told the mother that she and her daughter should eat some of the liver. As I ate I spoke to the woman, noticing that she was probably also Jewish. Whilst talking, I explained that I was Jewish, whereupon she told me she was too. She explained that she was from Drohobicz and had Aryan papers and had been able to flee from there to Warsaw with her daughter. Her husband also had Aryan papers but he was off somewhere and she didn't know where he was or whether he was even still alive. She also told me that another Jewish lady was living across the hallway, who had also survived thanks to Aryan papers. I met the lady, who was from Tomaschow Lubelsk and was called Marylka. She and her husband had survived for some time with Aryan papers, until a few months previously when he had been detained, questioned then arrested on the street. When they realised he was Jewish, they shot him. The lady had a brother, who had also survived. Later, after the end of the war, I met this woman when I was in Lodsch. She had married again and lived there, and I visited her in her new apartment.

With the help of one or two other controllers, I maintained contact with the reconnaissance group, who, as I recall, were observing the uprising for about two or three days. In the end, we were not needed to help in their mission and they were fortunate enough to return without losses. They even came back with a small orphaned lad of about ten or twelve years old who had lost both parents. He stayed with us until the end of the war, and was even made a small uniform. He was our mascot, and was a clever boy who we all liked having around. We were all convinced he was Jewish but he did not admit to it.

It would have been difficult to support the uprising with artillery. Heavy artillery such as ours required a specific target area for shelling. We had neither in this case, and would only have only been firing at

the resistance. Military command came to the conclusion that the reconnaissance team had put themselves in danger unnecessarily. This was one way of looking at it but not everyone agreed. One thing was clear: the AK insurgents were given no support and were thus brutally defeated by the Germans.

While we were stationed in Gruckow, I remained in contact with the lady from Drohobicz and helped her as much as I could. She introduced me to a Pole, who did not know she was Jewish and who lived in a detached house on the other side of the street. This man showed me a house where the loft was used for storing empty cans used for shoe cream and bees wax. As with other buildings nearby, this house had been abandoned because of its proximity to the river and because of the occasional firing on them from the Germans on the other side. Our soldiers often went to these abandoned houses looking for everything they could take and thought they could sell. They even risked their lives doing this under fire. I agreed with the Polish man that I would get the tins so he could sell them and we could share the money. He arranged a buyer and I packed the tins into sacks and delivered them. I had to make several trips as there were so many. He was unable to sell the tins used for floor polish. After this, I had sufficient money since our pay as soldiers was so little that it was negligible. There were no shops, only a black market where individuals and dealers sold all sorts of things.

I met another Jewish lady and her daughter of about fifteen years old. They were also very fortunate to have survived. I lived with four other soldiers in the flat of a Polish lady three streets away from HQ. She was on her own, as her husband been shot by the Germans. This woman had a visit from a friend who was also a Jewish lady, who had also managed to survive with Aryan papers. Once I had the money from the sale of the tins, I was able to help this woman from Borislaw. I went to the market with her and bought some necessities for her and her daughter, including some food. I paid because she had real financial difficulties since she had no possessions she could have traded for food. I also managed to give her some food I got from our army provisions.

The break in fighting spent on the Weichsel until the offensive started lasted about three months, because we had to wait for replenishments, fuel, equipment, provisions, ammunition and vehicles, etc. It was hard to bring in the replenishments since all the railway

lines had been destroyed. The Germans had used a special vehicle for breaking railway sleepers, and had detonated explosives along the platforms at a distance of about every two metres. As a result, the tracks between the river and Warsaw needed to be rebuilt. The Russians brought in Mongols for this work. During this standstill of three months on the Weichsel, our unit was given two weeks leave in Otwock for rest. Otwock is a well-known spa town not far from Warsaw. Firing was still being exchanged in Gruckow the whole time. The moment our scouts discovered that the Germans were building a new post or were setting up an observation point or machine gun nest, then we opened fire and attempted to immediately destroy it. Despite the standstill on the front, we didn't experience a complete ceasefire.

The year 1944 was drawing to a close and it was the pre-Christmas period. In Poland it is a tradition that young people sing Christmas carols in front of their homes in the evening. A group of soldiers belonging to our division went one evening to the residential area not far from the HQ and sang carols there. I also went along because I was on duty and didn't want to be discharged. I even tried to sing along and managed with some of the lines, but never managed a whole song. The residents came out of their homes and invited us in. Those who had something to offer us gave us something to eat or drink, but most were unable to offer us anything. In one home, I noticed that one or two windows were covered with nailed up parchment Torah scrolls. When I saw what these Polish anti-Semites had done with our Torah scrolls I thought to myself that it was it a shame the German artillery had not fired harder on these houses and destroyed them, along with their anti-Semitic inhabitants.

In the meantime, a Polish Government had been established under General Berling. This was known as the Lublin Government and was a precursor to the Polish Communist government, which was established after the war in Warsaw. There was still an exiled government in London, who the communists considered revanchist.

At the beginning of January, our regiment was transferred to the south of Warsaw in the Góra Kalwaria region also on the Weichsel. This area was uninhabited; it was flat land and along the river was a high, filled-up dam. A bunker had been built in the dam out of tree trunks for command. For the men, accommodation was Zemlankes covered with wood. The batteries went undercover and we wait-

ed for the Warsaw offensive. The reconnaissance teams constructed their observation points and the batteries set up their weapons in position for firing. The reconnaissance teams informed command of intelligence gathered on German base and observation positions. There was light shelling every day on both sides. There was a lot of movement and concentrated effort with heavy machinery by the Russian army because crossings had to be constructed over the Weichsel, to ensure the later transportation of tanks and heavy equipment to the other side. These substantial operations had to be undetectable so the Germans would not learn that an imminent offensive was being prepared against them and would not open fire. The Red Army also arranged concentrated military positions in other places to divert German attention away from the actual site of the bridgehead, where the Weichsel crossing was planned. This offensive was one of the most difficult in this war because it involved crossing such a wide river, and there was no longer a surviving bridge after the Germans had blown them all up. This location was chosen because Warsaw was to be surrounded and the various armies were to push forward to Bydgoszcz and on to Pomerania and the Baltic Sea, and then in the direction of Berlin.

The day of the offensive came. The artillery, to which our brigade also belonged, began an attack which lasted all day, firing relentlessly with full force on German positions, from early that morning until late that evening. The whole area was under fire in a murderous bombardment. During the evening and night, soldiers were parachuted in to enemy territory on the other side of the river under the cover of artillery fire, to build the bridgehead. Immediately after this, more units of the Red Army, also covered by heaving fire, were transported across the river in boats of all sizes to increase the bridgehead. Subsequently, pioneer units started building floating bridges and temporary wooden crossings. The floating bridges were operational after a few hours, enabling trucks and tanks to cross with soldiers who could increase and secure the bridgehead until the larger tank divisions as well as others were able to cross the river. The bridgehead and the construction of the first bridges cost the lives of many men from our side. The Germans, despite heavy losses and despite the heavy artillery pounding they were exposed to, still had enough strength to fire on our bridge builders with their artillery. These teams lost many men. We also had a casualty from command, namely the secretary. An artillery grenade explod-

ed right next to command's bunker as he was coming out. Shrapnel hit him and he was killed on the spot. He was Polish and from Stanislaw and was a good friend of Senek Stein.

Larger units, including our brigade, could now cross the river as the bridgehead was being continually expanded with the construction of floating bridges and wooden bridges. When enough military was gathered at the bridgehead, we started hitting the Germans with heavier fire, forcing them to pull back. The bridgehead was near Góra Kalwaria. This is where the renowned Gerer Rebbe had lived before the war, who had thousands of devout followers who regularly undertook pilgrimages to him. These followers were known as Gerrer Hasidim. Even today there are many of them in Israel and America. Rich Hasidic Jews used large bribes to buy his freedom, making it possible for him to leave Poland and emigrate to America.

Our attack was such that the Germans had to leave Warsaw hastily, otherwise they would have been closed in. Our regiment belonged to an independent artillery brigade, which reported directly to command as opposed to having to report to any other unit. During the battles we also supported Soviet troops and advanced with these units. Our command advanced with that of the Soviet command. The Germans left Warsaw and we pushed on through the city. It was completely deserted. Almost every building was burnt, damaged from shelling or completely destroyed. It was practically a ghost town, with not a single inhabitant to be seen on the streets. Up until this point we had always been welcomed by residents of the towns we passed and were enthusiastically received. However, in Warsaw, the streets were piled with the rubble of fallen buildings, to the extent that our convoy of vehicles had real difficulties getting through the city at all.

The military convoy then moved on to the next large town in the direction of Pomerania, namely Bydgoszcz, which was the last Polish town before the border with Germany. On the way to Bydgoszcz we still had to gain small towns and there were heavy skirmishes. After a few days, we reached our destination in the evening; the inhabitants greeted us enthusiastically and joyously as liberators. We slept there before moving towards Germany in the morning. The German border was only about seventy kilometres away, and the next German town of Schneidenmühl about one hundred kilometres. Our highest-ranking officers from central command were convinced we should ex-

pect further action with the Germans. They expected a large counter-attack just before crossing the border between Poland and the German Reich. The officers were very nervous, as they had been informed by their superiors to prepare for a heavy counter-attack and did not know how the Germans would react should the Red Army continue to pursue them into the German Reich. Neither did they know what defensive lines or bases the Germans had prepared. Due to this uncertainty, large reserves had been kept aside for this breakthrough. This was, after all, a historically significant act, that the Red Army was to victoriously cross the border into Germany. The renown of the Red Army was at stake. A bitter battle was indeed fought just in front of the border with Germany, requiring large tank divisions, heavy artillery and Katjuscha rocket launchers.

Our brigade was deployed in this battle, which lasted a few days. The Germans were ultimately no longer able to withstand the onslaught and lost some ground until they were pushed back to the German border, at which point there was major fighting. The Red Army retaliated with such a strong and concentrated fire that, after a day and a half, the Germans could not hold this position and had to withdraw back into German territory.

The Germans had built strong defensive lines in the meantime at the border, which the Red Army now had to cross. Our military command understood that the Germans would now use all possible means to prevent this. However the sheer concentration of shelling from the Red Army resulted in the Germans being forced to retreat and, in so doing, they were then under continual pressure, leaving them no opportunity to regroup or re-establish the defensive lines they had prepared. We gave them no rest, day or night, and continued pounding their positions. The Germans put up a valiant fight but were given no chance to counter-attack or put pressure on the Red Army. Without the possibility of regrouping to defend, they continued to withdraw deeper into German territory.

We thus crossed the border into the German Reich and were fighting on German soil. When we crossed from Poland into German territory, Russian officers and soldiers wrote on cardboard and large pieces of paper with pencils or chalk "Germany be damned" and then hung them on walls, telephone poles and trees. Our brigade was involved in all of these campaigns. It was hard to describe how thrilled we were to be on German soil. The officers and soldiers hugged each other and we were happy.

We continued our advance, marching in to the medium-sized town of Schneidenmühl. The town was almost untouched by the fighting. There was still coffee in the cups and breakfast left on the table. The inhabitants must have had to flee unexpectedly. German civilians were terrified of the Russians and all were convinced they would take revenge for the atrocities committed by the Germans in Russia. I myself was incredibly happy and could hardly believe that I had successfully fought against Germans as a soldier and was now pursuing them in their own country. I did not know whether it was a dream or reality, that I was now a soldier carrying a weapon in a German town and that the Germans were now scared of me. Only a short time before, only a year ago, I had been hiding in Prociuk's barn, terrified of being found. Only one and a half years ago, I had run away from the Jewish settlement at Borszczow, where Jewish people were shot in the street and my sister, aunts, my uncle and my friends, acquaintances and loved ones were murdered. I had miraculously got away in time and had been able to save myself, and was now a soldier on German soil. It was almost too much to comprehend. I was caught up with thoughts of my loved ones, of my family, and thought to myself how this would be some sort of consolation to them, had they seen this now.

There was a very large German military base in Schneidenmühl with army equipment, clothing, supplies, etc. Our forces and those of the Red Army made use of these provisions, each taking whatever they wanted. I took a pair of army boots, as I had only been given a pair of lace-up shoes with my uniform and they were not half as comfortable or practical as leather boots. I wore these leather boots for some time – even after the war during my time in Lodsch, Krakau and Budapest.

We continued our advance beyond this town. Our aim was to reach the Baltic Sea and the town of Kolberg, which was on the coast. We were already in Pomerania. The advance was slower this time, and regularly interrupted by heavy fighting. There were lots of lakes in this region. Military command's plan was to reach the Baltic and then cut off eastern Prussia from the rest of the German Reich. Our division advanced with the Red Army division. We passed through many small towns and villages – all devoid of inhabitants. Everyone had fled with the German army, which must have been very sudden since they had clearly left everything behind. In one place, where our division stopped

with the Russians, the Russian Commander received a radio transmission direct from a Russian fighting unit. The message, or rather the question, was: "What do we do now? We are pursuing a German unit and a lake is in front of us." Whereupon the Commander answered: "Nitschewo, talkat ich woshero." (Do nothing, drive them into the water). I heard this exactly because my transmitter was next to that of the Russian division. We continued to pursue the Germans to Kolberg, which continued to be interrupted by German efforts to resist. Heavy fighting was always the result, but the Germans could not match the superior force of the Soviet army. They continued to retreat, suffering heavy losses.

Between Schneidenmühl and Kolberg, I'm not sure exactly where, we suddenly came across some Jewish women. They were emaciated and were on foot between army platoons. They were women who the Soviet army had liberated from the Stutthof concentration camp at Sztetowo in Poland. They had been on the move for days in the direction of Bydgoszcz. Now and then they were taken some of the distance in army trucks by the Red Army. I was able to talk to some of them, although not for long, since we had to push on. They explained to me briefly that Stutthof was a concentration camp for women, and how horrific it had been there. They told me how the camp inhabitants had died of exhaustion and starvation, and how terribly the female wardens had treated the prisoners. This was the first time I even heard of the existence of female concentration camps. They couldn't tell me much, because we didn't have the time and had to keep going. They only said that they were looking better now than they did when they were first liberated, because they had been given enough food to eat and some new clothes – taken from the houses left empty by the fleeing Germans. When they were liberated they had nothing but ripped cloth to wear, and many had to remain in the camp because they were too undernourished and weak to move.

We arrived in the Baltic town of Kolberg. It was a very beautiful, small and clean holiday destination. Almost all houses were built in the style of seaside villas, with very beautiful gardens. The town was also deserted; the entire population had fled upon our advance. Once again, unfinished plates of food had been abandoned on the tables in the hasty departure.

We stayed in Kolberg about two weeks. There was no fighting or firing; all was calm and we were able to rest. The cellars of the hous-

es were full of preserving jars filled with stewed fruit, jams, vegetables and preserved meats. There was also good cracker bread. We were able to help ourselves to as much as we liked, which we did since army provisions were not that great. One morning, a chap from our battery came to see me – he was Jewish and from Warsaw and had survived, having been deported to Siberia and Kazakhstan. He told me that it was the first day of Passover, upon which I abstained from eating bread for the next seven days, only eating cracker bread. Cracker bread was the nearest thing to matzah and, although not kosher, was symbolic for me.

When the Red Army caught up with us in Kolberg, a part of Pomerania and East Prussia was effectively cut off from the rest of the German Reich. Thus a section of the German army and resident population were also cut off; they were no longer able to reach Germany by land and could only do so by sea.

Once the two week break in Kolberg was over, our unit was sent on an offensive in the direction of Berlin. This involved heavy fighting once again as the Germans had strengthened their position, deploying tanks, to halt our advance on Berlin. We were stationed in the area of the Oderbruch.

One afternoon, our unit received an order that our batteries retaliate immediately if directly fired upon. Such a response is always a dangerous and risky operation. Heavy artillery guns normally stand away from the frontline and fire at the enemy from a safe distance using information on coordinates. Only in extreme and critical circumstances were direct bombardments adopted. However, in critical and threatening situations, where the aim was to reduce or completely avoid the possibility of enemy attack, heavy artillery was used for direct bombardments. This entailed bringing the guns into combat position as quickly as possible and firing immediately at enemy targets. Then the guns had to be pulled back quickly so that the enemy could not then fire back at them, which was possible if they were in range of vision.

Batteries were normally positioned at the rear. Late one afternoon when it was already dark, our unit took the trucks pulling the weapons and vehicles transporting soldiers to the area of old Oderbruch and started putting the weapons in position. All of a sudden tanks began firing on our partly established positions and had some direct hits. Immediately our troops began a retreat with the vehicles and

weapons that had not been damaged. There were many casualties in our unit and some of the vehicles and machinery had been destroyed. The incident was the result of an error. In the dark, we had mistakenly gone into enemy territory, and had not noticed that the tanks stationed there were German instead of our own. This was the biggest hit our unit had experienced during the whole campaign. Despite the fierce German resistance and attempt at a break through, the Germans couldn't retaliate sufficiently against the greater pressure and firing of the Red Army. The Germans continued to suffer grave losses and pull back to Berlin. Every thirty or forty kilometres, the Germans built new defence lines and tried to halt the advance of our troops. However, with every attempt, they lost more lives and had to retreat still further. This is how it continued towards Berlin until there was another major fight at Eberswalde, about eighty kilometres from Berlin. My friend Mottel Kubert, who had survived by hiding in the loft of the national building in Mielnice and had joined the army with me, lost his life in this fighting.

He was on an inspection round along the telephone lines running between his artillery battery and the observation point and was hit by a grenade. When I heard this, I could hardly believe it; I was devastated and deeply saddened to the point that I was really at a loss. Of all the people, Mottel had to be hit; and just before Berlin, just before the German Wehrmacht was to capitulate. After everything he had been through in the army, after having practically starved in hiding in the national building roof; having almost frozen under the tin roof until he was free again. And now, just as we were about to reach Berlin, after he had fought this criminal regime, responsible for having murdered his people, and who had tried – and failed – to murder him; just as we were about to taste victory, he had to die. He would no longer know the joy of victory, and would not witness how the Generals and Commanders of this evil force would become Soviet prisoners in their own capital.

Every town and village, whether large or small, was deserted of people as we crossed Germany on our way to Berlin. The inhabitants had left everything behind and hastily fled the surroundings of Berlin. Once in the capital, the population had stayed. There were also many refugees, who did not know where to go. Berlin was surrounded. We got closer and closer, despite the ongoing resistance of the German army. We took more and more Germans prisoner as we fought

our way on to the capital. On 21 April we reached the suburbs of Berlin. When I saw the signs for Berlin when we reached Frohnau and Wittenau showing how many kilometres remained, I could not believe that I, a Jewish soldier, had now arrived in the capital of the German Reich; when only a short time before I had shaken from fear and panic at being shot at the sight of a single German in our town. Now I was armed, manning a radio station and passing on information, messages and orders for firing on German positions. I was barely able to comprehend this new reality and kept having to run it through my mind again and again because it was actually happening. And yet, despite this reality, the fact remained that I was still felt the fear and horror, which was deeply embedded in me after the three years of horrific German occupation.

