

MICHAEL J. KRAUS PAPERS, 1937-1994
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Translations:

Below is a translation of the Michael Kraus diary, translated by Michael Kraus. In the diary, written after the war, Michael describes his memories from the war and of his parents.

ABSTRACT

This is a diary of a Czech boy from Nachod who was deported in 1942 at the age of almost 13, who survived Terezin, Osviecim, the death march, Mauthausen and the tent camps before being liberated by the American army at age 15. At age 17, in 1947, while living with relatives, he wrote this perceptive diary to honor the memory of his murdered parents.

Ila

**DIARY
1942-5**

Michal Kraus (photograph of parents)

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To the Memory of My Parents

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Under German Dominance!

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PREAMBLE

Most people—say those here in Nachod—did not live through as much suffering and disappointment during the seven years of occupation, as we, the ten or twelve of us who survived the hell of Nazi occupation and returned home, alive, but not healthy because many returned with serious illnesses.

I saw and heard so much during my years of persecution that I would like to write down succinctly what I remember. Last year, when I started to write the first part (of this diary) I still had many details etched into my memory, but today, two years later, what I want to write about, I recall less, even though every day would provide a good author with an abundance of rewarding material.

I shall note only what remained in my memory, the most important events of my life during the war.

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Before ending this preamble, I would like to pay homage to those who did not survive the Nazi concentration camps. There were many of them, terribly many. They suffered unbearably. They perished under indescribable circumstances. And their sacrifices must not escape our consciousness, they must keep admonishing us: beware of Nazism, Fascism and all unlawful authority.

INTRODUCTION

It is now three years that I started to write my first diary. Already then we were preparing ourselves for Terezin, so there was no shortage of news or interesting things to report. I spent a lot of time on this diary, as well as on several of my own writings and poems. In Terezin this activity continued more intensively because the children's house in which I was placed issued a weekly newspaper on which I also collaborated.

In December 1943, I left for Osviecim, where everything was forbidden. My

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beloved books and note books were taken from me and burned. So no written memories of those horrible times remain. That is why I will start anew and briefly recount that which I experienced during the six years of German domination.

It is impossible to describe the horrors of the K-Z as they really were, because no mere words can accurately describe the reality of the hardships and horrors. Surely nobody can believe the SS methods if he did not feel them on his own skin.

**Who can feel with us/
Who can understand us?**

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And believe me, even if physical suffering was unbearable and many succumbed, the psychological suffering was worse than the physical one.

And when I now recall what was, I don't want - I don't want to - remember the horror: that I lost my father, my mother and lived with the expectation of death, that I miraculously escaped. On the other hand, I want to record all that I experienced during the supremacy of National Socialism, retain it so that my progeny will not forget to hate the Germanic hordes.

I use the term "hordes" because it is impossible, in the 20th century

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to use the term "nation" for a highly cultured and civilized people that conducted its affairs with medieval methods that were used by people 700 years ago.

I call these writings "Diary" although I am sure that anybody who reads this will realize that the title "Diary" is incorrect. But they are my experiences, written after the fact and that is why I chose to retain the title "Diary" though it is not completely correct. I don't intend to elaborate. In this diary I merely wish to describe the worst days under the supremacy of the Hitler hegemony.

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1942-43

I. Part

Cover Drawing of Terezin ghetto

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I spent one year in the ghetto of Terezin. No matter how hard it was, that year in Terezin can not be compared with the months in Osviecim or Mauthausen. That is why I will not linger with descriptions of Terezin and will only briefly describe the most important happenings, since I am writing at a moment when time is precious and I would rather spend it on a detailed description of the incidents in the KZ.

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Chapter 1

TRANSPORT

**It is Friday, the 29th of November 1942. It is raining outside, the wind is blowing in the crowns of the huge oak trees, thunder is roaring and lightning flashes on the darkened horizon. I am ill and I am lolling on my bed in utter boredom. Suddenly there is a penetrating noise of a bell. Mother opens the door and I hear frightened voices from the entry hall:
“Is it possible? Yes, absolutely certain, on the 2nd. Pardubice is leaving and we on the 14th.”**

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I run out from my room and after a brief debate I learn that we are leaving for Terezin on the 14th. Mother is upset but father calms her: “It had to be our turn sooner or later, be glad that we were not among the first.”

Since that day the house is in an uproar. We are packing and preparing ourselves for the departure. On the morning of the 14th we go to the train station with our luggage. There are about 250 persons on the Nachodska railroad station. After we are checked in, we board the train and then the train slowly starts to move. Tens of people from Nachod bid us farewell.” When will we see you again,” I think, wiping away tears.

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(Jewish star illustration)**

The first stop is in Hradec Kralove, where gold, silver, valuables and money is taken away from us. Everybody gets a tag with a number which we have to hang around our neck. My number was CH320. Two days later we left Hradec Kralove, directly via Prague to Terezin.

The welcome was not exactly pleasant and we were not exactly handled with kid gloves but after an hour’s walk from the Bohusovice railroad station

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The ghetto gate closed behind us.

At first, we were housed in the dark barracks, called “Schleusska” (sluice) to which all new transports came. There we were again inspected and after three days were assigned to a block.* Mother and I were assigned to L-425 (G1V), father to the Sudeten barracks (E 1). After some weeks, mother was**

assigned to the infectious laundry, father as doctor, to the Dresden barracks.