Our unit advanced on Berlin from the North, arriving at the Wittenau and Reinickendorf districts running up towards Charlottenburg. People who were still living in houses hung white sheets out of the windows. It looked like a white forest. Another battle raged on the streets. A large portion of the buildings were burnt out or bombed and the streets were barely passable. Huge piles of rubble lay about. The inhabitants were all in their air raid shelters. Our regiment was given the order to fire on the bunkers in the Tiergarten. Our division positioned itself for this in the back part of the Charlottenburg town hall; it's entrance was easily defendable from firing because it had an annexe on the side. The entrance was the entrance for the registry office. A Red Army department also took over some of the rooms near ours. Just next to the entrance was a pile of rubble from a building which had been destroyed. Two dead German soldiers lay next to it. As well as being told to fire at the bunkers, we were also told to fire at the area around Potsdamer Platz, where the German government buildings were located. We fired at these a week long without letting up. There were other fierce battles raging around the city. My team and I received a radio message from the observation points about a direct hit. The divisional commander, Baranowski, was pleased when he received this information, and was convinced that Berlin would be completely captured within a few days. Particularly as the German army had now been completely squeezed and only occupied the very centre of the city. It was inconceivable that the Germans would successfully break out of this trap. The Head of the Red Army division who was in the neighbouring room was also very confident that

it was only a matter of days until the Germans gave up the fight for the capital. Radio reports continually reported new successes of bases which had been silenced. My team and I were continually receiving information on new targets from the observation points, which were to be fired upon. They were quickly passed on to the divisional command, who then gave orders on which battalion should fire on which targets. I was almost deliriously happy when the observation points reported direct hits on enemy targets. I cannot explain the almost hypnotic effect the battle for the government quarter of Berlin had on me. Only fifteen months after the Germans had been persecuting Jews, our Jewish commander Colonel Parchamowski was giving me coordinates relating to targets within the government quarter and I was passing these on to the divisional chief, also Jewish, Major Baranowski. Once again, orders were given regarding which battalion should fire at which target.

I still cannot put into words exactly how I felt during this battle: almost joyous to be witnessing the destruction of these bastards, their capital city, their government buildings, their headquarters and administration. I was there and I was passing on the orders by which these were to be destroyed – I was almost delirious. I'm not sure whether this was a moment of madness, fantasy, imagination or illusion. I was intensively caught up in the destruction and annihilation of this barbaric and evil regime. This was an ambiguous feeling; on the one hand there was the indescribable joy at having been one of only a few who had had the good fortune to have personally survived, and to now be an essential part of the destruction of Germany; on the other hand there was a deep mourning for the loss of my loved ones, friends, acquaintances and all those Jewish people who had been murdered in such a brutal way.

We received reports of direct hits on enemy bases, and passed them on to the divisional Chief Baranowski. The Germans put up a strong fight and were still trying to break out of their surrounded position. We continuously received intelligence from the observation points on the position of these bases, which should then be fired upon, and passed them on. It was a last desperate fight from the Germans, whose position was gradually weakening. Whenever we thought it was finally reaching an end there was, suddenly, another desperate retaliation from the German side. It went on and on. It was particularly bad in the area between the Reichstag and Potsdamer

Platz, where the many German elite units were trying to defend the government buildings. Our regiment was also allocated to attack this area. The worst part of it was the nests of heavy machine guns hidden in the buildings. As soon as we had a direct artillery hit on one of these nests, destroying it, a new nest would appear quickly afterwards, either a storey higher or lower or in another building altogether. This is how it continued. The observation points passed on direct hits whenever we shut a nest down, and we then expected an end to it. However firing would also start up again from a new enemy position. Our regimental commander Parchamowski was in Berlin the whole time with the observation points and passed on the orders to the divisional chief, in particular relating to the targets we should be firing at. The pressure and shelling imposed on the Germans by the Soviet Army increased until the German elite troops had to surrender early one morning on 2 May.

The German army capitulated in Berlin on 2 May and its soldiers were taken prisoner. The German generals and divisional commanders were taken to the Soviet divisional headquarters, which were near our headquarters. We were not sure whether it was the main chief in charge of the whole of Berlin or only the man in charge of the frontline. I was standing outside and watched how these officers were led into the Soviet HQ with lowered heads. Outside, the soldiers were jubilant; everyone was dancing, hugging, kissing and getting drunk. We had no idea what we were to do, we were so ecstatic. I myself could hardly believe it, that I had fought in this battle against the Germans all the way to Berlin and was now witnessing our victory. A victory over the German army, which had occupied almost the whole continent, victory over a people who had wanted to enslave the whole of Europe and who had brutally murdered my parents, my sister, my grandmother and all my relatives – who wanted to murder the entire Jewish population. I was now in Berlin, the very same city from which the orders and instructions for murdering our people had been issued. Now I was witnessing with my own eyes, how the generals and leaders were led with bowed heads to neighbouring headquarters. It was unbelievable. I have mentioned it already, but I was unable to shake off the recent and traumatic memory of hiding in fear on Prociuk's barn floor, in fear of being discovered. I remembered also how fast I ran away at the sight of a German in uniform when we were in Borszczow – ran to hide so as not to be shot to death. Now, af-

ter fifteen months of this horrific, brutal, murderous period, which I had only miraculously managed to survive, I was part of the victory as army transmitter. I played a part in the destruction of the evil heart of this regime.

The celebrations went on and on by day and night. We were yet to hear news of the complete capitulation; Berlin had surrendered but there was still fighting outside of Berlin, in the west.

A New Life after the War

Displaced Person

Our regiment was transferred after four days. We went to a small town called Wriezen about sixty kilometres outside of Berlin. We simply occupied people's homes since there were hardly any inhabitants – most had fled during the fighting. We stayed about three weeks in order to get some much needed rest. During these three weeks of quiet we had to clean and organise the equipment and clean the cannons, although we also had a lot of free time. We told each other what we had done during the fighting and talked about the critical phases we had just survived, and about what we wanted to do once we had been discharged by the army. Everyone hoped to be discharged soon and talked of home, of parents and siblings and what they would do when they all met up at home. We also discussed our futures. I listened to the plans of my fellow soldiers and thought about where I should go. I no longer had parents, nor siblings or relatives. Our house had been destroyed and I no longer had a home to speak of. All my friends and acquaintances had been murdered. There were hardly any Jews left in my home town. Returning to Mielnice was not an option for me. It just wasn't something I considered. I could no longer return and live amongst the Ukrainian thugs, the *Banderowcy*, who had murdered Jews sometimes more brutally than even the SS and Gestapo. But I needed to go somewhere once I was discharged. Where should I stay? To which town should I go? I couldn't think of a single town where I had acquaintances to whom I could turn. I did not want to go to eastern Poland, which was now occupied by the Soviet Union. Such thoughts occupied me increasingly. I simply could not imagine what was to become of me once I left the army. However, having survived the indescribable horror of the German occupation and remaining unhurt almost a year as

13 The General decorates Colonel Parchamowski, leader of my unit, 1 June 1945.

a soldier on the front fighting the German army, I hoped, upon leaving the army, to somehow get sorted and establish myself somewhere.

On 8 May came the news: the German army had capitulated. The Generals and the Marshals of the German Wehrmacht had been imprisoned. A victory party was organised by units of the Red Army and our Brigade. A parade involving the whole Brigade to celebrate the victory over fascist Germany was approved by the General, and was to take place in Gusow, about ten kilometres away from Wriezen where we were stationed.

It was our Brigade's birthday on 1 June; on this day our Brigade had been founded in Sumy. To celebrate this we arranged a celebration in Gusow, in which our Regiment leader, Colonel Parchamowski was decorated by the General.

On 5 June our unit left Wriezen and we were transferred to Poland. We arrived in the town of Wozlawek, not far from Warsaw. We were put up in barracks and began a military life typical of peace time. I went into town to find out if there were any Jews. I cannot remember now how I found out, but I learned of a house in a certain street where young Jews were living. I went to this house, where some young men and women lived in a flat in the courtyard.

After we had met, they told me that they had been in the Auschwitz camp and were some of the few who had survived it. This was the first time I had heard of Auschwitz. They told me everything they had been

14 An undated photo of Israel with two girls, who had survived Auschwitz.

through and that, when they had finally been freed, they were only skin and bones and barely able to walk. They told me about the gas chambers and the crematoria. I could hardly comprehend what they were telling me. They also told me about the Majdanek camp, at which point I realised that we had passed Majdanek when we captured Lublin and were moving on towards Warsaw – we had no idea it was a death camp and thought it was something to do with the military.

I became friends with these people. Before the war, they had been members of the Zionist organisation *Haschomer Hazah'er*. They now wanted to emigrate to Palestine. They told me that there were more Jews in Lodsch as well as a Zionist organisation and the Ichud Kibbutz in Zachodnia street. I decided to go to Lodsch and take a look, in the hope of perhaps coming across some acquaintances. I requested leave from the Commanding Officer, which was subsequently granted.

I took the train to Lodsch, which was free for soldiers. I arrived during the night but had absolutely no money. I laid down on the cold stone floor of the train station and slept. In the morning I asked around for directions to Zachodnia street and made my way there – or perhaps I took a tram, I no longer remember.

I eventually arrived at my destination and the Ichud Kibbutz, which was run by the Zionist organisation *Ichud*. The word *Ichud* in Hebrew means 'unity' Before the war, there had been different youth organisations like: *Hanoar Hazioni*, *Akiba*, *Gordonia* amongst others. After the

15 An undated photo from the Ichud Kibbutz. I am wearing a cap.

war these all merged into the *Ichud* movement. I went to one of their administrative offices and introduced myself, explaining that I had been a member of *Hanoar Hazioni* before the war and, in 1939 before the war's outbreak, had been at a summer camp in Skawa. I listed the names of the leaders and the members from Lemberg, whose names I could remember. They were able to tell me who from the list of names was still alive, for example Hanka Emek and Artek Kweler and his wife, who were originally from Lemberg. Hilek Seidel, Bezek Lemberger and David Meler were members of the main committee.

There was a large number of young women and men, around one hundred and fifty, who had survived the war and were now at or in the Kibbutz. They had all been orphaned, since their parents had been murdered. At the Kibbutz they were fed and were given lessons as well as being prepared for the *Alija*, the emigration to Palestine (the State of Israel had not yet been proclaimed). The Kibbutz was run by Henjek and Josek – I only knew their first names – and was financed by the *Sochnut* and some American organisations. There were also some delegates from Palestine who had started organising the *Bricha* – meaning illegal emigration to Palestine. The *Bricha*'s priority was to get Jews in Poland as far west as possible, preferably to Germany and the American zone. At the time,the number of Jews in Poland was increasing, as those who had fled East from the Germans, and those who had been evacuated to Siberia by the Russians, started returning. Among them

were also property owners and wealthy Jews who had been deported by the Soviets to Siberia, and many who had fled with the Russians as the Russians retreated before the German invasion and who were now able to return to Poland as Polish citizens.

Once again I was struck at how chance or fate play such a significant role. When the communists occupied Eastern Poland, all land and property owners from our town were forcibly deported with their families to Siberia, which was considered a huge misfortune. We had pitied them. And now that the war was finally over, it turned out that almost all of them had survived thanks to having being taken away against their will. We considered those who, by chance, escaped these deportations as the 'lucky ones'. Only afterwards did it become clear that their fortune was actually their misfortune, since those who stayed were almost all murdered by the Germans.

The Zionist organisation began to gather Jews. Sites were arranged in Hungary, Budapest, Czechoslovakia, Prague, Bratislava and West Berlin. The mandate was to transport these Jews in groups from Poland to sites where they would then be sent on to Vienna or West Berlin, or from West Berlin further into West Germany or directly to Bavaria and the American Zone. Those travelling from Vienna were brought to the Mediterranean either to Italy or the South of France, to then be brought illegally to Palestine by boat. This was called the *Alija Bet*. From West Berlin the groups were taken to West Germany to the UNRRA camps, where all refugees were taken in. The transportation from Poland to Hungary and then on to Austria or to Berlin and West Germany was not legal and had to be covertly arranged. In order to carry this out logistically, both delegates from Palestine based in Lodsch and operatives from Zionist organisations in Poland worked together to target willing idealists.

Bricha (1946–1948)

(Bricha was part of the larger operation, Aliya Bet, and aimed to help Jewish Holocaust survivors leave Europe at the end of the Second World War)

I decided not to return to the army, and instead started working for an organisation called *Bricha*. I left my army jacket behind and instead started wearing a navy blue parka of the British army which I had got hold of. I was told by my superiors at *Bricha* to go to Kraków, where there was a kibbutz and also one of the *Bricha* bases. I was supposed to track down someone known as 'little David', due to his diminutive stature. There were many young people like me at the kibbutz, which was run by a woman called Dinka. As soon as I arrived in the city I reported to David and stayed for a few days, living in the kibbutz. It was there I also met Dowid and Vima who both worked there; it was usual in the *Bricha* to be on first name terms. After a few days, I received an order to accompany some people to Budapest and bring them to the base there, a large site where Jewish people arriving from Poland could be housed. 'David the yellow' worked in Budapest with his wife. He was called David the yellow as he was bright blonde. I was in Budapest for three days; the city was beautiful and undamaged by the war. I strolled around in the lovely summer weather and, around lunchtime, went to an outdoor restaurant as I was very hungry. The waiter asked me something in Hungarian but I couldn't understand him. I pointed to the neighbouring table where someone had been served half a golden roasted chicken with gravy, fresh bread and watermelon, and indicated that I wanted the same. The waiter first brought me the melon and bread. The melon was delicious. He then brought the chicken; I took a piece of bread and dipped it in the gravy and tried it. I thought my mouth was on

fire, it was so spicy. My eyes began watering and my tongue was burning. I ate one piece of melon after the other to relieve the burning sensation, which only stopped hours later. The gravy had been made with hot paprika and I had never eaten such a spicy meal in my life. Hungarians were used to it, but it made an impression on me that I have never forgotten.

From Budapest I took the train back to Kraków. David the yellow gave me various messages and instructions which I was to pass on when I got there. The relaying of messages and information was only entrusted to people in the time directly after the war. There were no telephone lines and the post took weeks. Besides, our activities were secret, essentially illegal and undertaken in countries controlled and under surveillance by the communists and Soviet Union. Zionists were considered revanchist by the communists, as well as being people who attempted to smuggle others out of the Soviet empire to a revanchist country; a punishable offence. Those who had been caught for this received heavy prison sentences and were deported to Siberia, which happened to acquaintances of mine mentioned later.

This secret activity was only possible due to the huge disruption in Europe at the time because of the displacement of tens, indeed hundreds of thousands of people; for example, people who were returning to their home towns having been moved to Germany for forced labour. Other refugees, who had left their home regions during the fighting, were also now returning. There was an exchange of population between eastern Poland and western Ukraine as the Soviet Union kept a part of what had formerly been Poland for itself. Because of this, Poland then claimed German territory, known as Silesia and Pomerania, and moved Polish people there. People of all nationalities, who had survived the camps, made their way back home to various destinations in any number of European countries, many travelling with no documentation whatsoever. It was only due to this complete chaos that the *Bricha* could be set up, and that thousands of Jews could travel or be effectively smuggled out of areas controlled by the Soviet Union. This situation had to be quickly taken advantage of in order to organise the movement of people as fast, and with as little risk, as possible. Every route was always risky since they involved crossing national borders, which were all controlled. We did however take advantage of other border crossings, which weren't as heavily guarded because the Red Army used them. When I came back to Kraków from Budapest and passed

on the messages and instructions I had been given, I was sent accompanying people another two or three times to Budapest, and once to Prague and Bratislava.

After various trips I was then sent to Lodsch where there was a meeting involving Hilek Seidel and Bezek Lemberger from *Ichud* as well as two from *Haschomer Hazah'er* and a delegate from *Jischuw*, as the Jewish population living at the time in what was then Palestine were called. He was called Shimon and came from the Degania kibbutz. At this meeting the discussion was about whether it would be possible to set up a *Bricha* base in West Berlin, so that large numbers of people could be moved there from Stettin. West Berlin was chosen since it was occupied by the Americans, British and French, and it was a relatively short distance from Stettin to Berlin. It was decided that I would be sent to Berlin to have a look around, find out what the conditions were like there, what possibilities there might be, and generally ascertain whether it would be sensible and practical to set up a base there.

I went to Berlin by train, as at the time train travel was no problem from Poland to neighbouring countries without papers. The authorities were unable to stay on top of the huge movement of people. I arrived at Lichtenberg station in Berlin and went straight on the nearby underground. I had no idea that underground trains existed before then. I went down the stairs where a conductor asked to see my ticket. In Russian I answered "What do you want?" When he heard me speak Russian he no longer needed to see a ticket and was happy that I didn't want anything from him. My destination was Oranienburger Street where apparently the Jewish Committee, or community, was. I cannot remember what they used to be called. Neither can I remember who gave me the address. At Lichtenberg Station I asked how to get to Oranienburger Street. I was told to go to Alexanderplatz and then go down a level lower, find the platform and change to a line going to Oranienburger Street. Oranienburger Street was the street where the large synagogue had been burned down, as well as a neighbouring building to the left where the administrative offices had been. The neighbouring building was only partially damaged and was now inhabited by some refugees, as well as housing an office for the community and the administration for the building. I immediately made contact with the administration and with dedicated people from Jewish institutions which where already there, and others which were be-

ing set up. There were three places in Berlin where Jewish refugees stayed: Oranienburger Street, Ryke Street and Iranische Street, where the Jewish hospital had been before the war. All three Jewish organisations, *Joint*, the Jewish Congress and the Jewish community of Berlin, attended to survivors and refugees. There was also some temporary shared accommodation for Jews as well as German/Jewish families who had survived the war, either by hiding or surviving the concentration camps.

I made contact with the leaders of the re-established Jewish community; Erich Nelhans was in charge, supported by Julius Meyer, Wilhelm Busch, Katz Rotholz and Dr Fabian. At that time, Aaron Saurimper and Israel Gepner and his wife, both from Lodsch in Poland, were also living in Berlin. Other Jewish people were living in flats which had been confiscated from the Nazis as part of the general denazification. After I talked to Herr Nelhans about what I was planning he offered his full support.

The city was divided into four sectors; Russian, American, British and French. Each sector was overseen by a military commander. The borders between sectors were marked by signs, although the population moved freely between sectors without restriction. There was already a representative of the Jewish organisation *Joint* in the American sector. There was also an American military Rabbi, a chaplain who had his own office and dealt with the Jewish population and refugees.

From the few days I spent in Berlin I realised that bringing people from Poland to West Berlin was hardly a solution, since Berlin was effectively an island surrounded by the Red Army and under Soviet occupation. Although the people brought to Berlin by *Bricha* would be under American protection, it would not be the same as being in West Germany. In Lodsch in Poland, people believed at the time that being in West Berlin was the same as being in West Germany. They didn't really know that the reality was that West Berlin was surrounded by Soviet-controlled Eastern Germany and that leaving the American sector to go to West Germany meant travelling through Soviet territory.

I also found out that it was possible to send people to West Germany with the help of UNRRA. UNRRA was an American relief organisation, also represented in West Berlin, and I assumed that Jewish Americans would support efforts to transport Jews to West Germany.

I took this information back to Lodsch with me, although it is worth mentioning that getting to Lodsch was no easy or comfortable task. You couldn't just buy a ticket and hop on a train. At the time, train travel was incredibly risky; trains were full and packed to the brim, with people hardly able to move. Sometimes you had to stand outside on a step, and some even travelled on the roofs of the carriages. This was how I had to travel. Once I even went all the way to Berlin in open rolling stock transporting iron poles.

When I arrived in Lodsch, I reported on the contacts I had made in Berlin and my thoughts about how things could be organised, including how people could be transported and where a *Bricha* base could be established. Representatives from *Jischuw*, the Degania kibbutz, *Haschomer Hazah'er*, *Ichud* and from the revisionists took part in this discussion. The Bricha was made up of employees made available by each of the Zionist organisations of varying ideological persuasions. It was decided that one base should be set up in Berlin and another in Stettin; transportation was to run from Stettin to Berlin and it was decided that I was to take over the Berlin operation. A few others were sent with me to Berlin, where I was to be known as Stefan. I was given two hundred dollars to spend. Later I was joined by colleagues: Kuta from *Haschomer Hazah'er*, Haim and Baruch from *Ichud* and, after a time, Batja and Nathan. We went to Berlin, experiencing the kind of travelling difficulties I have described.

Upon arrival we made our way to Oranienburger Street. We were given a room with two bunk beds, although not many people could be housed in Oranienburger Street because few rooms were available. We had to be able to accommodate the many people we expected to be brought here as part of the operation. Straight away I got in touch with the community leader, Herr Nelhans, explained our plans to him in detail and told him that we required his help with accommodation for refugees. He promised me that, when the time came, he would do everything he could to help. He put me in touch with the head of Ryke Street and Iranische Street, both of whom also agreed to help where they could.

Operations in Stettin were arranged by Josek Meler and Mottek Sandberg who, with help of colleagues, were responsible for organising transport and creating opportunities for delivering people to Berlin from Stettin. There was really only one possibility; using Soviet military vehicles – obviously unofficially. Soviet troops were travel-

ling regularly with trucks from Stettin to the outskirts of Berlin and then on to the centre. There were Jews living in Stettin at the time who had grocery businesses, and others who did business with Soviet officers. They sent trucks with bacon and butter to Berlin and, on the way back, brought leather, sweets, synthetic material, rolls of cloth and other blackmarket items, which were scarce in Poland at the time. Thanks to this access to Soviet officers and, upon payment, we were able to start sending people from Stettin to Berlin. There were also some Jews who paid the officers direct to transport people, and then rented a truck with a Soviet driver and took money from the people who were being transported. Depending on the size of the lorry, about twenty or thirty people could be taken. Each person had to pay their passage. None of these were organised by *Bricha*, but by individuals such as Arthur Brauner, Joel Rubinger, Plotzki and others who had connections to Soviet officers. *Bricha* in Stettin managed to establish its own links to officers and organise its own transport. Joel Rubinger and others were able to help organise transportation possibilities for *Bricha*, as well as arranging the transportation of their own groups of people. Without receiving payment, *Bricha* was able to oversee and transport whole groups of people, young people and adults.

As soon as *Bricha* in Stettin was able to start transporting people it did, bringing everyone to Berlin. This was of course illegal since people were being smuggled out of the country. As transportation happened with Soviet military assistance and Russian drivers, the trucks were able to cross the border between Poland and the occupied German border without being checked; thus it was a relatively safe operation.

People began arriving in Berlin – being put up in either Oranienburger Street, Iranische Street or Ryke Street when necessary. Problems began when the amount of people arriving increased to the point that space was becoming an issue and we did not know how to house them all. I contacted the community leader, Herr Nelhans, people at *Joint*, the American military Rabbi and Jewish officers of the US army, describing the potentially catastrophic situation and asking if they could involve UNRRA, in the hope of setting up a camp for refugees. UNRRA was not allowed to know that these people were being transported from Poland to Berlin by *Bricha*; they were to be described as refugees who had survived the concentration

camps and were now homeless and displaced. Thanks to this intervention and pressure from *Joint* and the Jewish chaplain, the American Rabbi and US officers, UNRRA opened a camp in Schlachtensee in Berlin. It was a large, fenced area with wooden barracks, which had probably been a military camp. There were long barrack buildings in the centre of the camp, each with a central corridor and rooms going off on either side. Each room had a wooden cupboard and camp bed provided by the US army. The camp was run by a man called Herr Fischmann.

Once this camp was opened, the pressure on accommodation at Oranienburger, Ryke, and Iranische Streets was relieved. The three locations were so full that many people had to sleep on the floor and in hallways. The camp also made new transportations possible. The transfer to the Schlachtensee camp had to be handled delicately and discreetly so that UNRRA's management would not discover that they were assisting with the organised movement of people.

Now, taking full advantage of the possibility of housing more people and with *Bricha*'s contacts in Stettin, we could transport people with increased regularity. The four of us based in Oranienburger Street gained a new colleague called Batia, who was employed to be responsible for the people we had transported to the Schlachtensee camp. It went like this: a transporter would arrive in Oranienburger Street from Stettin; people would be put up for a day or two depending on capacity; they would then be sent to the camp in small groups of three or four by overground train. Before being sent to Schlachtensee, *Bricha* personnel would have coached people to not say anything about how or with whom or in what way they had got to the camp. They were also told that they were to make contact with our colleague Batia once they had been taken in by the camp, and that she would take care of their issues.

We had a lot of support in the camp and from UNRRA. One of UNRRA's workers was a girl from Bendzin in Poland called Halinka; she wore a US army uniform and could speak English fluently. Before the war, she had been a member of the Zionist youth organisation *Hanoar Hazioni*. If ever we had any problems she would help us if she was able to.

Transportations continue to arrive in West Berlin from Poland. However, our job was not to bring people to West Berlin so they could stay there; the aim was to ensure that they were taken fur-

ther west so that they could be part of the *Alija Alef*, the legal emigration to Palestine. There was also the *Alija Bet*, illegal emigration. The state of Israel did not exist at the time. UNRRA helped people of various nations, including many from Western Europe who were now displaced in Germany, having been released from forced labour or as prisoners of war. UNRRA helped these people get back to their home countries, organising the transport with US military vehicles which drove people from Berlin to West Germany, travelling through Soviet-occupied East Germany. At the time, civilians from West Berlin were not allowed to travel through the Soviet zone. For this reason, French, Dutch or Belgians, as well as others, including even Germans, who had lived in west Germany before the collapse of Nazi Germany, were no longer able to travel back to their home towns. To go through the Soviet zone to West Germany, or the American, British or French occupied zones, you needed special permission or an inter-zone pass. These were issued by the Allied Control Authority which was located in Potsdamer Street, and run by military officers from all four allied occupiers, although any inter-zone pass issued had to be approved by the Soviets. These approvals were very hard to obtain as one had to demonstrate very good reasons, or know the right people. Military vehicles of the western Allies were also only allowed to use two roads through the Soviet Zone; one was towards the English zone via Helmstedt and the other to the US zone via Wartha. UNRRA vehicles always took the road to Helmstedt. Free movement was possible once in the Western zones, where one could go freely from one to the other. Because of this complicated situation, UNRRA arranged these transportations to help people get back to their home towns.

We now wanted to do something to ensure that UNRRA would transport the Jewish people being brought in from Eastern Europe to West Germany. I started to pressure Herr Nelhans, as well as the other board members, *Joint* and the American Chaplain that they intervene with the American officers. Our aim was that UNRRA would view and thus transport our people in the same way they would, for example, Dutch, French or Belgians who made it to West Germany. The result was that the community's board, *Joint* and everyone who petitioned the American officers were successful, and the decision was made that our groups could be driven from West Berlin by

UNRRA transportation. To be part of a transportation though, people had to prove that their home had been in West Germany before the war. UNRRA had to ask for proof of this as they had an agreement with the Soviet Union that they were only allowed to resettle people who had previously lived in the West. This agreement was made with the Soviet Union so that UNRRA would not relocate Soviet citizens or citizens of Soviet-allied countries. This created a new problem for us as we had to be able to prove that the people we were to transport had previously lived in the West, although all of them came from the East, now under Soviet control.

In East Berlin, in Niederschönhauser Street, an office was set up by the Communist party to help and assist former concentration camp inmates; it was an organisation called OdF (Opfer des Faschismus, Victims of Fascism). Moreover, its General Secretary was Heinz Galinski, who was later Head of Berlin's Jewish Community for many years. Everyone who had been persecuted by the Nazis could become a member and received proof of membership. I was also a member. This was an authorised and recognised institution of the Berlin Council and was also recognised by the Soviet occupying forces. Julius Meyer was a member of the main committee; he had been imprisoned in the Auschwitz camp along with other German communists, was very well thought of in East Berlin and had lots of influence. He was the boss of this OdF office, and he and I were on very good terms. This office also produced any necessary paperwork for former camp inmates returning home. We now needed paperwork proving that the Jews we wanted to transport west with UNRRA had previously lived in West Germany.

I had a word with Julius Meyer and suggested to him that the OdF office, where he had so much influence, could produce the paperwork we needed. I suggested that one of us went every day to his office with a list of names, birthdates and places of birth. On the following day, someone would bring a list of new names and collect the papers for the people named on the list from the day before. At first Meyer was reluctant and maintained that this was a risky and punishable business, and he was frightened of the consequences should it be found out. He was not wrong, however I managed to persuade him with a range of arguments. For example, that it was the job of the OdF to help former concentration camp victims who no longer had any documentation, and

thus the production of papers was a legitimate undertaking. Who was to know whether a Jew was from the West or East? I worked on him until he finally agreed.

Once all this was sorted, the uncertain and difficult situation regarding the transportation of our refugees was solved and we could start work. A detailed list of the people to be transported West was needed. We simply chose places from West Germany by looking at a map. In the morning, the list was brought to the office of the OdF in Niederschönhauser Street. The following morning, a new list was brought and the papers from the previous list were collected. It continued like this during the time that UNRRA was transporting for us. At the Schlachtensee camp, our colleague Batia had a new colleague with whom she worked for a short time called Kalman. The lists of names were put together at the camp and, afterwards, people were handed out their new papers. When the papers were handed out, people were also coached on how to answer potential questions in case they were questioned. There was so much work that we were unable to keep on top of it, so we were sent another three people; Willy, Max and Emil. Halinka, who worked for UNRRA, was also a significant help. She was often personally responsible for transportations and kept me up to date and advised me how we should approach things in order not to slow the process down. She also let me know when there were hold ups with transportations or when there would be a period without vehicles.

From time to time there were border controls for the transportations passing through the Soviet Zone. The vehicles were checked and the Soviets questioned any issues they had, thus preventing their passage until UNRRA could negotiate with the Soviets and overcome any issues and then hopefully ensure onward transportation. There were many such disruptions. More and more transportations were leaving Stettin, and thus more people arriving in Berlin than we could possible transport with UNRRA to West Germany. The Schlachtensee camp was so full that we could no longer take any more people and UNRRA was forced to open a second camp, which was located in the Mariendorf area of Berlin. In East Berlin, the situation immediately following the war's end had begun to stabilise. Soviet occupation meant the introduction of various new regulations, and the two temporary housing possibilities of Oranienburger and Ryke Streets, both of which were situated in the Soviet Zone, were

no longer safe for political reasons. Herr Nelhans, the community leader, knew this.

During a disruption of one of UNRRA's transportations leaving Berlin, a transportation arrived one evening in Oranienburger Street from Stettin. As it was already too late to arrive at Schlachtensee, the people were first brought there to get some sleep. Each room in the Oranienburger Street accommodation was already completely full but had to squeeze in an additional one or two people. A girl named Lili Beznaswisko was brought to our room.

This time UNRRA transportation was disrupted for about two weeks. However people continued to arrive from Stettin, causing serious accommodation issues. For this reason Lili was to stay with us until the opportunity arose for her to travel on to West Germany. Lili was from Warsaw and had been in the Warsaw ghetto from the beginning until its liquidation. I had heard many terrible stories of the ghetto which I had picked up from second-hand accounts. Now I could hear about what happened in the ghetto from someone who had actually been there. Lili had survived because she had Aryan papers, and had used these to work in domestic service in a Warsaw suburb. Every free hour that we had, we would sit with Lili and she would tell us horrible tales of the Warsaw ghetto. My colleagues and I were disturbed by her stories but keen for more information, wanting to know all the details. I will come to Lili's story in more detail later. Wherever there was an opportunity, we would ask most people who arrived many questions about the horrific experiences they had been through to survive. This was the main topic for us; hearing what each one of these people had experienced.

Several soldiers from the Jewish Brigade also came to Berlin to support our activities. Amongst them were Haim Sak from Petachtikwa, Perez Nachman from Haifa and Milek from Hadera. Apart from a brief stay at the transitional accommodation, families with children lived at the Schlachtensee and Eichborndamm camps while they were waiting to travel to West Germany, to then emigrate to Palestine or to America, or to some other country. Some form of cultural life was established for these people; there was a Hebrew school, youth organisation and so on. Talks and lectures were given. At the Eichborndamm camp the school teacher was Mr Warschawski, who had been a teacher in Lithuania. The schools and organisations all had Zionist affiliations. The soldiers from the Jewish brigade mostly occupied

themselves with the cultural life of the camps, giving talks and so on. Concerning our work for *Bricha*, they were not much help to us since they could only move freely in the three western sectors. Dr Lifschitz and Dr Hofman Jechiel got in touch with us and supported us with advice as much as they were able. Dr Lifschitz and his wife Rosel managed the newly-opened Sochnunt in Berlin's Zehlendorf area in the American zone, and Dr Jechiel ran the office of the Sochnut opened in Maria-Theresia Street, Munich.

We were of the view that we needed transition accommodation or a camp in the French sector. It would have been impossible to set up something similar in the British Zone, since the Brits were completely opposed to it, knowing that the majority of the people in such camps were attempting to emigrate illegally to Palestine. The British had the mandate for administrative control of Palestine and were against immigration. In the British Zone in West Germany there was only one transition camp located in the former death camp of Bergen-Belsen, which had been liberated by the British and where some survivors had stayed, leading to its current role as a transition camp. On the other hand, there were more than a dozen such camps in the American zone.

Herr Nelhans was very good friends with a highly-ranked and influential French officer from the French commandment in Berlin. As far as I can remember, his surname was Weil and he himself was Jewish. Herr Nelhans tried to persuade him to appeal to his colleagues, the commanders of the French zone, to set up a transition camp there. Officer Weil promised to do his best, which in turn led to the creation by the French of a camp in the Reinickendorf area at Eichborndamm. Two large apartment blocks were taken over to house the transition camp. Until the time when this would be ready for use, we continued to use the building in Oranienburger Street.

The complete halt of transportation lasted about ten days before UNRRA recommenced its transport to the West. The camps were overflowing with people, and UNRRA had to request more transportation from the American army to deal with and manage the sheer volume. The increase in numbers of people we could transport meant an increase in identity papers needed, which meant a lot more work. Lili was bored and did not know when it would be her turn to be transported out, so we employed her – she took over the job of putting

16 In a UNRRA vehicle with my Uncle Mottel Eisenberg, undated.

the list of names together and taking it to the OdF office in Niederschönhauser Street, then picking up the papers when they were ready. With the work we were doing we needed quite a lot of people. There were no telephones, and our work was of a secret nature and had to stay that way. We had to maintain contact and organise manoeuvres with the transition camps, including Stettin, through employees who kept having to travel back and forth between the various parties with public transport.

After a short time the Eichborndamm transition camp was opened and we moved over there. The Oranienburger Street building was then closed and all transports from Stettin came straight to Eichborndamm. We also tried sending groups from Stettin by train; in fact some groups arrived without incident this way. Once this had worked a few times successfully the East German police in Eberswalde, where everyone had to change, started questioning and harassing people, making them wait for hours until they could continue their journey to Berlin.

When we heard this I got in touch with Julius Meyer and Herr Nelhans and told them what was happening to these people in Eberswalde. I asked whether they would be able to help prevent such incidents. A German language paper was printed in the Soviet zone. The Soviet occupying forces published this paper and a Russian Army Major, a Jew, was on the editorial team. He often met with Herr Nelhans and was also acquainted with Julius Meyer. Herr Nelhans, Herr Meyer and this officer agreed to go to Eberswalde, which is about sixty kilometres from Berlin. Julius Meyer had a car at the time, known as a DKW, with a two-stroke engine; it was his company car. He, the officer and I went to the station and to the office of the station police at Eberswalde, where Julius Meyer introduced himself as the Head of the OdF and member of the Berlin Magistrate. When the representative of the station police saw a Soviet Army Major he was visibly scared, and it was made clear to him that these people had been persecuted by the Nazis and needed help and were not to be harassed further. They promised to do everything they could to help these people from then on. We went back, hoping to have resolved this issue.

As a result of this encounter I got a message sent via a colleague in Berlin to Stettin, and it was agreed that the groups should be brought some of the way from Poland to Soviet-occupied German territory in military trucks. From there, they should travel the rest of the way on the train, as such they would be saved the long journey from the Polish border to Berlin. I went by train in the direction of Eberswalde and then on as far as the Polish border, to a village whose name I forget. We had agreed with Stettin colleagues to send the groups to this village. The first group came in a military truck. Joel Rubinger was amongst this group. We took the first train to Berlin and had to change trains at Eberswalde. This time, the station police actually assisted. It was spring; tulips were in bloom. In the garden belonging to the flat where I was staying I picked a bunch of tulips and gave them to the group to pass on to Lili from me.

I stayed there a few days and everything went smoothly; the groups of people were well treated by the police at Eberswalde. We used this route for several weeks until we had some problems and could no longer use it. I can no longer remember what the exact problem was however.

As already mentioned, Julius Meyer was a well respected man in the Soviet Zone and had influence with the authorities. He was an official in the Communist Party, and we were friends. He had helped us a lot. Whenever he could, he did everything in his power to assist and we had much to be grateful to him for. Our work was getting more and more difficult. Oranienburger Street was in the centre of Berlin but Eichborndamm was located in the north which meant that, as well as with the Schlachtensee camp, we now had to travel from one end of Berlin to the other. Our work in West Berlin was not arguably legal, although there was little danger of a serious, punishable offence. The work in East Berlin and Stettin was however a lot more risky and discovery could have resulted in serious consequences from the Soviet Union; indeed many paid for their efforts with long prison sentences and forced labour in Siberia. Two of our colleagues in Stettin, Josek Meler und Schimschon Menczer, were arrested in Stettin by the Soviet secret police and were sentenced to a long period in Siberia. They spent several years in prison and in forced labour before being pardoned, released and allowed to leave the Soviet Union. Meler went to Israel and Schimschon Menczer to the US. In Berlin I was only known under the name of Stefan. Nobody knew my real name, which was also a safety measure.

One day I found out that my Aunt Sime, her husband and their son Yisroel, who had been born after liberation, had survived. They had moved from Mielnice to Bytom (Beuthen) in Poland. I no longer remember who had given me this information. When I heard this, I travelled to Stettin with a car, which had just brought people from Stettin, and from there I took a train to Bytom. I looked for the place I had as an address; it was a building housing refugees from former Eastern Poland. The Soviets had rehoused them to former German territory. The Soviet Union had resettled the Polish population of the former eastern Polish regions, where eighty percent of the population was Ukrainian, to former German territory, namely Silesia and Pomerania. This resettlement affected many Jewish people, including the twenty-four souls from Mielnice who had survived the war. When I saw the miserable conditions in which these resettled people, including my aunt and her family, lived, I immediately took them back to Stettin with me and handed them to the care of Josek Meler, who promised to send them to Berlin on the next available transport. A few days lat-

er, my aunt and her family arrived in Berlin and were housed at the Eichborndamm camp.