*** block was a rectangular building, divided into four sections, e.g. G1V, F11, etc.**

**** All signs such as E1, B11 denote buildings. See map. 1**

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Chapter 2.

HANOVER HOME

One day a buddy of mine came to suggest that we could move to the children's house in B 14, the Hanover barrack. I agreed and told my parents who enabled me to move to B IV a few days later.

Thus as of March I lived at the Heim (home), not yet properly furnished because it had just been started. Sometimes we studied, of course only illegally, sometimes we played sports (on the ramparts) at least it was less boring

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than to sit in the room all day waiting for mother to return from work. I was at least somewhat occupied and did not think all day of certain hardships that I do not even wish to mention. I slept on the top of a three-tiered wooden bunk. There were great cobwebs hanging from the dusty beams. I tried to avoid the ceiling which I frequently hit with my head, because there was not enough room to straighten up. Avoiding the cobwebs was not easy.

At the beginning of May there was a so called "Blocksperr" (lock down) as punishment for escapees, that meant that nobody except the workers who belonged to the building were permitted to leave the building. At that time I did not see my parents

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illustration: back entrance to Ghetto)

for a long time. But everything has its end and even that Blocksperrre eventually ended.

In September our entire home moved to the Q 609 building that we had prepared during the previous month because it had been in an impossible state. There conditions were a bit better, because there were really rooms, not attics. In a 6.5 square meter room there were 21 boys with one caretaker. We published a newspaper and we got along well and were good friends.

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Chapter 3

DANGER !!!!!

Already once, in January 1943, we luckily escaped transport to Poland. At that time, five transports of 2,000 persons each: women, men, children, old folks were shipped to such places as Birkenau, Riga, Izbica, etc. Not even 3% of those from these transports survived. And now the same danger lurked again and the whole ghetto trembled: transports to Poland. The Kommandatur issued an order that 5,000 persons were to be prepared for departure within five days. Everybody

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obviously tried to evade this fate and there were negotiations day and night. But all in vain, 5,000 had to leave and so on the 6th in the morning they went to the train. They were herded into locked cattle cars with their entire luggage.

We were on tenterhooks day and night whether our turn had come. The danger increased when 150 physicians were supposed to be included and my father was a doctor. Although nobody knew what danger awaited them, the fear was terrible. The fear was justified even though nobody knew what awaited them. We were very, very lucky. Today no more than 10 persons survived from those transports.

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Chapter 4

GREAT APPELL (Roll call) November 11, 1943

In Terezin escapes were continuously announced but the German Kommandatur did not have exact records and therefore was not able to ascertain who and how many persons were missing. Therefore, one November day we were awakened at 3:30 A.M. and marched out of the Ghetto to the Bohusovice hollow. We were surrounded by police and the SS. It happened to be a cold day and everybody had to go out except the most seriously ill. At about 10 A.M. the Lager Kommandant and his staff came and the counting started. The numbers and the records never matched. The whole roll call lasted into the night when

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finally, after a severe downpour we were ordered to return to the ghetto. A huge panic ensued and nobody was able to maintain discipline. Not even shots from revolvers helped, everybody wanted to get home first. The crying of children, the complaints of the old folks and the shouts of the leaders all muted the shots. I got home at about midnight and fell into bed.

Chapter 5

DEPARTURE

We got caught after all! On a cold afternoon in December, the wind howling through the

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snow covered the streets of Terezin. I went to see mother in the infectious laundry. As I entered I saw her talking excitedly: "Again a transport, oh, the horror!" I recalled what had gone through my head when the previous transport was announced. I wasn't sure but something in me told me that this is the transport with which we will leave. Immediately I thoroughly informed myself. On the 13th a transport was to be assembled and on the 14th at noon people would line up in the various barracks that were quickly emptied. Everywhere fear and anxiety, everybody was trembling when at night the name cards were distributed.

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I don't know why but I was astonishingly calm, something told me that we would be among these 5,000 unlucky ones. I should really have been the most upset, but..... I don't know..... I can't describe it. The day before mother hurried from office to office, trying to find out whether we were included in the transport, because if so, it had to be prevented before the name cards were issued. Once issued, it was too late. Despite all the effort, mother did not find out anything, nobody

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was willing to divulge anything, because that was heavily punished. Nothing helped. It is morning, December 13, 1943, and there is a strange sound throughout the ghetto. The plague entered the houses and barracks. The clerks deliver the names. And really, my foreboding was correct. From our house "Q609" 15 names were on the list, mine among them. I had known it..... I started to pack immediately. My comrades helped. In the end I still included my most favorite items, articles, drawings and similar items. My best friend, Ivan Polak, quickly put together whole articles from our newsletter

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that was titled "Comrade". Then I rushed to my mother and helped her pack food items. It was hard to take leave of my friends who accompanied me to the so called "Sammelstelle", (staging area). There was again control, registration and administrative tasks.

The next day early in the morning we dragged ourselves to the train. A long line of men, women, children and old people, weighted down with luggage crawled to the platform. *Difficult leave-taking from family, friends and comrades

***At that time the tracks from Terezin to Bohusovice had already been built.**

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in front of the Sudenten barracks. Then we went in the direction of Jaeger barracks (A II on illustration). On one side ready cattle cars, on the other huge mounds of luggage and in front of us a table with the officials, several SS men, the leader of the police, Janecek and Lagerkommandant Burger. A colorful assortment of German murderers! We were checked one by one. Everybody got a number and with that we took leave of Terezin.