Amongst the survivors of Mielnice who came to Berlin were Jonas Lindenbaum, who had been drafted in the Polish army with me; his sister Lotke, my cousin Mentschel and his daughters Minusche and Rose Sternberg. They were housed in Schlachtensee camp. It had not been easy to travel from Stettin to Aunt Sime in Bytom at the time. I have already described how difficult travel was back then, but it was actually also extremely dangerous; some people had lost their lives in transit. A colleague of ours called Avraham was travelling from Berlin in the direction of Stettin, tasked with finding new ways to transport more people. He wanted to look into the possibility of using the many barges which regularly used the waterways connecting Stettin and Berlin. Avraham never returned from this journey and we never found out what happened to him, whether he had been arrested by the Soviet secret police (NKWD) and sent to Siberia, or had been murdered. The officers with whom we arranged the transportations kept getting changed, and this was impacting on the journeys. Also some trips delivering military equipment for the Stettin barracks were stopped, forcing us to look for alternative ways of moving people. It was a demanding undertaking and we had to overcome all sorts of problems to keep the transportations running.

I went to Munich a few times to the Sochnut and to Dr Hofmann, to complete formalities and receive instructions or news. As I have already mentioned, this had to be undertaken personally and not via post or telephone. I had no problems whatsoever travelling from West Berlin to West Germany, as I had an unlimited inter-zone pass. This pass had been arranged for me by Herr Nelhans, who was able to do this thanks to his French officer friend, Weil. In order to move more people from West Berlin to West Germany, we also tried to arrange a crossing on the demarcation border between the Soviet Zone and West Germany. Willy and Max were working on this. The crossing was at Heiligenstadt. On the other side was Duderstadt in the West Zone. A German was employed from this town, who knew the area well and also knew the points where the border could be crossed and when the border points were no longer patrolled. In this way, we were able to get small groups of people into the West Zone. These manoeuvres were very complicated. Firstly, it was only possible to attempt this with small groups of people; secondly, it involved taking the train from Berlin to

Heiligenstadt and then, when you had already crossed the border into the West, you had to get out of the train a few kilometres from Duderstadt and from there take a train to the intended destination. We only used this procedure for a short time.

Meanwhile in Berlin the UNRRA transports continued. We continued our work until the amount of people arriving from Poland started to decrease. As soon as fewer people came from Poland, it became easier to house people at the Schlachtensee camp and the other camps started to wind down. The camp at Mariendorf was closed, followed a few weeks later by the camp at Schlachtensee. Most occupants went on to West Germany, with a small number remaining in Berlin finding rental accommodation.

Herr Nelhans was arrested around this time in the Soviet sector. The Soviet Secret Police, the NKWD, accused him of having incited members of the Soviet Army to desert, making their escape to West Germany possible. He was sentenced to prison and forced labour in Siberia. It had been a mistake to live in the Soviet sector. Had he lived in the western sector, this would never have happened. The accusations made against him were simply not true; he had done nothing of the kind. We at *Bricha* had transported Jewish Soviet soldiers, officers and regular soldiers with UNRRA transportation to West Germany. Herr Nelhans' arrest was a big shock for us. He was a sophisticated, educated and decent man. He had tried to help all Jews whenever he could. He did everything he could for us and the successes we had at *Bricha* in Berlin were, to a large extent, only possible due to him. An innocent man had been arrested, charged and deported to Siberia. Herr Nelhans had been unable to bear the hard conditions of a Siberian prison and was to die miserably. I found out about his death from a Lithuanian Jew called Moshe Rybak, who had also been arrested by the Soviets in Berlin and had been charged. He had been with Herr Nelhans in the same work camp. He was a strong and robust man, and managed to survive the dreadful conditions for a few years until he was released early. He returned to Berlin and told me about the sad fate of Herr Nelhans.

On 20 April 1946 Lili and I were married in Bamberg in Germany. We married in Bamberg because Lili's brother Israel was living there with his family. In 1939 with the arrival of the Germans, he had left Warsaw for Eastern Poland with several students. This part of Poland had been occupied by the Soviets, who had then deported all refugees

17 Our wedding in Bamberg on 20 April 1946.

to Siberia. He had survived in Archangelsk, married there and returned to Poland after the war. With help from *Bricha*, he had then moved to a refugee camp in Bamberg from Poland. It was pure coincidence that Lili had learned of her brother's survival from an acquaintance. Since it was not easy to travel through the Soviet Zone from West Berlin to West Germany and required an inter-zone pass, which very few people had, it would not have been possible for Lili's family to travel to a wedding in Berlin. We decided to get married in Bamberg. I managed to organise a short-term inter-zone pass for Aunt Sime, who was living in Berlin, so she could be at the wedding.

18 Lili Stern, 1945

Lili

Lili Stern (née Beznaswisko) was born in Plonsk, Poland on 24 October 1924. Her father Menachem Mendel and mother Yecht were middle-class orthodox Jews. Lili had four siblings: Yacov, Israel, Miriam (Marilka) and Hanna (Hanka).

As I have previously mentioned, Lili would talk to her family about how she survived the horrors of the Warsaw ghetto when specifically asked. We urged her to tell us about it, and what she had experienced and seen, first-hand. Although it took some time, Lili eventually described to us the horrendous and criminal conditions prevailing in the ghetto. I shall relate what she told us here.

Lili told us that, for the Jewish population of Warsaw, the nightmare and eradication began even before the ghetto existed.

The Germans began to bomb the city as soon as war had broken out and, as the areas populated by Jews were the most heavily hit, the Jewish population suffered right from the outset. The supply of electricity,

19 Lili (seated in the chair) with her father Menachem Mendel, her mother Yecht and siblings: Yacov, Israel, Miriam and Hanna.

running water and food broke down completely, resulting in the Jewish population experiencing hunger relatively early on and being forced to struggle for food.

The Germans invaded about six weeks later and, as soon as they entered Warsaw, they began harassing the Jews: members of the Jewish intelligentsia were arrested and others were simply taken from the streets and put into cars, never to be seen again. Before the ghetto was established raids such as this occurred regularly.

Jewish men and women were made to work for the Germans without pay, carrying the furniture required in the administrative offices set up by the Germans – furniture which was simply taken from Jewish families. It was the Jews who had to provide their goods and furniture to furnish both the homes and work places of the German officers, administrators and the families they had brought to Warsaw.

For the Jews, German occupation immediately represented murder, stealing and plundering, and the situation got worse with each passing day. Initially, a Jewish committee had to be formed so that the Germans had a body with which they could place their demands, some of which were considerable and often could just not be completely met. For example, they demanded the procurement of workers to clear the rubble of bombed buildings, keep the streets cleared of debris, work in the armaments factories, clean the barracks, etc. Since there were few workers available for these jobs the Germans started their raids, taking people off in cars and forcing them to work without payment or sustenance. Ration cards were introduced shortly after the invasion, and the allocated ration for Jews was so little that it was less than one needed to live. As long as they were still able to leave the ghetto, Jews were able to exchange money with Polish dealers or farmers for the most necessary supplies. For those who had no money, which was often the case since Jews were not paid for their work, possessions had to be sold or traded for food. This situation – hunger, heavy unpaid labour, violence and harassment – was already dire, but was nothing compared to the situation once the ghetto was closed: at this point survival was at least possible.

A little while later an order came that Jews over the age of ten had to wear a white band with a blue star of David above the elbow of their left arm so they could be immediately identified from the rest of the population. The band had to be ten centimetres wide. Every few days new orders came to harass and humiliate, for example it even became

obligatory to pay up large sums of money, in a form of newly legalised extortion. In streets inhabited by Jews and Poles, the Jewish population was made to move out and into streets allocated exclusively for them. These streets later made up the ghetto. Following this, an order came for all Jews who lived in the vicinity of the following streets to move: Leschno; Karmelieka; Nowolipki; Gesia Stawki; Grysbowska; Mila Plaz Maranawski; and Nabewki. This order made it explicitly clear that the death penalty would be enforced for those who did not follow it. These roads were then barricaded off, and connecting roads were closed off by a high wall. Between the roads where the Jews were now forced to live there was a main road along which ran a tram, effectively the main connection from Warsaw, along Zelazna Street, which went through the Jewish quarter and intersected Chlodna Street. Zelazna Street was now bricked off by a high wall on both sides to separate it from Chlodna Street. A footbridge was built over the main road so that Jews could go between their two quarters without mixing with the Polish population; it connected one Jewish quarter with the other. As soon as the walls and bridge were completed, the Jewish area could be contained and was declared as the Jewish ghetto. From this moment, Jews were unable to leave the ghetto without official permission. According to the decree, anyone attempting this was to be punished by death. A further order required the establishment of a Jewish administration, the so-called *Judenrat*, as well as a Jewish police force to police the Jewish population.

The *Judenrat* had the tasks of distributing ration cards and organising walk-in medical practices, however their main purpose was to fulfil the requirements of the Germans which was principally the provision of workers. The *Judenrat* had to deliver a target number of workers for the factories which had started producing equipment and clothing for the German Wehrmacht. The *Judenrat* also had to meet demands imposed on them for money, which the Jewish population had to find.

After a time, the Germans started to relocate Jews in their thousands from the outskirts of Warsaw to the ghetto. The *Judenrat* had to arrange accommodation for a huge influx of people, leading to an indescribable nightmare as the ghetto was already too small for the newly relocated Jewish population of the city. Whole families had to move into flats already containing other families until, over time, several families ended up sharing one flat, depending on its size. This new or-

der led to several thousand new refugees being absorbed into the ghetto. Those who had the resources were able to rent a room from some families who, despite their limited space, were desperate for money and would separate off a room and then occupy a reduced space with their whole family. Having some money was a necessity. For those refugees who were unable to help themselves and were unable to secure accommodation the *Judenrat* erected so-called 'sites', which were set up in the school buildings which were now empty, the schools having been closed. In such sites refugees in their hundreds were dumped and left helpless.

The Gestapo then suddenly demanded that the *Judenrat* was to put together a certain number of families who could be relocated to the East for work and the people in the 'sites' were the first to be put forward. At the beginning, no one knew where these people were being transported to. When the ghetto population realised that people were being taken out of the ghetto to work in some unknown place, they started to establish workshops, known as *Schops*, to produce goods for the Wehrmacht. With the *Schops*, individuals could claim to have an occupation and a pass showing that they worked for the Wehrmacht and thus have some sort of protection against being taken away. To this end knitting and sewing workrooms were established for both men and women. People did everything they could to get a position in one of these *Schops*, believing this would prevent them being taken off to an unknown destination. Preference was given to people who could bring their own sewing machine with them. The manufacture of uniforms turned into a huge business, employing several thousand people; the director was a German by the name of Tebens.

A second *Schop* making Wehrmacht uniforms was established which also had several thousand workers. The director of this one was called Schatz.

Before the war there was a very large factory in Warsaw, well known in the city and throughout Poland for its production of knitwear such as jumpers, socks and underwear. This factory was at 78 Leschno Street. It was a large building complex with four courtyards and buildings with four stories. There were flats in the front building and factory space at the back, and it was here that the machines were housed. Owned by the Braun and Rowinski families, this factory was known as Bro Ro and was also a so-called *Schop* where they also started pro-

ducing jumpers, socks and underwear purely for the Wehrmacht. Several thousand people were employed and a twenty-four-hour period was covered by three shifts. The Director was an ethnic German by the name of Schulz who came from Bielsko. The owners Messrs. Braun and Rowinski were banned from and no longer allowed to enter their own factories.

The Head of the Judenrat was Dr Adam Czerniaków. The situation in the ghetto was getting worse day by day. People were starving and the distribution of rations was so minimal it did not provide anywhere near enough food. Moreover, many people simply could not afford to buy ration cards as they did not have the money and were unable to earn any. In every employment – including in the *Schops* – people earned so little that it was hardly worth mentioning and, after a time, earned nothing at all, although they were happy and grateful to at least be able to work. With a secure job came the hope that they wouldn't be taken away.

Mr Braun had two daughters – Eva and Tamara. Eva was married to a Mr Schik and had a child of four and a half years. The child was a boy called Lolusch. The Braun family was very rich and set up a kitchen for the poor, who could get warm soup for free. Mr Schik, the son-in-law of Mr Braun, was an engineer. He was allowed to go into the *Schop* and also worked there in administration. The Schik family had a governess for Lolusch, a Polish woman called Paulina Czechainska. At the beginning, when the ghetto was formed, Poles were still able to enter the ghetto for a time and so the governess was still able to look after Lolusch. The child also went to the private Kindergarten of Mrs Beznaswisko. After a time an order came that Aryans were forbidden from entering the ghetto, which meant that Lolusch's Polish governess was unable to continue visiting. Mrs Schik enquired of Mrs Beznaswisko at the Kindergarten if there was a nice, reliable girl whom she could recommend to look after Lolusch. Mrs Beznaswisko was a sister of Lili's father and knew that her brother's family was struggling. The opportunity presented itself to find a place for her brother's youngest daughter. If it worked out, Lili would have a place to live, food to eat and would not starve. Consequently, Mrs Beznaswisko recommended Lili as a suitable candidate to Mrs Schik, without admitting that she was her niece. Mrs Schik requested that this person introduce herself to her. Mrs Beznaswisko informed Lili of the meeting and gave her an unopened envelope containing her recommendation that Lili

was a suitable person to care for Lolusch. The next day Lili introduced herself to Mrs Schik and presented the letter. Mrs Schik read the letter and asked Lili if she was the person described in the letter, whereupon Lili apologised for not knowing its content. Mrs Schik spoke with Lili for a short time and told her she would talk again with Mrs Beznaswikso.

After a few days, Lili was assigned the task of taking Lolusch to the Kindergarten, to collect him from there, and then to keep him occupied in the afternoon. This was no easy task since the boy objected to the change from the Polish governess he was used to being collected by and spending the afternoons with. He didn't want to listen to Lili and did the opposite to what she asked him. Lili tried absolutely everything to get the child to behave and accept her. Lolusch's behaviour started to make Lili desperate, since she knew she would not be able to keep the position if he did not accept and like her and the job represented a real life-saver. Since the family were rich they had enough money to buy food on the black market, and still lived in their own apartment so were less cramped than other families. Lili tried various things to win over the child and worked out that he was interested in animals. She started telling him different stories involving animals such as elephants, lions and other exotic species. With such stories he became really fond of her to the point that he would ask after her, and needed to know when she would be back if she had had to pop out. Lili was greatly relieved when Lolusch started to warm to her as she knew that this would secure her stay with the family.

Lili's family (in the ghetto) was made up of her parents, her eldest sister Hanka (Hanna) and middle sister Marilka (Miriam). Her parents, Hanka and Marilka lived in a tiny flat in the ghetto. Lili looked after Lolusch for about a year and the Schik family treated her as one of their own. As the situation in the ghetto deteriorated and, with each month, more and more people were transported off to death camps, the Schik family arranged for Lolusch to be smuggled out of the ghetto into the care of a Polish family. Lili was able to remain living with the Schiks. Mr Schik continued to work in the administration of what had formerly been his father-in-law's factory and which was now in the possession of the Germans.

The apartment, where Lili lived and continued to be treated as one of the family, was in the front building of the factory complex where

the *Schop* was. Once Lolusch had been smuggled out of the ghetto, Lili started working in this *Schop*. She worked on the production of warp beams for the knitting machines, which produced components around the clock in three shifts.

Knowing her parents lived in a tiny flat in dreadful conditions, Lili could find no peace until she had done everything to save at least one of her sisters. Lili wanted to try to ask permission to invite a sister to live with her, but did not have the courage to go through with it because she was well aware of the generosity and decency which the Schiks had already shown. After some days however, she plucked up the courage to ask Mr and Mrs Schik, who gave their consent immediately and so Marilka moved in with Lili. This was like a dream come true for Lili, who would not have believed such an outcome was possible. The decency and humanity of this family was hard to put into words.

Once Lili had managed to organise this, she started trying to get Marilka a job with her in the *Schop*. In the apartments in the building where Lili lived, which was part of the whole complex in 78 Leschna Street, lived some men who had managerial positions in the *Schop*, such as in administration or as department heads. There were Messrs. Schik and Kawarski and Edek Ehrlich and Bezl Apter Kawinkski. Lili was known to these people, who were able to help by taking Marilka on. Now Lili was able to be with her sister and they could share work shifts. If Lili did an early shift then her sister would take the day shift, and vice versa.

Life in the ghetto was getting harder with each passing day and deportations to death camps were increasing. The first victims were those resettled to the ghetto from the surrounding area and who shared accommodation in schools, sports halls and closed businesses. Once all these poor people had been taken off to concentration camps, the Germans gave an order to the *Judenrat* demanding it nominate a certain number of people for 'resettlement'. The Head of the *Judenrat*, Dr Czerniaków knew that this 'resettlement' meant death in a concentration camp. He was unable to meet this demand by effectively sending people to be murdered so he committed suicide, resulting in the *Judenrat* having not fulfilled the order and identifying a contingent of people. Thus the Germans started their selection, making raids and capturing people and bringing them to a transfer site to be directly shipped off in cattle trucks to concentration camps.

Those who worked in the *Schops* producing important items such as munitions, clothing and other important goods needed by the Wehrmacht were given special identification cards by the works. Thus for a time these people were spared and not taken to the transfer site. With such special passes people genuinely believed the illusion that they were important to the works, needed by the Wehrmacht and, as such, the businesses would not be stopped or closed down and that it would be possible to survive the war.

Famine plagued the ghetto. Starved bodies lay on the pavements. Every day people were brought to the transfer site and transported off to concentration camps.

As already mentioned, Lili's parents lived in cramped and miserable conditions. Lili visited her parents whenever she could but this was restricted to the time when she was not working a shift. Her parents worked in a *Schop* where straw was braided so it could be used to cover shoes. This was used by the German soldiers stationed in Russia and worn over their boots to protect their feet from the extreme cold.

Every day hundreds of ghetto inhabitants were transported from the transfer site to the death camp Treblinka. With every passing day the ghetto population decreased until the Germans began selecting workers from the *Schops* and taking them to the transfer site to be sent off. At first they only selected workers from the smaller *Schops*, which were not producing essential goods for the Wehrmacht. If they took all the workers they simply liquidated the *Schop*.

Lili was working evening shifts so was able to visit her parents during the day in these weeks, as her parents were working night shifts. One day Lili arrived at her parents' apartment to find the door open and the place deserted – neither her parents nor her sister Hanka were there. Lili went to other apartments to find out from neighbours what had happened to her family but she found other doors open and not a single inhabitant. It was not just her parents' building which was deserted but the whole area. This is how Lili lost her parents and sister, never seeing them again and not knowing when they had been taken or to where.