The Hilfsdienst (helping service) helped us up onto the high platform of the cattle cars, dark without a single window. In the corner there was a pail and a demijohn with water. That is all they gave us for a two day journey.

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When 50 had entered, the gate was banged shut and sealed and total darkness enveloped us.

Chapter 6

THE JOURNEY

As soon as the doors were locked a horrible panic started. Most of the “travelers” were old men and women (the so called “dying”), a few children and very few men who could have created some order. One of them lit a candle and unsuccessfully asked for quiet . Then

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he began to organize the space (seating order) and the storing of the luggage. With the help of “volunteers”, he stacked the luggage all on one side all the way to the roof. Then he arranged the suitcases along the walls so that we could sit on them. After about an hour the train started. We felt how we changed tracks, then again at the Bohusovice railroad station and then we felt we were on the track toward Prague. Already in the first hour the tragic “comedy” started:

**“You are sitting on my bag with the eggs, get down at once”.
“Where is my bread?” “Ouch, my corn!” The bucket is spilling, the stench is in my shoes, brrr, I won’t let anybody go to the toilet any more, I’ll call the police, brr, that stench, that humidity, help, help!!!**

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We realized immediately that this lady didn’t have it all together but we were helpless. And that is how it went the whole trip, two nights and two days, without respite. No possibility to sleep at all.

Where were we going? Nobody knew, only that the direction on the Bohusevice railroad station had been towards the North East. That is all we knew. The wheels of the train kept creaking, clanging, one minute followed another, continually the same disputes, without water, without light, no end.....

End of the 1st part about Terezin

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II. Part 1943-45

KZ

BIRKENAU

Illustration of KZ with Chimney

Grave 5,000.000 Victims

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Birkenau (Osviecim II.) is the third part of my experience under German tyranny. It is interesting that conditions constantly went from bad to worse. These first six months in B.II b were not only physically hard to bear but emotionally we endured them terribly. It was unbearable, too much!

**A
B. .II. .b**

December 1943—July 44

Enter transport December 13th 1943

Arrive December 15th 1943 in Auschwitz II - B/2/b

Additional 2,500 prisoners from Terezin arrived December 18th.

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Chapter I

ARRIVAL

And finally, on Dec. 17, 1943, at 11:30 at night, the train reduced its speed and slowly came to a stop. Through the slats near the door powerful rays of lights entered the dark car. I looked out. I was frightened by the sight that presented itself to me through the narrow slats but I saw enough that I paled and felt goose bumps on my back. I saw so little and yet it was so much! Barbed wire, prisoners in striped suits surrounded by SS men; it could only be a concentration camp!

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But before I could reflect any further, the doors of the car opened with a roar, strong beams of light penetrated the darkness, gun shots were heard and several voices were heard shouting in German: "Alles raus, laufschrift , los, los, raus, Gepaeck liegen lassen, raus, raus" (Out, out, on the double, leave the luggage, get out, get out) I grabbed my knapsack and already I was out. Near the car stood a soldier who, as a welcome, hit anybody on the back if he carried luggage.

Only SS men and men in striped suits. Around them only barbed wire, only barbed wire! At left, flames shot up out of four large rectangular chimneys. The sky was red, and a strange smell was in the air. A strange atmosphere as though filled with some sort of foreboding, gloomy foreboding.

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They loaded us into trucks and drove us about ten minutes. I was upset; I looked for my father and mother. Maybe they were in the back, I knew nothing about them. When we descended from the truck, an SS man separated us, men to one side, women to the other. They led us to a building where I found Father. We climbed on a bunk that was without a straw mattress or blankets. Now I had time to look around. We were in a wooden barrack, about 40 m long and 8 m wide. There were about 500 of us. Along the sides there were three tiers of bunks. In the middle there was a horizontal pipe cover (?) on which walked SS men and several prisoners with red

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ribbons . (As we learned later, they were the Blockaelteste, the barrack leaders.) Then a lieutenant entered. Everybody stood at

attention and he placed himself into the center of the? (pipe cover) and explained, figuratively speaking, held the “welcoming speech” for the new victims of the KZ. We already shuddered at his first words, he was a strong, muscular, tall man, Rapportfuehrer.US-cha-(Unterscharfuehrer) Buntrock. The prisoners called him bulldog because of his facial expression. He held a long lecture about how we were to behave here, because we had landed in the feared concentration camp from which had come so many terrible death rumors, the KZ Osviecim!! This KZ was masked by names like Birkenau

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Waldsee, or others, but in reality it was AUSCHWITZ II., the largest KZ of this war, the harvest of German culture, the ultimate of Germanic sadism in the 20th century, and the means to annihilate all those who did not bow to the NSDAP (Nazi Party) - the empire of barbed wire, torture and death! Hell on earth. In short, he explained our situation to us. He was assisted by his knotted truncheon and several block inhabitants. There was a lot, almost too much that we found out in that hour, too much to internalize that which he did say. After all, he was an SS man, a villain, a sadist and murderer like all of them, these gentlemen in Osviecim.

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Chapter 2

SAUNA

The next day at night the "Schreibstube" (the office scribes) started calling names alphabetically. My turn came at about 10 A.M.; there were about 400 of us whose names started with K. We were led to a different block. There we got cards with our number with which we proceeded to the tattooing. They tattooed the number 168497 on my left forearm, Father's was 1683498. Then we went to registration. After completing all sorts of forms, they led us outside where they separated fathers from boys and children. The grown ups went to the sauna. Our turn didn't come until next day.

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They herded us out of the barrack, lined us up in rows of five and we marched. The old people slipped on the smooth snow and ice

that covered road. They were shoved to the side by their “Blockfuehrer”, there to end their hard life a few hours later. Then they counted us again and again in front of the camp. The road to the sauna led around Crematorium III and IV. At the time we did not know what horrors we were passing. After about 20 minutes we arrived at a new, large building with tall windows. The sauna. We entered a door with the inscription Unreine Seite-dirty side.

(Illustration)

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There we got undressed in a large hall. Children up to age 15 hung their clothes on hangers; the adults threw them into bags. Then there was an inspection after which we went to bathe. About four hours later we got our disinfected clothes back; the adults received terrible rags and wooden clogs. On the return trip we all shuddered in the cold. We came to the 14th block where we were welcomed by a savage Blockaltester by the name of Bondy, wielding his club.

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This scum and murderer was truly a horrible person. All day long he roamed the block, shouted and cursed and wielded his truncheon. We sewed our number on our coat and pants. Then they crammed 18 of us into one bunk, thus six to a level. That was our new home. Everybody received a thin blanket. For lunch, like always there was a 3/4 liter of an (inedible) mess. After lunch, there was a long roll call. Small children were crying, calling their mothers. And so it went day after day,

p.40,

a monotonous, almost hopeless life. For a long time I saw neither Mother nor Father. Only about 10 days later although it was strictly forbidden, I went to visit Father who was on the 16th block. Lack of food and the cold had changed my dear father in a very short time. He was pale, weak and very thin. I scrounged white bread and medicines for him but it did not help. He remained ill. In January men had to go out and carry heavy stones. The death rate increased. A heap of corpses accumulated daily behind the barracks.

(Illustration: Guard Platform)

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We were quarantined for one month. Later I saw my mother. She was in the 11th block, later in the 5th. She, too, changed dramatically during that month.

CHAPTER 3

“TAGESHEIM” (Day Center)

Camp G II b (Familienlager I) (family camp), was the only family camp in all of Osviecim, where, as the name implies, families were together. That means, in one camp, not just in one block. In camp B II b there was an “old transport” that arrived from Terezin in September that had (prisoners with) numbers from 146,000 to 148,000 for men, and women

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57,000 to 59,000. And our new transport with men’s numbers 168,000-171,000 and women’s from 70,000-73,000.

With the old transport Fredy Hirsch, the leader of the youth of Terezin had arrived. He had lived only for the youth and would have given his life for them. Already in Terezin, amid all the misery he was able to obtain all kinds of things for the children, such as things that enabled them to play sports, etc. And in Birkenau he was at first “Lager Kapo” (camp supervisor) but then he renounced that important function and reverted to his previous role. He became the “Jugendleiter”, leader of the youths. He exacted that children under 16 did not have to stand outside in the cold winter during the long roll calls

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but could stand in a specially designated area inside the block, where F. Hirsch was able to get tables and benches built for the children. It was a great advantage and saved the lives of many children who, however, eventually lost their lives.

After the quarantine even our “new” December transport was able to move around a bit in the camp, was registered for work and the children moved with the others to the 18th block, from where already starting in February they went to the Tagesheim during the day and came home only at night. I was among those; I was at that time thirteen and a half years old.

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Up to age 14 we got better soup and a larger helping of jam.

Mother found her “feet” in the laundry. She worked either evenings or mornings. I saw her rarely. Father continued to be ill.

Later, when he felt a bit better, he did what all the other physicians did: examine clothing to find lice. It was an important task because the dangerous lice spread typhus

(Illustration : Attention—lice danger - Disinfection!)

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March 7, 1944

The day of Pres. T.G. Masaryk’s birth, the September transport left for block A. And on March 8, 1944, early in the morning between 2 -4 A.M. they were all gassed.

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CHAPTER 4

MARCH 6

Days are long, every hour some new unpleasantness, cold, hunger, such is camp life in B II b. At the beginning of March there were rumors that the “old” transport, (146-8 to 58-59) would be sent away, nobody knew where to. There were so called “Bonkesy” (rumors)

But anyway....

On March 6 in the morning the whole camp had to stand for roll call. The numbers of the old transport were read

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and all of them left the camp in groups. There were many sad goodbyes because many of my relatives also left. For two days the whole transport was quarantined in B II.a, and on the third day they were gone. They left at night. Where to, that was the big question. Later is transpired that they went into the gas

chambers. Fredy Hirsch went along, together with his children for whom he lived and with whom he died. Only a few physicians and some twins escaped the gas!!

And that is what happened to all the transports that came to Birkenau from Poland, Italy, Hungary and other countries occupied by Germany.

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On Tuesday, March 7, 1944 at 1 P.M. they went to B II.a and on Wednesday morning, i.e. during the night they herded them into the gas chambers.

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CHAPTER 5

“Arrival!”

There was talk already for some time that more transports from Terezin were coming. At that time, it was said that the transports were already on the way, even that they were already at the arrival ramp. As in all rumors there is always some truth, so even this pessimistic news turned out to be correct.

It was May, the sun was already blazing on the uneven surfaces and the swampy muddy roads. The commandos were building an important Lager street and the Stubendienst (room orderlies) were preparing empty blocks for the expected

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arrival.