In the *Schop* where Lili worked they started making worker selections. Those people selected were taken to the transfer site and loaded up to be taken to Treblinka. The selections were organised with precision. At the site there was a loud whistle which sounded in all depart-

ments. When it went off, people had to halt production and the entire staff moved to the yard, where each department were to line up in rows. The director of the works Schulz, a heartless and sadistic man, would go along the rows of workers with SS guards. He would go from one department to the next with a list in his hand selecting people to be transported. It was unclear to Lili whether he selected people based on the list he held or whether it was more random. Those he chose were made to come forward and directed to stand to one side. Department heads were limited in their ability to reverse the decision once made and would have to intervene directly with Schulz. They could appeal claiming that this or that worker was indispensable, that he or she was well qualified, an expert or trained in repairing machinery. In this way the department head was sometimes able to prevent workers from being deported. After a selection, the remaining workers had to get back to work quickly and continue with their tasks; those chosen were led off under SS guard to be deported to Treblinka.

The relative safety of the *Schop* became ever more precarious. Workers had no idea when a selection would be made or whether several would be made until all of them were eventually deported. Shortly before Pessach Lili was working the night shift and Marilka the day shift. On that day there was another selection. When Lili returned from her shift in the morning, Marilka was not at home. Distressed, Lili went straight to neighbours who lived in the same building and were employed at the same *Schop*, asking if they knew what had happened to her sister. The neighbours told Lili that Marilka had been taken as part of the selection and had been seen being taken off to the transfer site. This news came as a total shock in which Lili almost lost consciousness and started crying. Firstly her parents and older sister had been taken and now Marilka. Now she was completely alone without a single member of her family in the ghetto.

The people left in the *Schop* and the ghetto were desperate and despondent, not knowing what they should do to save their lives. At that time, the situation was so dire and had developed to the point that people believed that survival was no longer a possibility in the ghetto, and the only way was to try to get out. Beyond the ghetto, on the Aryan side, one would also be in mortal danger but at least there was a very small chance of surviving, whereas there looked to be a hundred percent likelihood of being deported to the death camp if one stayed inside.

Lili spoke to Mr Schik, asking his advice on what to do and whether she should leave the ghetto. He answered that he could give no advice since he himself had no idea what he should do. The situation was terrible; people continued their work in the *Schops*, which were run by the procurement centres of the Wehrmacht who also issued the special passes for the workers. Employees had been completely convinced that nothing would happen to them and that they would survive the war as they were urgently needed for the war effort – and now the dreadful disappointment that workers were also being taken to Treblinka to be murdered after all. At this point the workers realised how false their hopes had been and how their work provided little or no security.

The *Schop* in which Lili worked also had a site outside the ghetto. The workers allocated to work at the site were escorted to each shift under guard and brought back to the ghetto at the end of the shift. There was major unrest amongst the small remaining population of Jews who had not been transported to the concentration camp.

One day, Lili was put in the group destined to work outside of the ghetto that day. At the beginning of the shift the group of workers was brought to the external site under close guard. After the shift the guards were meant to bring the workers for the next shift and return Lili's group to the ghetto. However, the guards did not turn up at the end of Lili's shift, leaving the workers waiting. A number of workers took advantage of this and tried to run for safety so as not to return to the ghetto. Lili also searched for a place in which she could hide herself assuming that the guards could still come to collect the workers. Not far from the *Schop* she saw a building which was not completely inhabited. Lili went to this building and quietly went up the stairs until she came to the loft. The loft was completely empty with a narrow recess where the roof pitch met the floor. Lili managed to climb into the recess, going as far back as she could to avoid being noticed by anyone who should search; she lay down and stayed in this position all night. When they realised a significant number of workers had fled from the *Schop* to hide, the Gestapo cordoned off the area at once. The Ukrainian police (brought in especially to support Nazi eradication efforts) and the SS and German police went round every building looking for those in hiding.

The next morning a Ukrainian officer came into the loft space where Lili was hiding. From the entrance he could see that it was empty but

he hesitated without going further or searching. In broken German he called out "Jew, we can do business."

Lili stayed three days and nights lying on the floor without eating or drinking. She recalled an address of a Polish man by the name of Koracek: 5, Zimna Street, flat five. She remembered someone had told her this man was a member of a leftist party which also helped Jews. On the third day as it started getting dark, Lili went downstairs and made her way to 5 Zimna Street to this Koracek.

After she had arrived and been let in to his apartment, Lili told the Pole where she had come from and in what circumstances she managed to get to him. Koracek told his wife to bring Lili some food. The woman brought food and after she had eaten it Lili asked Koracek if he would help her hide. This Koracek, along with other men, was indeed a member of an underground organisation which also helped Jews. Lili was not sure of the name of this organisation or what it exactly stood for. Koracek quizzed Lili about various aspects of the ghetto and about her escape. When the conversation was over, Koracek said he would be willing to try to help Lili and he told her that a man would now come who would bring her to a place where she could stay for the time being. Koracek arranged for a man to bring Lili to the suburb of Praga to Targowa Street, where a detached run down building stood. In the building a flat was being used as a hiding place for an older man; this man was a Jew and very wealthy. He had given Koracek large sums of money to hide him and bring him food. When Lili was brought there the older man was surprised and initially unhappy that another person had been unexpectedly brought to this secret flat; he was mistrustful of sharing with a stranger and did not know who Lili was or how trustworthy she would be. Once Lili had told him of life in the ghetto and that she had been living with the Schik family, he believed that she was a relative of the Schiks.

After talking he began to gain trust in her since he knew of the Schik family. This man had had a textile wholesale business before the Germans invaded. His name was Grinfeld and since he had been in the textile business he knew Mr Braun, the owner of the hosiery and knitwear business which was now a ghetto *Schop*; he knew that Mr Schik was the son-in-law of Mr Braun. As soon as he trusted Lili Mr Grinfeld began to tell her his story.

He had lived in the outskirts of Warsaw before the war and his textile business was going very well; his entire family were taken away

during the first *Aktion* leaving him on his own; he had been in hiding many months already. He said he was now happy to have someone with whom he could talk. Lili explained that her intention was not to hide but to get Aryan papers so she could work as a domestic in a house outside of Warsaw.

The Pole Koracek visited them in hiding and asked if they needed anything. Lili explained that she would really like to try to get Aryan papers and asked if he would be able to help. Koracek did not promise anything but said he would look into whether it was possible. A few days later Koracek came with a camera and took pictures of Lili for identity papers. The photos were not of sufficient quality so he had to take some more. Koracek tried extremely hard to make it possible for Lili to get the right papers. At first they needed a birth certificate typical of someone of Lili's age and, if the information on the certificate was suitable, an application could be made for papers. After two or three weeks Koracek came with an original birth certificate issued by the Registrar's Office in the name of Hanna Janina Rudnicka, born on 7 September 1920 in Warsaw, in Radnei Street. Her father was named as Yana Piotra and her mother as Wandi Ireni Orlowskiech.

The original birth certificate (pictured) was issued on 24 May 1943.

Once in possession of a birth certificate, it was then also necessary to obtain notification of residency, which had to be submitted in order to get identification papers. Koracek registered Lili in the town of Plock under the name of Hanna Janina Rudnicka and, after two or three weeks, unregistered her. With proof of unregistration he then registered Lili at his Warsaw address. The three original documents showing changes in residency are pictured on page 165.

With proof of registration in Warsaw, Koracek was able to make an application for the issue of identity papers. After some weeks the news came that the papers were ready and available for collection. In order to collect the papers, the person in question had to be personally present and be finger printed, which meant that Lili would have to go herself. The collection office was in Damilawienska Street and, although a Polish office, it was overseen by the occupying Germans and was heavily guarded and controlled by the German security service and Gestapo. It was unimaginably terrifying for Lili to have to go into an office overseen by the German security forces and Gestapo, who were checking that everything was carried out in the manner they required. However

GUBERNIA GENERALNA
ARCHIDIECEZJA WARSZAWSKA

Nr aktu 471
Rok 1920 Rz.-kat. parafia Św. ANTONIEGO w Warszawie

Świadectwo urodzenia

WYDANE NA ZASADZIE KSIĄG METRYCZNYCH

Zaświadcza się, że Hanna-Janina Rudnicka

urodził(a) się w Warszawie, przy ulicy Radnej pod Nr 26 | dnia 7 sierpnia tysiąc dziewięćset dwudziestego 1920 roku

z ojca Jana Piotra

z matki Marii-Ireny z Ostrowskich

Zgodność powyższego świadectwa z oryginałem stwierdzam.

Warszawa, dnia 24 m-ca maja 1943 r.

Urzędnik Stanu Cywilnego

Ks. St. Lenard

20 Birth Certificate of Hanna Janina Rudnicka, issued on 24 May 1943.
The first step to a passport for Lili.

there was no avoiding this in order to get the papers. Despite her obvious fear, she had to maintain her composure and do nothing to raise the suspicions of the officials. Lili went and kept it together, she was fingerprinted and given her identity papers.

A small square has been cut out of the identity papers signifying a change in location. Squares were cut out of papers every time a person moved, to prevent frequent relocation.

Once in possession of identity papers Lili was able to move around freely and began looking at job advertisements for domestic help in newspapers. Amongst the advertisements was one for a domestic help who did not necessarily need cooking skills; the position was in the suburb of Gruyec on the outskirts of Warsaw with the Zabrocki family.

A suburban tram ran to this area several times each day. Lili went to the stop and took the tram to Gruyec to apply direct to this family for the position. When she arrived at the stop in this small suburb, she asked around for the whereabouts of the Zabrocki family's house. When she arrived she immediately admitted that she could not cook well. They asked her where she was from and where she had been living and what she had been doing, where her parents live, and whether she had references. She gave Mr Koracek as a reference and told them she came from the town of Plock, that her mother had died fairly young and that her father had been killed in a bombing raid. With this information they hired her and explained what she would have to do. The work included: keeping the house clean and tidy; doing the washing and ironing; cooking; all the work in the garden; feeding and milking the cows; mucking out the pigs and feeding the hens.

The family lived in Warsaw and owned a pasta factory. They had a house in Gruyec with a large garden and animals, where they lived in summer. Because Warsaw had been bombed it was hard to find food so they spent the entire year in the suburb where they kept a cow, a pig and hens. In the garden they grew potatoes and vegetables for themselves.

The Zabrocki family comprised Mr Zabrocki, his wife and their daughter Zosia and son Tadek, who were both around twenty years old. Lili was given a small, dark bedroom with barely enough room for the iron bed it contained. Lili was expected to work from early in the morning until late each evening in order to finish everything she

Potwierdzenie zameldowania

m. Warszawa Komisariat 2 P. P.
Nazwisko Rudnicka
Imiona Janina - Janina
Miejsce zamieszkania Płock

Przybył z Płocka 10 I m. 3 na pobyt czasowy
dn. 22 m-ca V 19 43 r. i został zameldowany
w domu Nr 5 Nr mieszk. 5 przy ul. Kaliska
Komisariat 2 P. P.
Podpis urzędnika
Pieczęć gminy
dn. m-ca 19 r.

Potwierdzenie zameldowania

m. st. Warszawa Komisariat 6 P. P.
Nazwisko Rudnicka
Imiona Janina Janina
Miejsce zamieszkania Płock

Przybył z Płocka na pobyt czasowy
dn. 14 m-ca X 19 41 r. i został zameldowany
w domu Nr 101 Nr mieszk. 23 przy ul. Pawiak
Komisariat 21 P. P.
Podpis urzędnika
Pieczęć gminy
dn. m-ca 19 r.

Potwierdzenie wymeldowania

m. st. Warszawa Komisariat VI P. P.
Nazwisko Rudnicka
Imiona Janina Janina
Miejsce zamieszkania Płock

Wyprowadził się (opuścił miejsce czasowego pobytu)
dn. 12 m-ca V 1943 r. i został wymeldowany
z domu Nr 101 Nr mieszk. 23 przy ul. Pawiak
Komisariat P. P. VI obw. Leszno 5
(dokąd wymeldowany)
Podpis urzędnika
Pieczęć gminy
dn. m-ca 19 r.

21 Certificate of registration, dated 25 May 1943 and 15 October 1941 as well as certificate of deregistration dated 12 May 1943.

22 Falsified identity card for Hanna Janina Rudnicka from 26 June 1943, with which Lily could move around freely.

23 An undated photo of Lili working as a domestic for a Polish family and pretending to be a Christian.

was expected to do. Her food allocation consisted of two slices of dry bread without anything on it and a glass of coffee substitute made from roasted barley. At lunch she was allowed to eat any remains the family had left of their meal and, if they ate everything and left nothing, then Mrs Zabrocki would say that she had cooked so well that there was nothing left, in which case she had to make do with one or two slices of bread. Although she did not starve, Lili did not ever experience the feeling she had eaten enough to be satisfied the entire time she was there.

Lili also had to be extremely careful not to do anything which would make the family suspect her of not being a Christian. As it was such a small place and she was an outsider the locals were aware of her and she had to go to church every Sunday. At church there was the danger that she would stand out as she did not know the prayers or the order of the service. So she bought a book of catechism and studied it in bed in the evening so that she could learn as much as possible,

learning the most important parts off by heart. Lili went to church every Sunday and acted like a good Christian girl. Part of this act meant taking Communion, although she initially had no idea what this exactly involved or what one was supposed to do. At first Lili sat at the back in church so she could observe how others went up for Communion. Once she understood she always went up for Communion. There was no danger of being suspected as a Jew after going through all of that. Zabrocki's two children were rarely at home and Lili suspected they were members of an underground organisation. Meanwhile the work was exhausting and took up the whole day, from first thing in the morning to last thing in the evening.

One day Zabrowcki was outside talking to his wife and people they knew. In Warsaw the uprising had begun and Warsaw could be seen burning in the distance. Lili heard Zabrowcki say that Hitler had got only one thing right, namely getting rid of the Jews. Hearing this, Lili became more afraid that he would perhaps work out that she was Jewish if she were to slip up in any way, and she continued to carry this fear every day of her time living there, convinced now as she was that Zabrowcki was anti-Semitic.

During the late autumn of 1944, at either the end of October or the beginning of November, bomb detonations could be heard from far away. The front was moving closer and Lili began to hope that she would be freed. The detonations from the shelling got louder with each day and then suddenly there was a heavy bombardment and the Soviet Army invaded. Effectively Lili was now free since the Soviet army marched in, liberating the areas up to the Weichsel river and up to the Warsaw suburbs of Praga and Gruckow, stopping at the Weichsel. In the city itself, the Polish uprising had just happened in which thousands of people were killed and the city was completely destroyed leaving only ruins. Although Lili was now free and no longer needed to fear being caught, she had nowhere to go and nobody to whom she could go.

Lili did not want to remain with the Zabrowcki family being treated and exploited like a slave. Before the arrival of the Soviet army, during the German administration, Lili never went anywhere and stayed the whole time on the Zabrowcki property – with the exception of church on Sundays – for fear of being found out. Now that she was free, Lili went out to the nearest village and spoke to people and heard that a Chwascewski family in neighbouring Gloskow were

looking for a nanny. Lili went to this family and asked if it was true that they were looking for a nanny, as she would be willing to take the position. Mrs Chwascewski told her it was true. Lili explained that she was currently employed by the Zabrockis but was not very happy there, and that she would prefer to work as a nanny since she already had experience as one. As Mrs Chwascewski knew the Zabrowcki family, it being a small town, she gave Lili the job. The family comprised an older lady with her married daughter, her husband and small child. The husband was a high up official in a shipping company. The family lived in a large building in the style of an elegant villa, with a substantial garden. Lili was given a large room for herself and her only job was to look after the child. The family was very kind to Lili and she was well treated.

The Soviet army had advanced as far as this side of the Weichsel river in the Gruchow and Praga suburbs. The Germans were on the other side of the river in the centre of Warsaw. Firing and shelling was loud and went on for about three months. On a very early morning in January 1945 while it was still dark, the sudden loud noise of overhead planes and very heavy firing and explosions was heard. Everyone was woken from their sleep and went outside to try and establish what was going on. In the direction of Warsaw volleys of fire and explosions could be seen. This heavy firing lasted the whole day. That evening, when it became a bit quieter the firing seemed to be moving further and further away, becoming less audible. This attack was the offensive. Warsaw was now liberated.

After about two to three weeks, a Jewish committee was founded in Warsaw by the few survivors who had been hiding, those liberated from the camps and those returning from Russia. Lili found out by accident that this committee existed and was located in the Praga part of Warsaw. Lili went there and registered to see whether perhaps relatives or friends were also listed. She saw that Edek Ehrlich and his wife, Mr and Mrs Apter and Mr and Mrs Berek were listed. Lili knew these three families very well from the ghetto as they had all lived in the same building and had worked in the same *Schop*. Lili was given information as to their whereabouts and got in touch with them. Miraculously, the three families had also got out of the ghetto before it was liquidated and had been in hiding. From then on Lili stayed in touch with these families but stayed on with the Polish family as nanny, since she was well looked after and was living relatively well.

Lili died in Zurich on 26 March 2016 at her husband Israel's side.
Israel died in Zurich on 14 January 2017.

Glossary

Alija (Aliyah, 'ascent') Since the Babylonian exile (586–539), this biblical term has been used to describe the return of Jews to the Promised Land, either in groups or individually. People who "make *aliyah*" are called *olim*. Since the nineteenth century it is defined more generally as "Jewish immigration" to Palestine and, since 1948, Israel.

Alija Bet (Aliyah Bet, also known as Ha'pala) was the code name given to the illegal immigration of Jews to Mandatory Palestine between 1934 and 1948, violating the restrictions laid out in the British White Paper of 1939.

Bricha ('escape' or 'flight') was the underground organised effort that helped Jews between 1944 and 1948 escape Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union and immigrate illegally to Palestine.

Chassidim (Hasidim, "The Pious") refers to independent sects in Judaism, known as 'courts'. They all share basic convictions and their members adhere closely to religious rules and traditions as well as upholding high moral standards. They are said to pursue closeness to God which often involves mystic elements.

Chejder (Yiddish, Cheder) is the Hebrew word for 'room' and refers to traditional elementary schools teaching the basics of Judaism and the Hebrew language. They were common in Western Europe until the end of the eighteenth century and in Eastern Europe until the Holocaust. Lessons took place in the house of the teacher whose wages were paid by the Jewish community or a group of parents. Normally, only boys would attend classes – girls were educated by their mothers in the homes. Where money was scarce and the community could not afford to maintain many teachers, boys of all ages would be taught in a single group. Although traditionally boys started learning the Hebrew alphabet the day they turned three, they typically entered cheder school around the age of 5. After learning to read Hebrew, they would immediately begin studying the Torah, starting with Leviticus and the five books of Moses.

Chumasch is a Torah in printed form (i. e. codex) as opposed to a sefer Torah, which is a scroll. The word comes from the Hebrew word for five, 'ḥamesh' (the five books of the Torah).

Erew Pessach The Passover Seder is a Jewish ritual feast that marks the beginning of the holiday of Passover. It is traditional for Jewish families to gather on the first night of Passover for a special dinner called a Seder (derived from the Hebrew word for 'order' or 'arrangement', referring to the very specific order of the ritual). During this meal, the story of the Exodus from Egypt is retold using a special text called the Haggadah.