My father was sick at the time. When the physician's block No. 24 was emptied, he was transferred to the infirmary Block 28. We did what we could but his state of his health was getting worse.

And then one night it came. We were awakened out of our sleep by the noise of cars. There was Blocksperre (lock down). A transport from Terezin had arrived. The next day we climbed out to see whether somebody we knew had arrived.

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7,500 people from Terezin arrived in three transports.

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There was disorder in the camp. The excited SS men ran around like crazy.

The new transport was an exception. It did not go into the sauna which was a great advantage. The tattooed numbers were about higher by 100. Among the arrivals there were many acquaintances, friends and relatives. A new home was created on Block 29

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(Illustration of arm bands, designating rank)

for children under 10.

And again, days went by, one after the other, bringing new unpleasantness. The roll calls were long and unpleasant under the blazing sun.

CHAPTER 6

THE DEADLINE IS NEARING, DANGER IS INCREASING!!

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Yes, the period was ending. Six months had passed. "Raportfuehrer" was heard in the camp. Bulldog went to the office. A short parade, orders. Selection! Mengele, the leading camp doctor selected at that time several transports of men and women. And always more inspections. Nobody knew what was happening. The situation seemed hopeless and in the background always the black smoke from the crematorium. Daily transports arrived and daily the air was filled with the terrible stench of burned human

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bodies. My father was still sick. He was lying in the infirmary in 32. We went to see him daily. He spoke very pessimistically. He kept getting weaker. He felt terrible.

I worked at that time for about three weeks with Mr. Kunevalder in the laundry. There I got more soup there and a bit of salami. These were terrible days. Something awful was in the offing.

(Illustration: "Sport" during roll call)

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(Summary Information

July 1 - About 1,000 men from our camp left and actually went to work. (Up until that time we still thought that our transport would follow the September transport.)

July 3 - women age 16 to 40 went to the women's camp.

July 6 - they came to select women capable of working up to 50 years of age. They selected Mother; (illegible comment: they took me.....) they went to the women's camp where only a few women from our camp remained.

On the 16th we went into quarantine—Stutthofen

Further comment illegible

p.54A)

Chapter 7.

WE TAKE LEAVE—LIQUIDATION B II b.

At that time—in the summer of 1944, at the beginning of July, I saw my dearest parents for the last time. It is hard for me to describe how I felt at the time.

Overall, one transport later new names appeared (illegible) Belsen, Buchenwald. Mother left on the 5th or 8th to Stutthof with the Frauenlager (women's camp) together with Vera Loewenbach with whom she had always been together.

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(Illustration: Selection in the camp)

I did not know then that we would never, never see each other again. Maybe it was better. And then they selected us, 98 boys. The others were to stay..and...

horror to think. Leaving father was terrible. I see him in front of me, emaciated, sick, how he cried, he who had always been so good to everybody and now I left him,

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(Illustration: Krematorium I)

leaving him to die. I can't think about it because it was the most horrible moment in my life.

They led us to the gate, in the direction of the sauna—the crematorium was approaching. We were surprised that they took us to the sauna in the gypsy camp and then to Block 13, the men's camp.

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It is painful to remember all those who at that time remained in B II b so that they could later on be gassed - hundreds of acquaintances and comrades, and those who never returned from the transports.

NEW LIFE

“WITHOUT PARENTS”

Chapter 8

B II d

**We came to a block where the Sonderkommando lived. In the beginning we fared well.
From the Hungarian (illegible)**

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we stole a lot of food that was destined to the men's camp. There I became a Laeuffer (a runner) in the “Unterkunft”(in the housing department.) I met a lot of people, good ones and bad ones. I didn't have too bad a time.

On July 11 I did not sleep. The night was bright, the sky red. Of that—somewhere—I can't talk about it. On July 11 they killed my father. I balled my fists, I cried and promised to avenge him. Many lost their loved ones that day.

My work: Unterkunft Verwaltung—what is it? The housing administration. In each camp one or two barracks belonged to Unterkunft --

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storage. All camp furnishing belonged to that office. But I don't want to dwell on that, I wrote about that in Part 1. I brought news from one camp to the other. I was authorized to go anywhere in all of B II. A went around with other boys and distributed allotments. At first I lived at Block 13, then 22, then 25 (roll call on 9) where I had a small room. Three others went around with a cart on wheels, others were runners in other places. Our camp had a good leader called Wolfi. All the SS men later died (as we found out later) in battle.

The sky is burning

Yes, it really was! At night the windows of the block were completely red. All four crematoria were in full swing. The gas chambers continuously choked their victims. It was a slaughterhouse

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such as the world had never seen. Tens of thousands went daily into the gas. They hounded them out of the cattle cars directly to their death. And sometimes directly into the flames. And that was what we were supposed to watch in the camp!

Selection—mutiny (rebellion)

In the sick wards there were regular selections of critically ill ones, the Musulmans. One day, I don't remember the day, our turn came—the youth. We had to undress and he who was shorter than a certain height was recorded. The Raportfuehrer fortunately arranged it for about 30 of us boys to stay in the camp—he saved our lives. However we were sent to various different camps for work. Once, in the fall, a large transport was sent out of our camp. Many of our co-workers were taken away.

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Only a few Jews were left in BII b. And at that time, I remember, the Sonderkommando got a hold of weapons and tried to revolt and escape. However, they were all shot outside, far from the camp.

Tranports—October

In October more transports from Terezin arrived. Selection took place in the gypsy camp (they had gassed the gypsies during the winter) B II b where they were sorted and separated. Many had perished already due to the Mengele selection. I went with Ruda Becher, Max Haas-(illegible), Loewenbach, etc. They all left soon.

Executions

We were frequently forced to witness executions, mainly of Jews and Poles.

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Those that belonged to the nationality that was being executed were assembled on a large square in front of the kitchen and had to watch the executions. Normally they hung two or three simultaneously who had tried to escape. I remember how six of the most senior CAP's tried to escape, among them our Obercapo Unterkunft, (housing).

AIR RAIDS

American and Russian planes flew over us daily and dropped bombs nearby. A bomb also fell on the camp but unfortunately only killed a prisoner, no SS man.

THE FRONT IS NEARING

CHAPTER 9

Transports kept leaving regularly with those who went to work. The furnace was no longer smoking

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and a light layer of snow was covering Birkenau when in the night of about January 18 an order was given that the already registered transport was to assemble immediately. It was half of

the B II d camp. The transport left in the morning. A new order came to burn all the files and anything written. In the afternoon, it was our turn; the second half. It went slowly because they liquidated also other camps.

Finally then, the front was nearing. Only the sick and the twins remained. They herded us to Oswiecim I. There we got some food and started to walk, walk all night. It was freezing. The prisoners in the wooden clogs—in bad physical condition kept slipping. In back there were those who had been shot in the head. Terror. The road was already littered with corpses from previous transports.

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CHAPTER 10

DIFFICULT TRAVEL

In January—during the last year of the Second World War- I participated in the so-called death march. Yes, indeed it was a death march because it claimed many victims and only a few of us survived. We walked for three days. Ahead of us lay the victims of previous marches who had been shot and behind us were guards who spent their time shooting prisoners who were not able to continue. They had a lot work .It was a horrible sight because the SS shot the prisoners in the head at close range. At night they herded us into some kind of farm, some of us slept on hay, some in the stable and the majority out in the cold. With the inadequate clothing many froze to death or were shot because their legs had given out. I remember a specific wretch whom the (Unterscharfuehrer) ordered to

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run ahead only so that he could shoot him from the back; but only the third shot in the head actually killed him. Our “supervisors” amused themselves with these and similar occupations! And again they herded us further, to Leslau(?) where they loaded us into a huge number of railroad cars. There wasn’t even room to sit down. And so we rode four days without food in open railroad cars to a new concentration camp. At first we thought we were going to Gross Rosen because that is where the transports that had left before us were going. But when we arrived in Bohumin, they cut off the track and we had to go back. The Poles treated us shamefully. They didn’t give us anything. They didn’t even react to the piles of corpses that were lying on the road and in the villages. And my opinion of the Poles has not changed to this day. In contrast our Czechs behaved well. In every station,

p.65

in spite of great danger, they threw us rolls, bread, ginger bread and other things. The railroad employs contributed their part. Yes, I returned to Czechoslovakia, rather I traveled through the Czech lands, and was not disappointed.

Many succumbed on the way. For a long time we did not know where they were taking us until we traversed the damaged Vienna, we realized that they were taking us to the horrible concentration camp Mauthausen where so many of our people—from Nachod—perished.

In the railroad car, if I remember correctly, I was together with Walter Spitz, (illegible) Schreiber, and three (illegible) who were runners is Osvietim.

p.66

Some Capo spent a whole year there. One German Jew from the Borkenlau (?) camp composed pretty songs there.

On the way we drank water from the locomotive and had nothing to eat (with a few exceptions).

And in this state we woke up one morning from dozing (in wasn't possible to sleep) on e bridge across the Danube. The view that we encountered was dreadful. Above huge, legendary quarries rose a stone fortress famous as the death camp--Mauthausen. Next to the fortress clung a small village. It was early morning, maybe 5 A.M. when they dragged us out of the railroad cars. The sight of the piles of corpses that remained in the cars was horrible. They lined us up in rows and led us at about 8 A.M. through the small town, surrounded by all sorts of German signs(illegible)

p.67

It wasn't easy for everybody to climb up the steep slope on the icy road. Even there they claimed their victims. Up there people were already busily working. After passing a row of SS barracks, we came to a huge stone dam which overlooked the main camp. High watch towers with guards, machine guns, barbed wire. We came to the gate. They counted us, we entered. Again on the grounds of a KZ—Mauthausen.

End of Part II

About Oswiecim

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Diary II b

THROUGH SUFFERING TO FREEDOM!

M. Kraus

Title opposite p.3

Contents of Part II.a

It begins with the transport to the ghetto Terezin, the stay in the ghetto, it describes life and suffering. It describes various buildings, occupations, etc. Several transports left without us, but in the winter of 1943 we leave for Oswiecim where for six months I was together with my dear parents. In July my father was gassed and I also saw my mother for the last time. She went to Stutthof where she died a horrible death, most likely of typhus, like Mrs. Loewenbach. I am saved together with 97 boys, moved to barrack BII d, the men's camp, where I become a runner in the Unterkunft (housing department). I start a new, sad life without parents, in uncertainty, hoping that at least Mother will survive and will come home in good shape. I pray almost daily but nothing helps. Mother dies in January 1945 but I don't know about it until Skalice (Summer 45). At the end of Part II.a my transport arrives in Mauthausen because the front moved across "Oberschlesien."

p.3

Introduction

None of us, say in Nachod, lived through so much suffering and disappointments during the seven year occupation as we, the ten or twelve of us who survived the hell of Nazi reign and who returned home. Alive, yes. But it was not possible to call us healthy because we brought with us many severe illnesses.