Gemara (from the Aramaic verb *gamar*, 'study', 'learn') is the section of the Talmud comprising rabbinical analysis of and commentary on the Mishnah. After the Mishnah was published by Judah the Prince, the work was studied exhaustively by generation after generation of rabbis in Babylonia and the Land of Israel. Their discussions were written down in a series of books that became the Gemara, which when combined with the Mishnah constituted the Talmud.

Gerrer Hasidim Ger, or Gur (or Gerrer when used as an adjective) is a Hasidic dynasty originating from Ger, the Yiddish name of Góra Kalwaria, a small town in Poland. The founder of the dynasty was Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Alter (1798–1866), known as the *Chiddushei HaRim* after his primary scholarly work by the same title.

Hachschara (Hakhshara, Hebrew, 'preparation') refers to training programs and agricultural centres in Europe and elsewhere. At these centres Zionist youth would learn the technical skills necessary for their emigration to Israel and subsequent life in kibbutzim.

Jischuw (Yishuv, Hebrew, 'settlement') refers to the body of Jewish residents in the land of Israel prior to the establishment of the State of Israel. The term came into use in the 1880s, when there were around 25,000 Jews living across the land of Israel, which then included the southern part of Ottoman Syria, and continued to be used until 1948, by which time there were about 700,000 Jews residing there. The term is still used in Hebrew today to denote the Pre-State Jewish residents in the Land of Israel.

Joint or JDC (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee) is a Jewish relief organisation based in New York City. It was founded in 1914, initially to provide assistance to Jews living in Palestine under Turkish rule. After the Second World War it was one of the most important Jewish organisations providing support for Jewish survivors in Displaced Person camps in Germany, Italy and Eastern Europe. After the founding of the State of Israel it helped immigrants resettle there.

Kapote A long coat formerly worn by male Jews of Eastern Europe and now worn chiefly by very Orthodox or Hasidic Jews.

Kulak (Russian, 'fist') is a Russian term used since the nineteenth century to describe affluent peasants. According to the political theory of Marxism–Leninism in the early twentieth century, the kulaks were class enemies of the poorer peasants. Lenin described them as "bloodsuckers, vampires, plunderers of the people and profiteers, who fatten on famine".

Madrichim (Hebrew, 'youth leaders') is an organised Machanot ('holiday camp') for the *Zentralwohlfahrtsstelle der Juden in Deutschland*.

Peja (Payot, lit. 'corner', 'side', 'edge') is the Hebrew word for sidelocks or sidecurls. According to Halacha, peja are to be worn by Jewish men. The Torah commands wearing sidelocks and beards.

Rebbe is a Yiddish word derived from the Hebrew word rabbi, which means 'master', 'teacher', or 'mentor'. Like the title 'rabbi' it refers to teachers of the Torah or leaders of Judaism.

Scheplein (from English 'Chaplain'). A member of the clergy attached to a certain group of people, here for a group within the military.

Schochtim (Shechita) means the slaughtering of certain mammals and birds for food according to Jewish dietary laws. The procedure, which must be performed by a shochet, involves severing the trachea and esophagus in a swift action using a special knife with an extremely sharp blade. As the Bible prohibits the eating of blood, it must be promptly removed from the carcass.

Sochnut (Hebrew: HaSochnut HaYehudit L'Eretz Yisra'el, The Jewish Agency for Israel) was established as the Palestine Office (of the Zionist Organization) in 1908, the organisation became the Zionist Commission and later the Palestine Zionist Executive, which was designated in 1929 as the "Jewish agency" provided for in the League of Nations' Palestine Mandate and was thus again renamed as The Jewish Agency for Palestine. After the establishment of the State it received its current name. It is best known as the primary organisation fostering the immigration ('Aliyah') and absorption of Jews and their families from the Jewish diaspora into Israel. Throughout the years 1934–1948 it facilitated clandestine immigration beyond the British quotas. The potential immigrants were Jews fleeing Nazi atrocities in Europe and, after the war, refugees from DP camps who sought a home in Palestine.

Sofer (Hebrew, 'scribe') is a Jewish scribe who can transcribe sifrei Torah, tefillin and mezuzot, and other religious writings. Many scribes also function as calligraphers, writing functional documents such as ketubot 'marriage contracts' or ornamental and artistic renditions of religious texts.

Stiblech or 'stibl' is a small prayer room, used by Eastern European Jews for prayer services.

Stramel (Shtreimel) is a fur hat worn by many married Haredi Jewish men, particularly (although not exclusively) members of Hasidic Judaism, on Shabbat and Jewish holidays and other festive occasions. The most widely seen shtreimel is typically worn by the Hasidim of Galicia, Romania, and Hungary, and was worn by Lithuanian Jews up until the twentieth century. It is comprised of a large circular piece of black velvet surrounded by fur.

Sukkah is a temporary hut constructed for use during the week-long Jewish festival of Sukkot. It is topped with branches and often well decorated with autumnal, harvest or Judaic themes. The Book of Vayikra describes it as a symbolic wilderness shelter, commemorating the time God provided for the Israelites in the wilderness after they were freed from slavery in Egypt.

Sukkot (commonly translated as Feast of Tabernacles or Feast of the Ingathering, literally Feast of Booths) is a biblical Jewish holiday celebrated on the 15th day of the seventh month, Tishrei. The holiday lasts seven days in Israel and eight in the diaspora.

Tanach (Tanakh) also called the Mikra or Hebrew Bible, is the canonical collection of Jewish texts, which is also a textual source for the Christian Old Testament. These texts are composed mainly in Biblical Hebrew, with some passages in Biblical Aramaic (in the books of Daniel, Ezra and a few others). The traditional Hebrew text is known as the Masoretic Text. The Tanakh consists of twenty-four books.

Tefilin (Tefillin) are a set of small black leather boxes containing scrolls of parchment inscribed with verses from the Torah. They are worn by male observant Jews during weekday morning prayers. The arm-tefillin is placed on the upper arm, and the strap wrapped around the arm, hand and fingers; while the head-tefillin is placed above the forehead. The Torah commands that they should be worn to serve as a "sign" and "remembrance" that God brought the children of Israel out of Egypt.

UNRRA The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration was an international relief agency, founded in 1943, which became part of the United Nations in 1945. Its purpose was to "plan, co-ordinate, administer or arrange for the administration of measures for the relief of victims of war in any area under the control of any of the United Nations". It played a major role in helping Displaced Persons return to their home countries in Europe. It operated camps in occupied Germany under the local military commander, primarily for Displaced Persons, especially the 11,000,000 non-Germans who had been moved into Germany during the war.

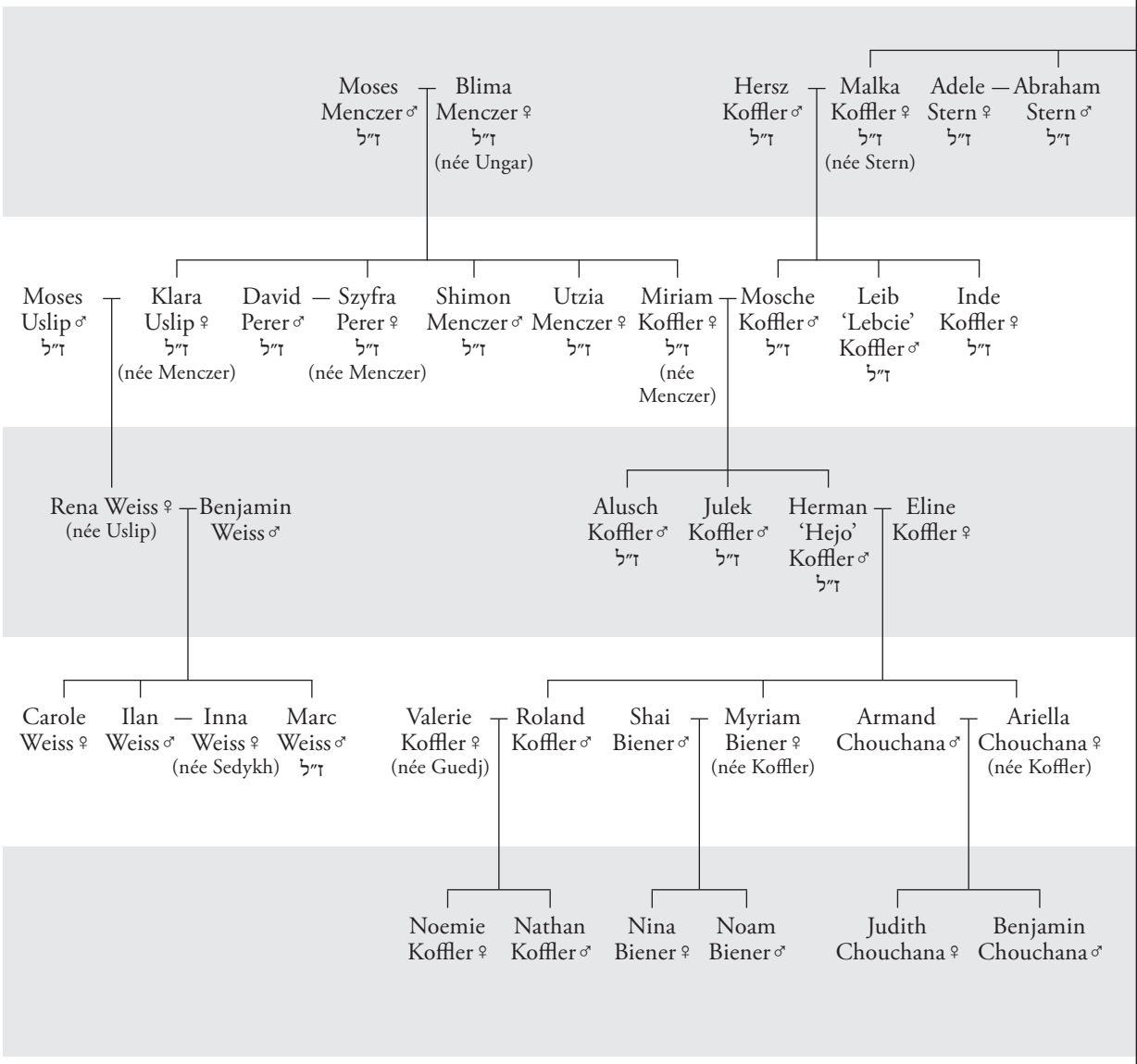
Zemlanke (Zemlyanka) is an Eastern Slavic name for a dugout or earth-house. In World War II, partisans, or armed resistance fighters in Eastern Europe sometimes lived in zemlyankas which were used as underground bunkers to provide shelter and as a hiding place from enemies.

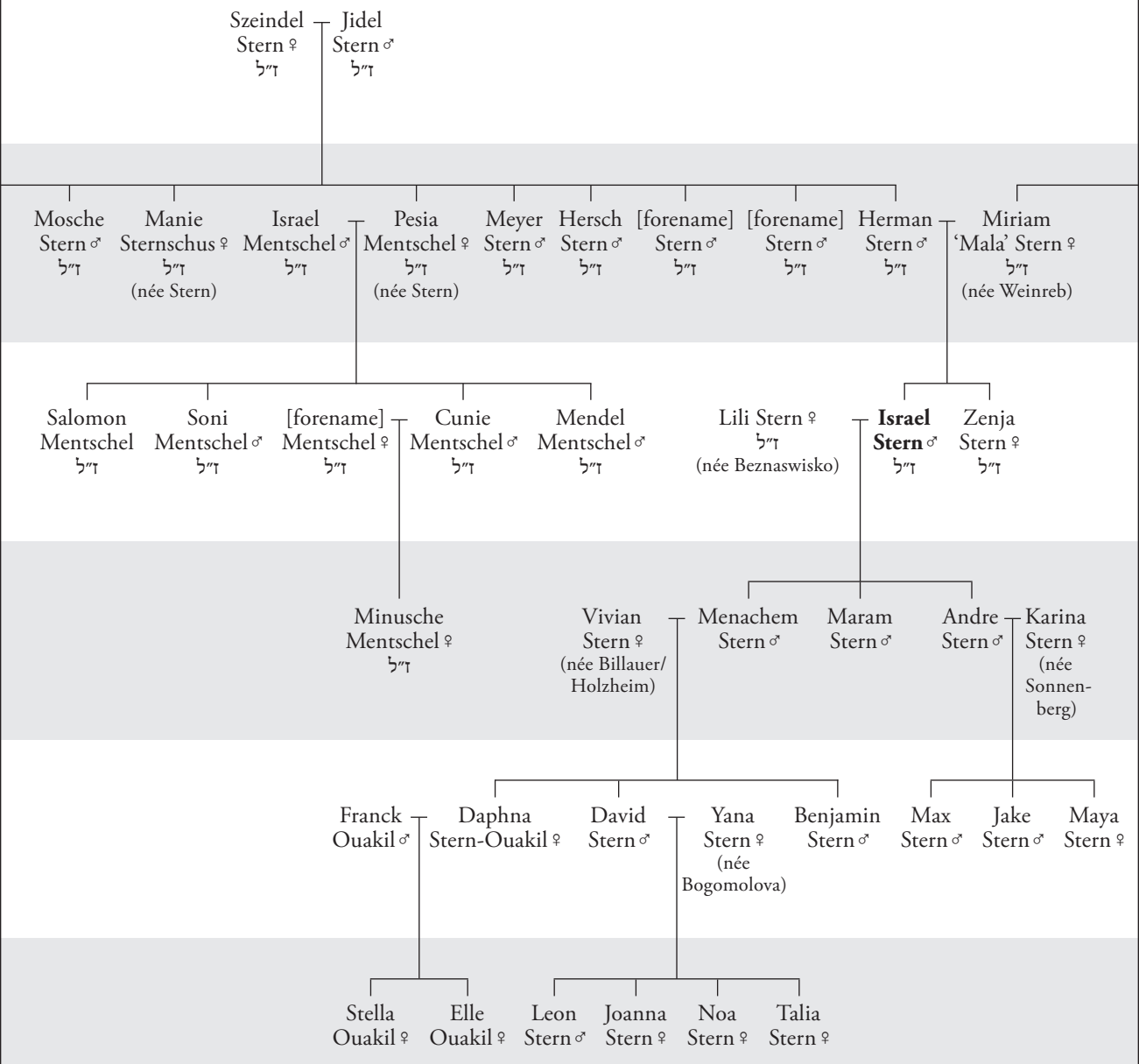
Israel Stern Family Tree

♀ female ♂ male
Where gender is not indicated, it is unknown.

ז״ל / הכרבל ונורכיז (of blessed memory)

Unknown forenames are marked in square brackets:
[forename]




Szeindel Stern ♀ ז״ל
Jidel Stern ♂ ז״ל
Mosche Stern ♂ ז״ל
Manie Sternschus ♀ ז״ל (née Stern)
Israel Mentschel ♂ ז״ל
Pesia Mentschel ♀ ז״ל (née Stern)
Meyer Stern ♂ ז״ל
Hersch Stern ♂ ז״ל
[forename] Stern ♂ ז״ל
[forename] Stern ♂ ז״ל
Herman Stern ♂ ז״ל
Miriam 'Mala' Stern ♀ ז״ל (née Weinreb)
Salomon Mentschel ז״ל
Soni Mentschel ♂ ז״ל
[forename] Mentschel ♀ ז״ל
Cunie Mentschel ♂ ז״ל
Mendel Mentschel ♂ ז״ל
Lili Stern ♀ ז״ל (née Beznaswisko)
Israel Stern ♂ ז״ל
Zenja Stern ♀ ז״ל
Minusche Mentschel ♀ ז״ל
Vivian Stern ♀ (née Billauer/ Holzheim)
Menachem Stern ♂
Maram Stern ♂
Andre Stern ♂
Karina Stern ♀ (née Sonnenberg)
Franck Ouakil ♂
Daphna Stern-Ouakil ♀
David Stern ♂
Yana Stern ♀ (née Bogomolova)
Benjamin Stern ♂
Max Stern ♂
Jake Stern ♂
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Elle Ouakil ♀
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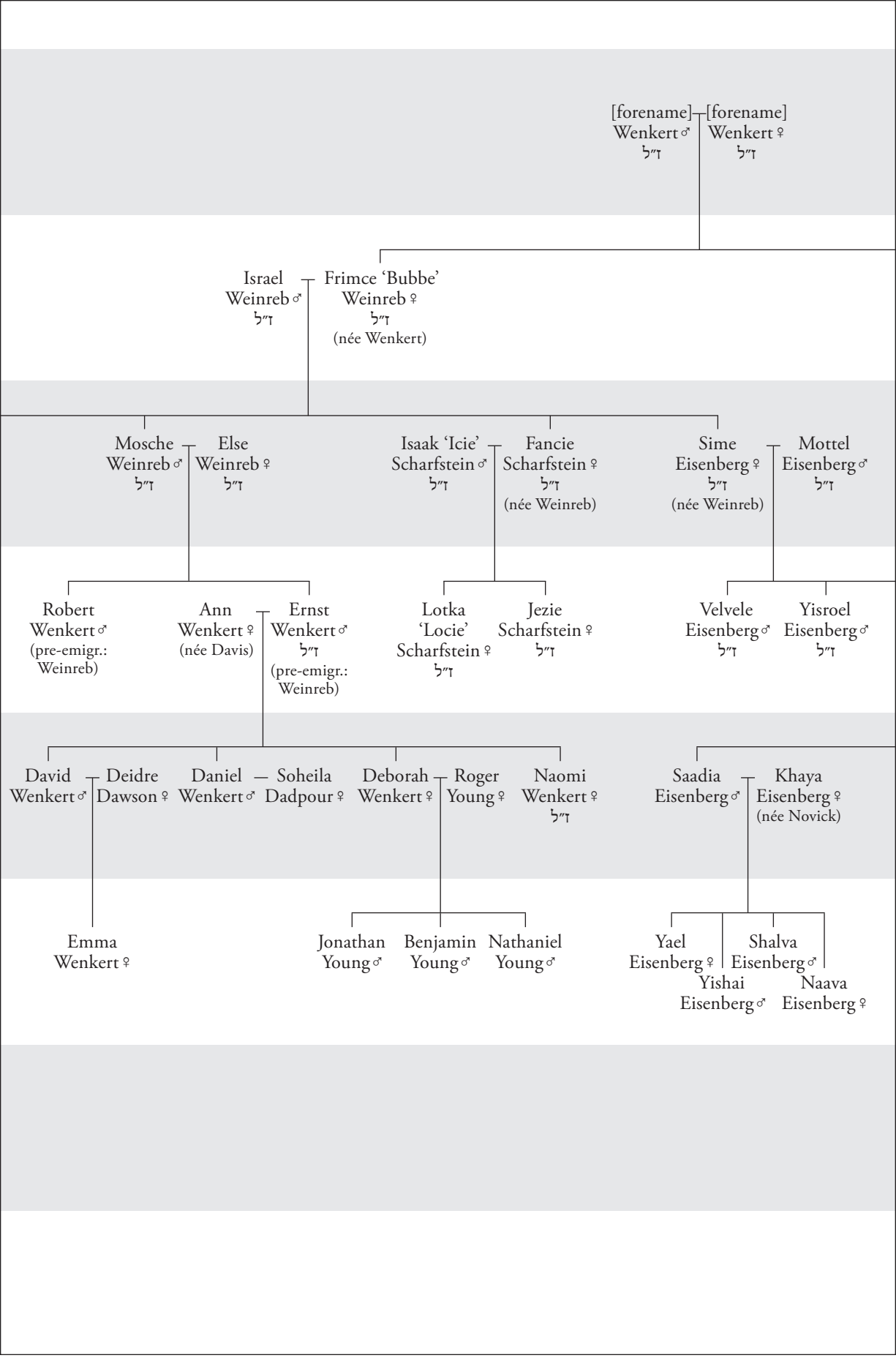
Joanna Stern ♀
Noa Stern ♀
Talia Stern ♀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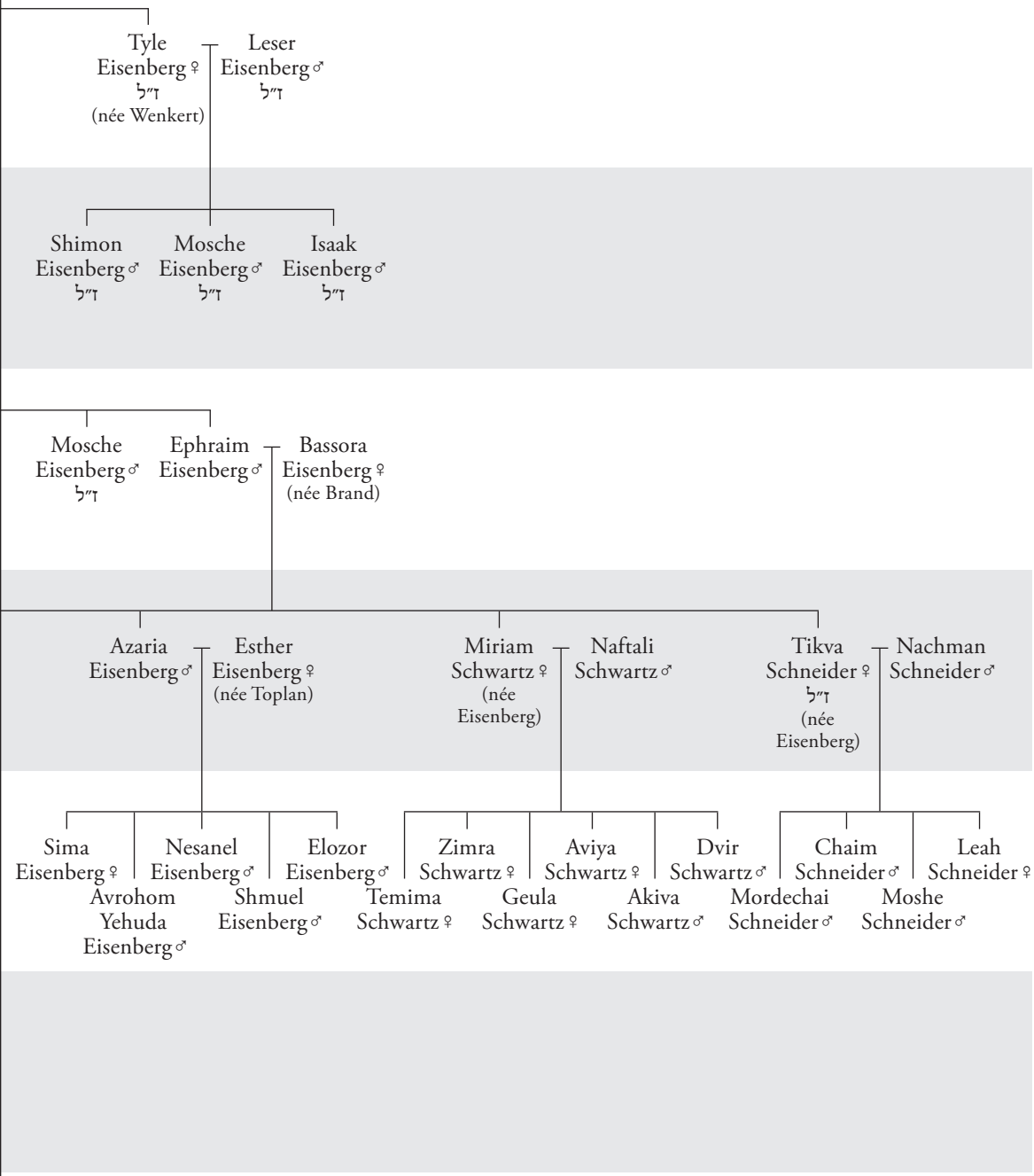
Frimce 'Bubbe' Weinreb ♀ ז״ל (née Wenkert)
Mosche Weinreb ♂ ז״ל
Else Weinreb ♀ ז״ל
Isaak 'Icie' Scharfstein ♂ ז״ל
Fancie Scharfstein ♀ ז״ל (née Weinreb)
Sime Eisenberg ♀ ז״ל (née Weinreb)
Mottel Eisenberg ♂ ז״ל
Robert Wenkert ♂ (pre-emigr.: Weinreb)
Ann Wenkert ♀ (née Davis)
Ernst Wenkert ♂ ז״ל (pre-emigr.: Weinreb)
Lotka 'Locie' Scharfstein ♀ ז״ל
Jezie Scharfstein ♀ ז״ל
Velvele Eisenberg ♂ ז״ל
Yisroel Eisenberg ♂ ז״ל
David Wenkert ♂
Deidre Dawson ♀
Daniel Wenkert ♂
Soheila Dadpour ♀
Deborah Wenkert ♀
Roger Young ♀
Naomi Wenkert ♀ ז״ל
Saadia Eisenberg ♂
Khaya Eisenberg ♀ (née Novick)
Emma Wenkert ♀
Jonathan Young ♂
Benjamin Young ♂
Nathaniel Young ♂
Yael Eisenberg ♀
Shalva Eisenberg ♂
Yishai Eisenberg ♂
Naava Eisenberg ♀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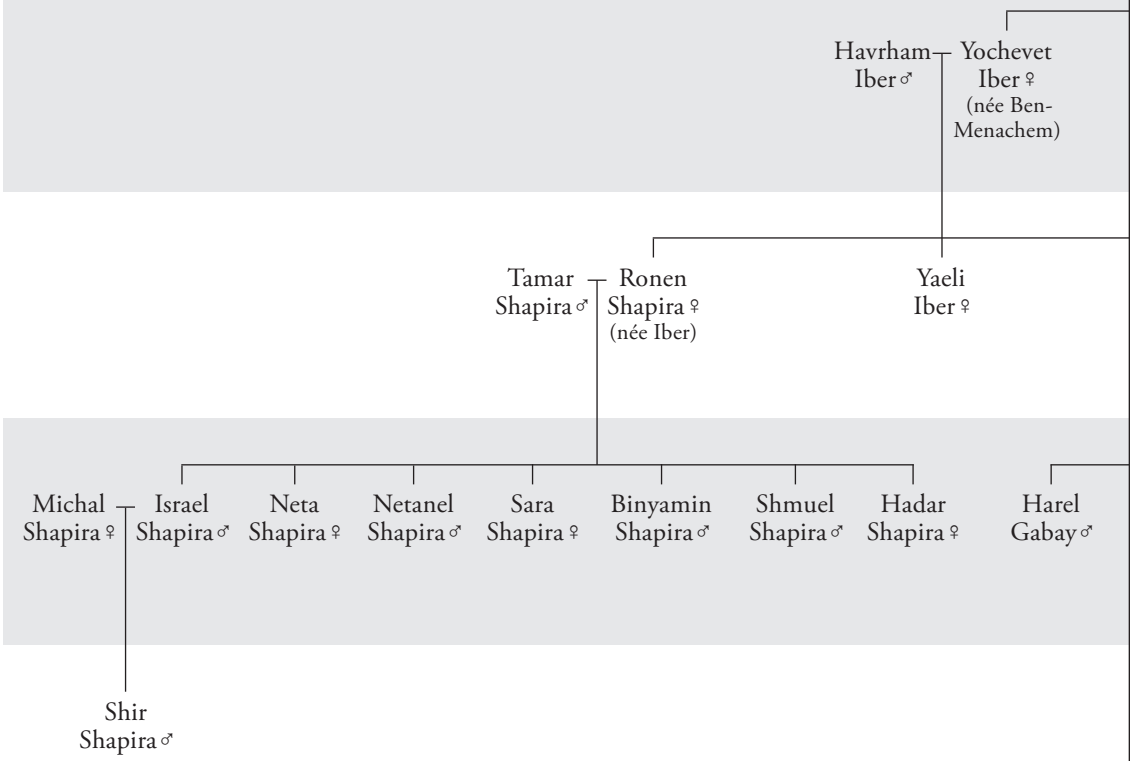
Leser Eisenberg ♂ ז״ל
Shimon Eisenberg ♂ ז״ל
Mosche Eisenberg ♂ ז״ל
Isaak Eisenberg ♂ ז״ל
Mosche Eisenberg ♂ ז״ל
Ephraim Eisenberg ♂
Bassora Eisenberg ♀ (née Brand)
Azaria Eisenberg ♂
Esther Eisenberg ♀ (née Toplan)
Miriam Schwartz ♀ (née Eisenberg)
Naftali Schwartz ♂
Tikva Schneider ♀ ז״ל (née Eisenberg)
Nachman Schneider ♂
Sima Eisenberg ♀
Nesanel Eisenberg ♂
Elozor Eisenberg ♂
Zimra Schwartz ♀
Aviya Schwartz ♀
Dvir Schwartz ♂
Chaim Schneider ♂
Leah Schneider ♀
Avrohom Yehuda Eisenberg ♂
Shmuel Eisenberg ♂
Temima Schwartz ♀
Geula Schwartz ♀
Akiva Schwartz ♂
Mordechai Schneider ♂
Moshe Schneider ♂

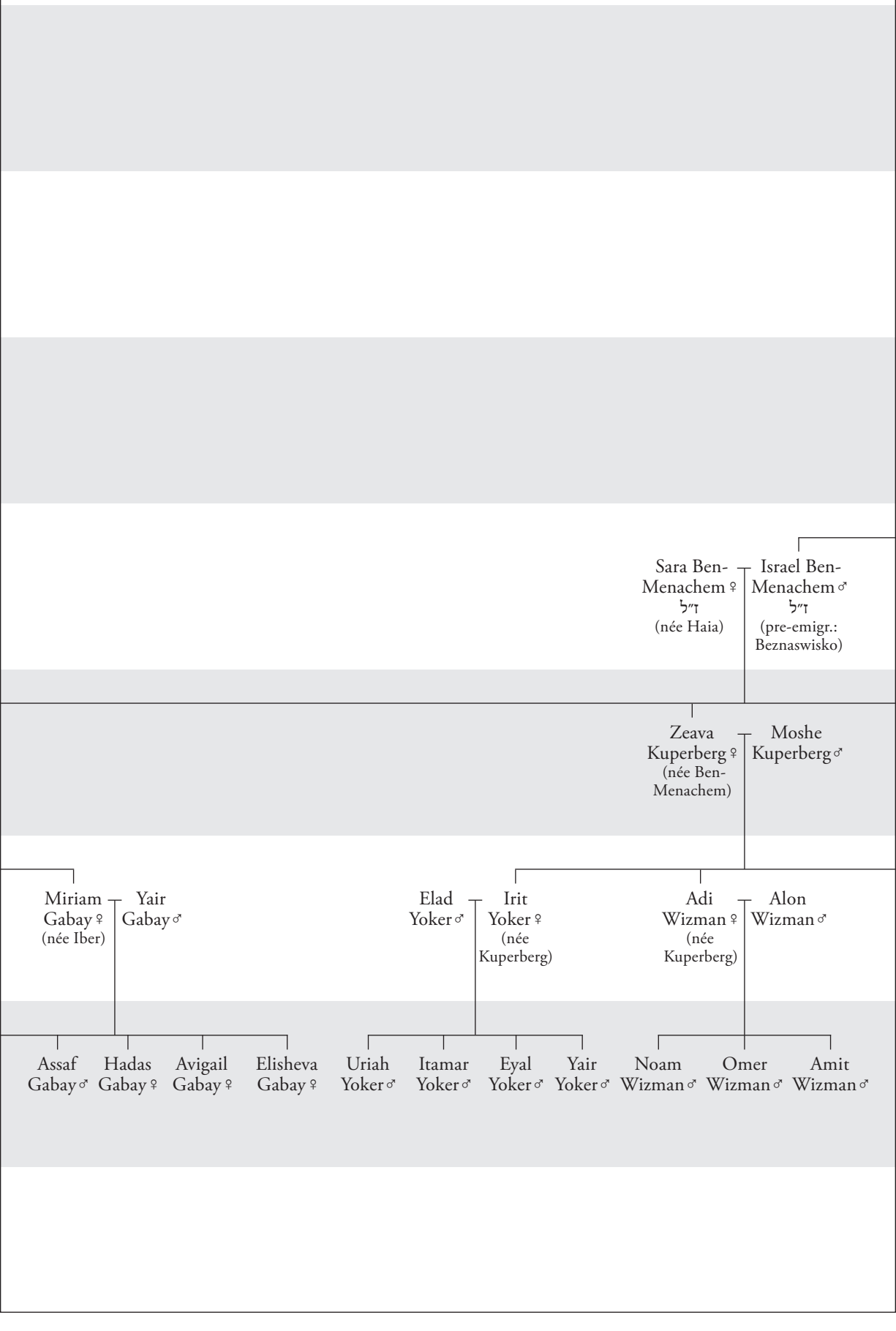
Lili Stern Family Tree

♀ female ♂ male
Where gender is not indicated, it is unknown.

ז״ל / הכרבל ונורכיז (of blessed memory)

Unknown forenames are marked in square brackets:
[forename]