Because during this time I saw a lot, even lived through a lot I would like to record it because as time passed, I already forgot a lot. Last year, when I started to write the first part, I already had forgotten many details, but today, two years after what I want to write about happened, I remember only a few things, even if

every day would provide a good writer with much valuable material.

I therefore only write what remained in my memory, the most important happenings of my life during the war. As I end this summary, I would like to remember all those who did not survive the Nazi concentration camps. They were many, terribly many. They died under the most unimaginable circumstances. And they were victims who must not disappear from our memory, they must continuously remind us: protect yourself from Nazism, Fascism and all other oppressors.

p.5 and 6

PART III MAUTHAUSEN

P.7 is a detailed sketch of Mauthausen

Part III describes the worst days of my life. It concerns the death camp Mauthausen and its branches: Melk and Gunskirchen. It describes the worst conditions under which man—if one can call this desperate being man—can exist. After a horrible transfer I arrive in the worst concentration camp, not knowing anything about Mother who left me in July 1944. I meet a lot of new people, some like me but mainly brutal SS men and supervisors.

p.8

I. SECOND CAMP

p.9 Is a sketch of the various camps around Mauthausen

I. Again "Sauna"

They herded us on to a large space where there were offices, crematoria, a laundry and saunas. The sick prisoners were hauled to the barracks where they were placed on the frozen ground. We were arranged into rows of five and counted several times. The sauna was not large; it was not able to hold as many people as in Osvietim. It took a long time before it was our turn. We, the children, and some of the higher officials (capos, blockalteste) put our things in bags except our shoes. Then they herded us under the boiling showers, out after five minutes, then threw to each of us underpants or shirts. A Czech gave them out so I got both. And immediately out, to the trains. We waited about ten minutes until there were about twenty of us

p.10

and half running they herded us to some block, I think it was Nr. 21. There we found already many wretches. All sorts of nationalities were there together; we got a band with a number that was fastened to the wrist with a wire. Thus it was possible to recognize many prisoners who got blood poisoning from the dirt.

At night five of us slept on a narrow bunk. In the evening we got some sort of soup that one could hardly eat; we had not had anything in our mouths for a week or more. I hardly slept because I had to watch out that I would not fall off. They woke us early in the morning. The whole day there were formalities. Registrations, examinations etc. The food was miserable. We received a piece of smelly, fat free butter. The next day we got sick to our stomachs. On the third day clothing was distributed. Completely impossible- striped drill. We who had put our clothes into a bag got ours back. I found them on the fourth day, but not everything.

p.11

That day was the first roll call. I and Misha Gruenbaum got from a Czech—I think he was called Franta—there were lots of Czechs in Mauthausen—a piece of bread and a pocket knife, which was a rarity. I don't remember how many days we stayed there. We were in several blocks. Then they assigned us and called out all the children and some of the adults. Almost the whole transport that had arrived from Osvietim, except for some shirkers and the sick. Some went to Gussen.

The frightened us that we would be sent to do heavy work. It was not the worst yet. In front of the Schreibstube (office) they organized us into groups of five. We were five Czech boys.

II. Travel Again

They counted out a hundred and

p.12

sent us to the gate, where they counted us again and the most senior SS man of Mauthausen inspected us. At the gate the

guards stood at both sides of our transport. We first walked (if I remember correctly) through the barracks where the SS lived. Then a view opened up. Below us was a sports ground with parked military and personal automobiles and trucks. In the background here were again barracks surrounded by barbed wire. In front of us was a road into town, on the left high quarries with watch towers, machine guns, here and there smaller guns against aircraft and rockets. Nothing but guards and barbed wire. Everywhere frightened prisoners with SS men with machine guns guarding them. Then we moved and descended toward the town. We waited for a long time at the railroad station for the cars. I wondered about the people. They looked at the prisoners like at a wild animal or a real criminal

p.13

whom one had to guard. They herded us in cattle wagons. We traveled relatively well, compared to the other travels that we had experienced. I don't know how long we traveled. In the car there were two guards, nice guys. They gave us bread with butter and other goodies. On the way we saw only military trains, damaged weapons and trains with the wounded.

Melk an der Donau is a very nice town with a pretty castle on a hill above the river. (An SS infirmary was there at the time). We got out on a smallish railroad platform. The guards herded us into fives and soon we started. Our former blockaeltester (barrack warden) took charge of us children, from block 13 of the men's camp. A Volks German.

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(Illustration of entrance to Melk)

1. Potatoes !!

We walked for a long time through the snow covered streets of the extensive town with beautiful villas and gardens. Everywhere the same notices and posters—German organizations and offices. The streets were almost deserted due to the bad weather. Then we went up a steep hill. It was beginning to get dark when they counted us again in front of a gate and admitted us in hundreds into a camp.