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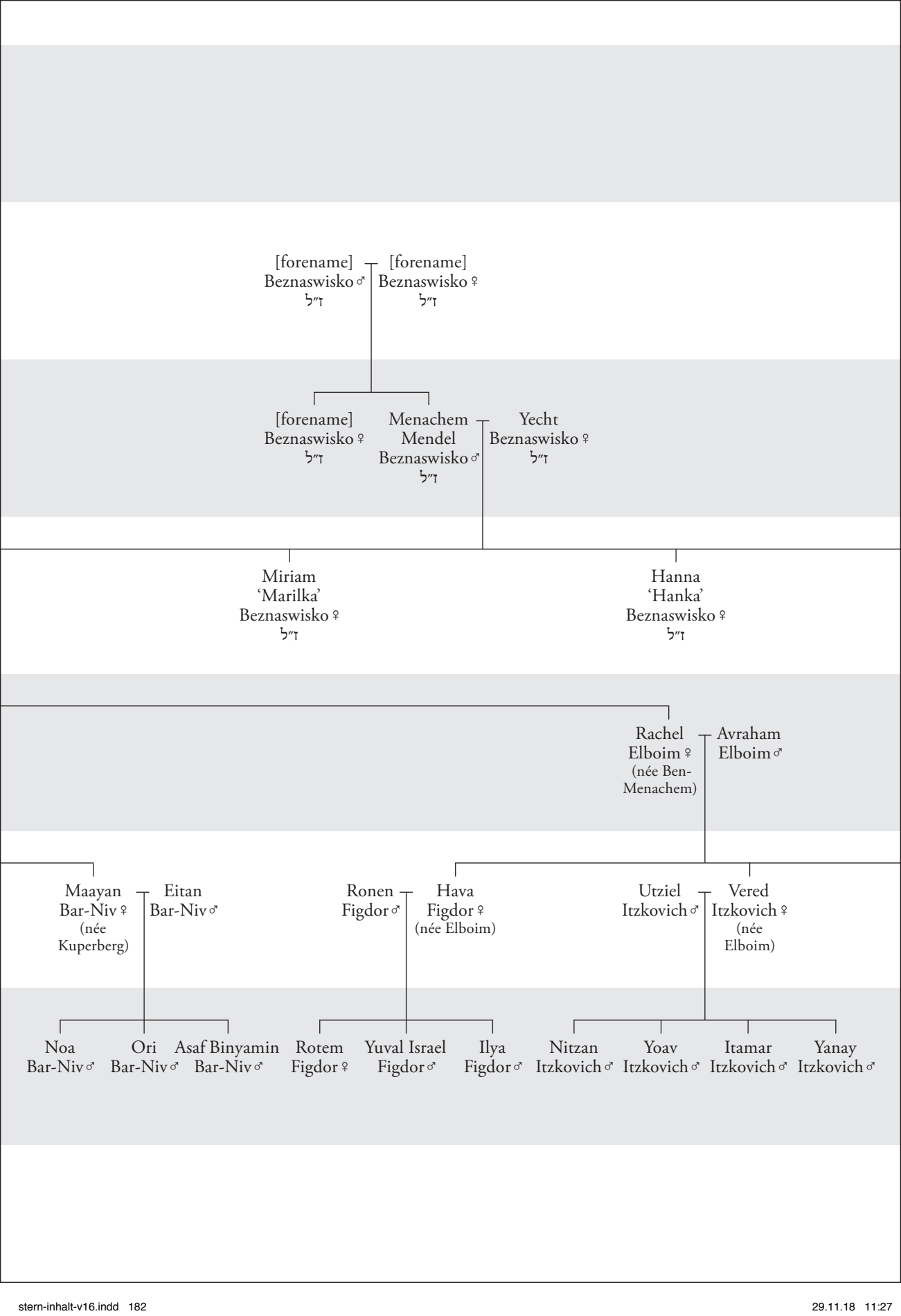
Israel Ben-Menachem ♂ ז״ל (pre-emigr.: Beznaswisko)
Zeava Kuperberg ♀ (née Ben-Menachem)
Moshe Kuperberg ♂
Miriam Gabay ♀ (née Iber)
Yair Gabay ♂
Elad Yoker ♂
Irit Yoker ♀ (née Kuperberg)
Adi Wizman ♀ (née Kuperberg)
Alon Wizman ♂
Assaf Gabay ♂
Hadas Gabay ♀
Avigail Gabay ♀
Elisheva Gabay ♀
Uriah Yoker ♂
Itamar Yoker ♂
Eyal Yoker ♂
Yair Yoker ♂
Noam Wizman ♂
Omer Wizman ♂
Amit Wizman ♂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Menachem Mendel Beznaswisko ♂ ז״ל
Yecht Beznaswisko ♀ ז״ל
Miriam ‘Marilka’ Beznaswisko ♀ ז״ל
Hanna ‘Hanka’ Beznaswisko ♀ ז״ל
Rachel Elboim ♀ (née Ben-Menachem)
Avraham Elboim ♂
Maayan Bar-Niv ♀ (née Kuperberg)
Eitan Bar-Niv ♂
Ronen Figdor ♂
Hava Figdor ♀ (née Elboim)
Utziel Itzkovich ♂
Vered Itzkovich ♀ (née Elboim)
Noa Bar-Niv ♂
Ori Bar-Niv ♂
Asaf Bar-Niv ♂
Binyamin Bar-Niv ♂
Rotem Figdor ♀
Yuval Figdor ♂
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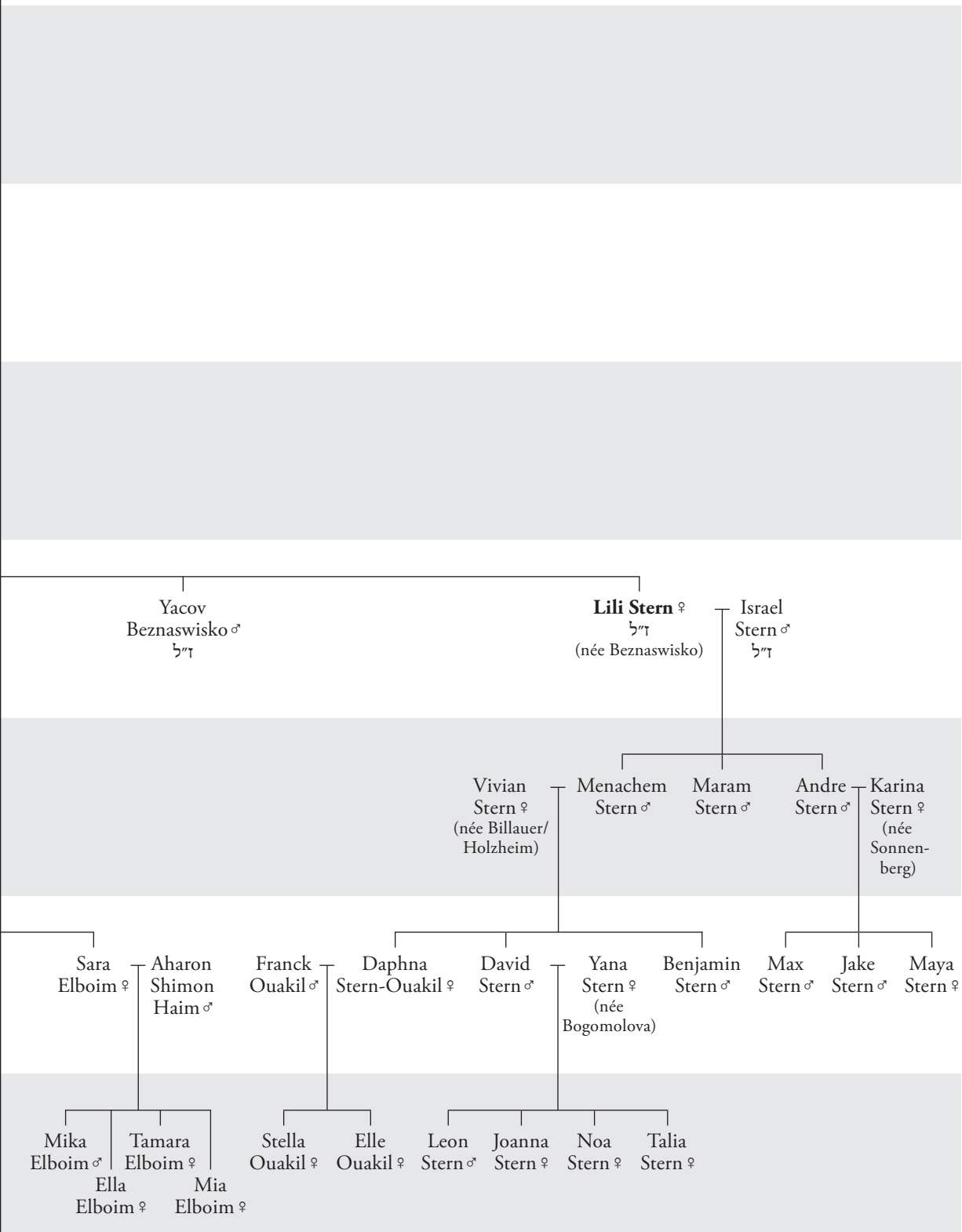
Yacov Beznaswisko ♂ ז״ל
Lili Stern ♀ ז״ל (née Beznaswisko)
Israel Stern ♂ ז״ל
Vivian Stern ♀ (née Billauer/ Holzheim)
Menachem Stern ♂
Maram Stern ♂
Andre Stern ♂
Karina Stern ♀ (née Sonnen-berg)
Sara Elboim ♀
Aharon Shimon Haim ♂
Franck Ouakil ♂
Daphna Stern-Ouakil ♀
David Stern ♂
Yana Stern ♀ (née Bogomolova)
Benjamin Stern ♂
Max Stern ♂
Jake Stern ♂
Maya Stern ♀
Mika Elboim ♂
Tamara Elboim ♀
Ella Elboim ♀
Mia Elboim ♀
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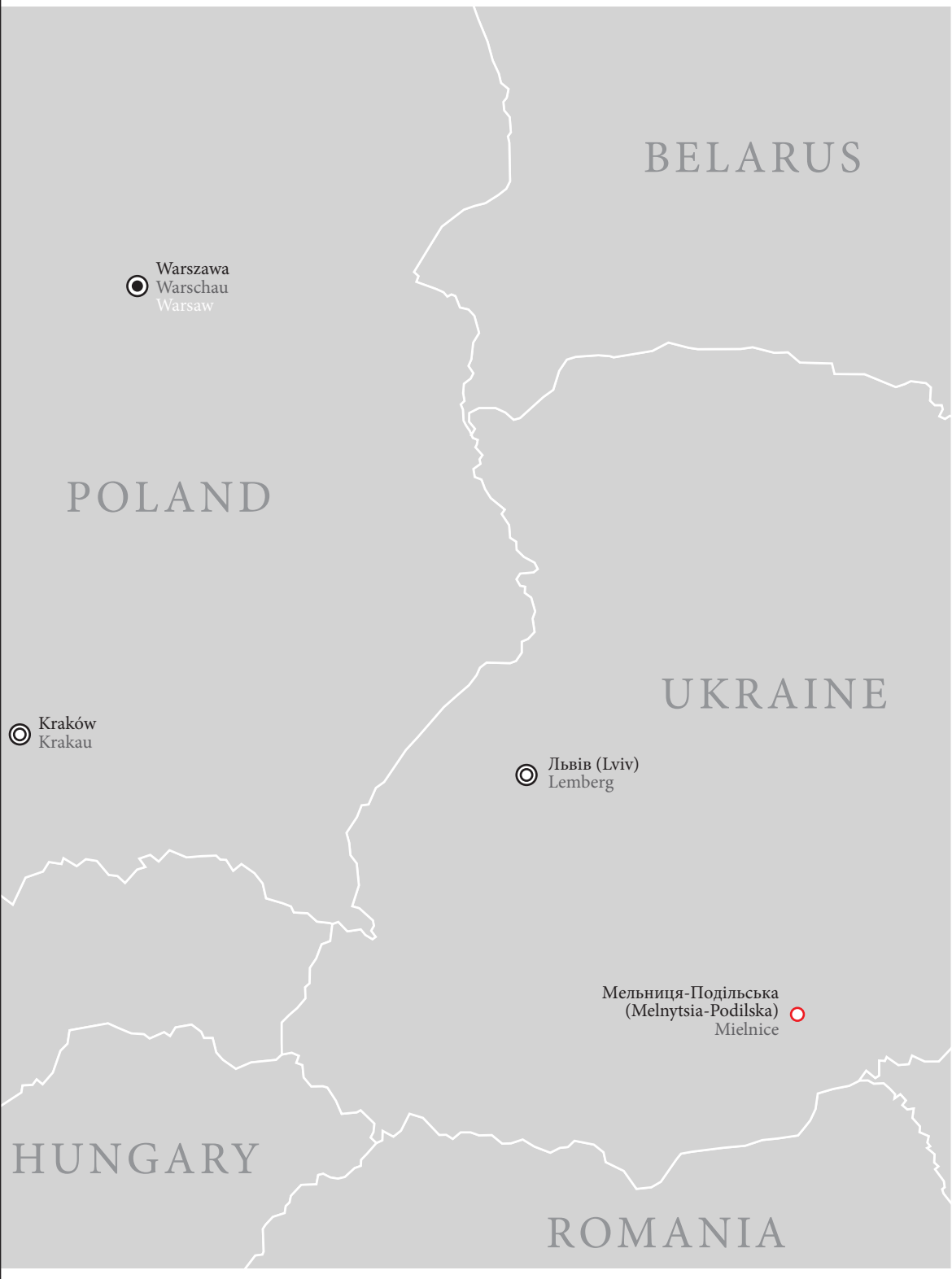
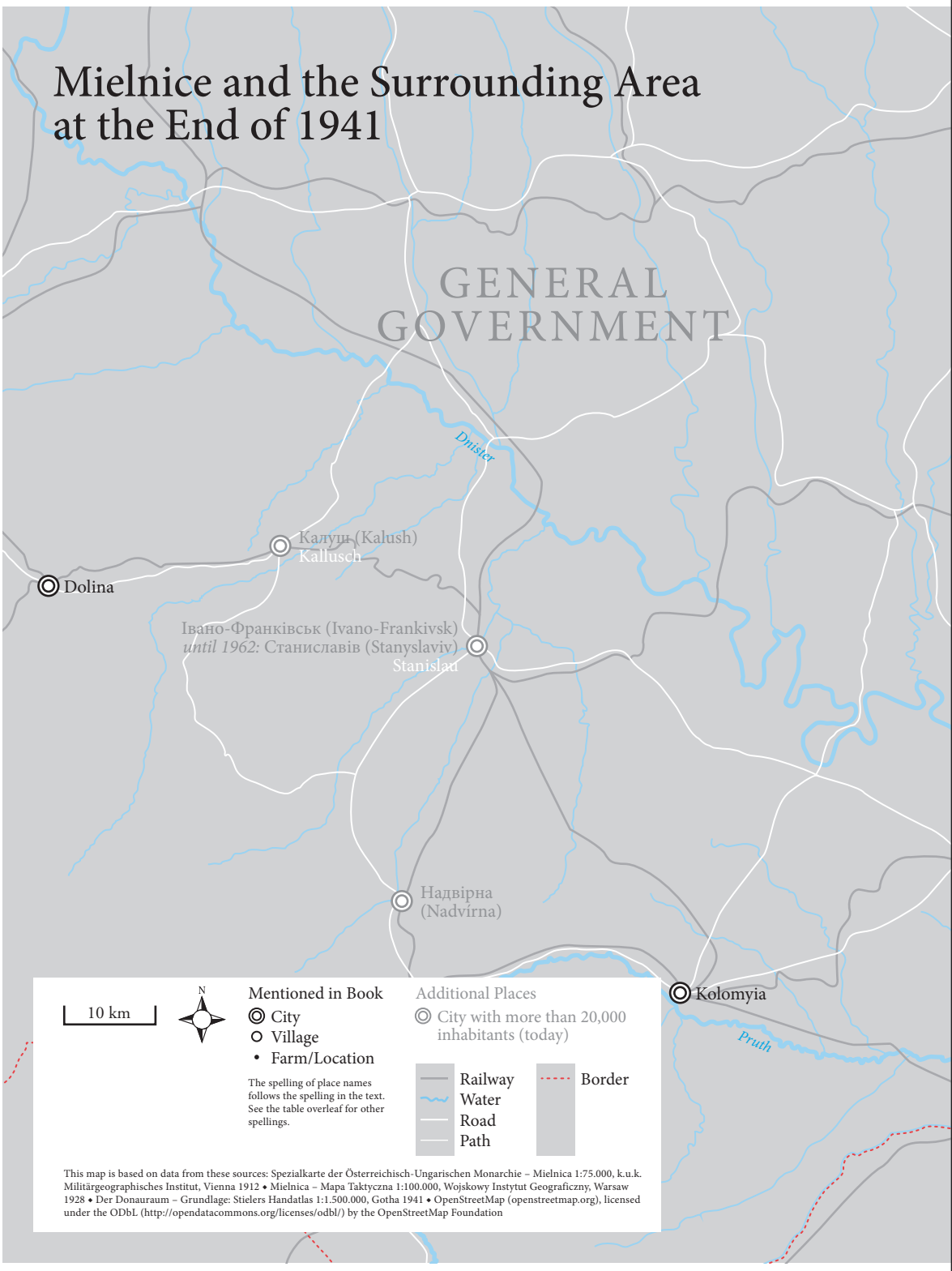
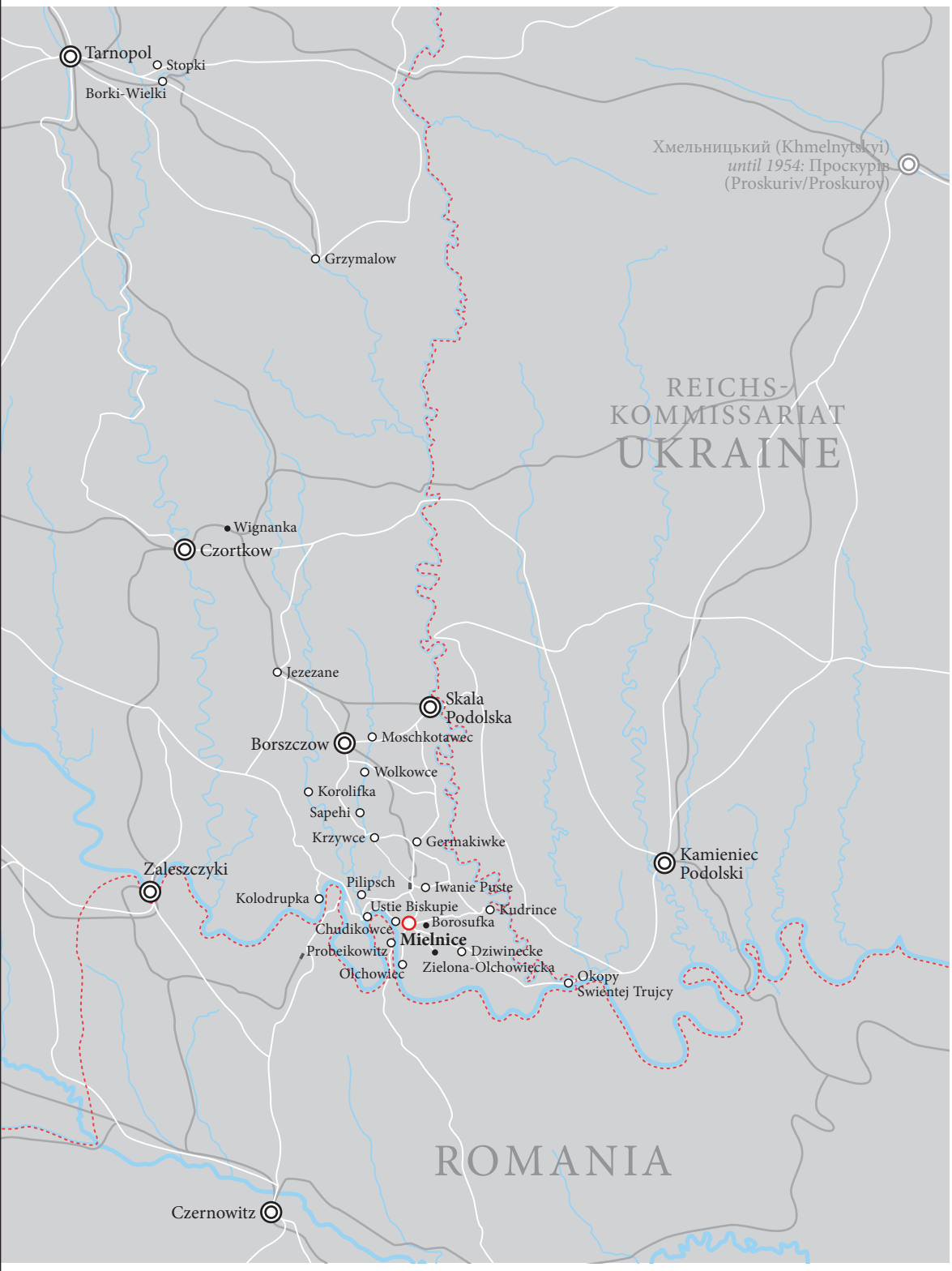
Noa Stern ♀
Talia Stern ♀

Overview with Borders at the End of 1941







Spelling of Place Names

In the Book	German	English	Polish	Ukrainian	Russian
Borki-Wielki		Velyki Birky	Borki Wielkie	Великі Бірки	Великие Борки
Borszczow	Borschtschiw	Borshchiv	Borszczów	Борщів	Борщёв
Chudikowce		Khudykivtsi	Chudykowce	Худиківці	Худыковцы
Czernowitz	Czernowitz/ Tschernowitz	Chernivtsi	Czerniowce	Чернівці	Черновцы
Czortkow	Tschortkiw	Chortkiv	Czortków	Чортків	Чортков
Dniester	Dnister	Dniester	Dniestr	Дністер	Днестр
Dolina		Dolyna	Dolina	Долина	Долина
Dziwinecke		Dzvyniachka	Dźwiniaczka	Дзвинячка	Дзвинячка
Filipkowce/ Pilipsch	Pilipsch	Pylypche	Filipkowce	Пилипче	Пилипче
Germakiwke		Hermakivka	Germakówka	Гермаківка	Гермаковка
Grzymalow		Hrymailiv	Grzymałów	Гримайлів	Гримайлов
Iwanie Puste		Ivane-Puste	Iwanie Puste	Іване-Пусте	Иване-Пусте
Jezezane		Ozeriany	Jezierzany	Озеряни	Озеряны
Kamieniec Podolski	Kamjanez-Podilskyj	Kamianets-Podilskyi	Kamieniec Podolski	Кам'янець-Подільський	Каменец-Подольский
Kolodrupka		Kolodribka	Kołodróbka	Колодрібка	Колодробка
Kolomyia	Kolomyja	Kolomyia	Kołomyja	Коломия	Коломыя
Korolifka	Koroliwka	Korolivka	Korolówka	Королівка	Королёвка
Krzywce		Kryvche	Krzywcze	Кривче	Кривче
Kudrince		Kudryntsi	Kudryńce	Кудринці	Кудринцы
Michalki		Mykhalkiv	Michałków	Михалків	Михалков
Mielnice		Melnytsia-Podilska	Mielnica Podolska	Мельниця-Подільська	Мельница-Подольская
Moschkotawec		Mushkativka	Muszkatówka	Мушкатівка	Мушкатовка
Okopy Swientej Trujcy		Okopy Svyatoyi Triytsi	Okopy Świętej Trójcy	Окопи Святої Трійці	Окопы
Olchowiec	Wilchewitz	Vilkhovets	Olchowiec	Вільховець	Ольховец
Probeikowitz		Perebykivtsi		Перебиківці	Перебыковцы
Sapehi		Sapohiv	Sapohów	Сапогів	Сапогов
Skala		Skala-Podilska	Skała Podolska	Скала-Подільська	Скала-Подольская
Stopki		Stupky	Stupki	Ступки	Ступки
Tarnopol	Ternopil	Ternopil	Tarnopol	Тернопіль	Тернополь
Ustie Biskupie		Ustia	Uście Biskupie	Устя	Устье
Wignanka		Vignanka	Vignanka	Вигнанка	Выгнанка
Wolkowce		Vovkivtsi	Wołkowce	Вовківці	Волковцы
Zaleszczyki	Salischtschyky	Zalischyky	Zaleszczyki	Заліщики	Залещики
Zielona-Olchowiecka		Zelene	Zielona Olchowiecka	Зелене	Зелёное

Credits

Photos
Author's Archive

Maps
Phillip Hailperin, Hofmeister Stauder. Büchermacher using the sources named on the maps.

Glossary
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