p.15

They lined us up on a large open space among buildings. We could not see because the wind kept blowing snow into our eyes. Again they counted us, the angry Lager Kommandant cursed. I don't know how long it took but to us it seemed an eternity. Finally they separated the younger ones and took us to the largest stone building, to the second floor where they made space for us. We got soup, they registered us, they inspected us to see whether we had lice, and then we went to sleep. We were at that time like in paradise. How many weeks had passed since we were able to sleep? The last time it was in Birkenau—about January 15. And after that horrible trip and the ensuing happenings and the terrible cold. For us, it was amazing. Emil—from the 13th block became our leader. He beat the Poles, us Jews he only hit. I had an advantage because I had been

p.16

a runner in Birkenau. Some of the boys got good assignments. Misha Gruenwald went to Stubendienst (cleaning crew) in one block, Haryk Levit to the office, later to the Lager Kommando, Karol to the block leader room, a etc. The next day they selected 25 of us, the bigger ones, I was paired with Harry Osers, they assigned us to several blocks as Stubendienst (cleaning crew). I don't know the number of the block to which we were assigned; I think it was No. 9. There was a good supervisor, scribe and altogether, it was good. Like the majority of the barracks, this one also was a garage or some sort of warehouse. Harry and I had a lot of work. But it was something better than to be sent, like the others, into the potatoes. We could help ourselves to as much soup as we wanted, once in a while there was a piece of bread or similar. But it was not destined to last. Some other guy who knew the "Schreiber" (office clerk) got my job.

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The next day I traveled to work with the others. Similar experiences were also in some of the other blocks. Some were thrown out because they were too small, others, because they did not produce enough, I remember that Chaim Gruen and Harry Goldberger right on the first day had to carry out a corpse. The death rate there was terrible but I realized that only later.

So I went early in the morning to the kitchen, returning late at night. It was a terrible job. Wet and rotten potatoes had to be peeled with a sharpened knife. We could not take potatoes home because they checked us every day. We threw the dirty potatoes into huge vats. The damp environment hurt our health. The work

was monotonous and tiring. The inadequate rusty tools hurt our hands. Those were terrible moments. Some of the boys, especially the Russians, managed to steal some potatoes

p. 18

which they either boiled or traded for bread. Frequently if they were caught they were beaten .The Hauptscharfuehrer, chief of the kitchen, was terrible, also a thief. I can't remember how long I worked there, maybe a month, maybe longer.

II. Runner for the Blockfuehrerstube

The runners at the main gate were Karolek and a Dutch boy or some such nationality. One day a Capo came to us from the electricity and said he needed a servant. Bednarek suggested me. But I did not want to go with him and the Capo left. The third day then came a Lagercapo (the highest rank prisoner) that all the runners are sick and that he needed replacements. Again they called me and the next morning

p.19

much earlier than the others, still in darkness I went to the gate. It was not a job to be envied.

Before I describe the segment of my life at the gate in Melk I believe it is useful to describe general conditions. At that point I was able to observe conditions in the camp quite well. I can't remember how many people were in the camp. Maybe 10,000 or fewer. Most of them left the camp to go to work. Some worked in Melk, others in Amstetten, etc. The largest commando was that which worked on the construction of underground factories where they produced rockets, and anti aircraft guns and God knows what else. It was strenuous work in three shifts; afternoon, night and morning. The individual worked more than 12 hours, then had to stand for roll call and the rest of the time was spent eating and sleeping. The trip to the

p.20

work place was most strenuous. Workers had to go down to the specially prepared freight railroad yard where they waited for a long time for the trains that arrived unreliably due to frequent air raids. All along there were large reflector lights on both sides of the road during the night shift. Every day workers brought with them dozens of corpses of their comrades on primitive

stretchers. The conditions in Melk were terrible. It was a so called starvation (annihilation) work camp. In the winter more arrived on primitive stretchers, the sickest ones who were already dying. And what it looked like there is not worth describing. Three or five died in the same bed, that is one bunk of a three-tiered bunk. The dead were taken to the crematoria which we were able to inspect properly after we were liberated in Melk.

Only a few people remained in the camp and they also worked hard. They were the invalids and the ill ones. They worked in the camp.

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(Although I remember the details in Melk I don't want to expand on them. I'll report on everything in Part I, Postscript (?))

Thus I came to the gate at about 4 A.M. when the daily commando left that returned at 5 in the afternoon. At eight in the morning the night shift arrived (they had left at seven or eight in the evening) and at night at about 12 or one o'clock the afternoon shift arrived (they had left around noon). Frequently they carried wood shards that they used to heat their soup in the unheated surroundings, or wood for heating was sold by the Blockaelteste. So actually they really bought their own soup. Wood was very scarce in the camp. The "high gentlemen" needed it, they cheated with the dispensing of the soup—they pilfered from the others and with the leftovers they bought wood. Some starved ones (everybody was hungry) betrayed others for a bit of soup

p.22

and still went on their shift.

As I said, conditions were abominable. Housing terrible, clothes miserable, hunger enormous, the work hard, mortality rates beyond belief, beatings, etc., roll call in the camp about half an hour. Each Blockaeltester already had his inmates whom he counted.

I stood next to the gate and ran wherever the Blockfuehrer sent me. Sometimes they gave me the leftovers from their lunch, but much I did not get. On Sunday there always was a whole Lager roll call. Then everybody went to the large roll call grounds. The

roll call was conducted by the Raport leader or the Lageraelteste or the commandant. I spent about ten days at the gate. When the Blockfuehrer needed wood they took it away from poor wretches who brought it from work. The wretches tried to hide it but the sly eyes of the SS

p. 23

always found the loot. I remember a dying Czech whom they culled out from the group and left in horrible shape.

And so slowly passed the days, muddy, it constantly rained or was cold, sometimes even snow fell that immediately turned into slush, the roads became slushy canyons and the exhausted prisoners had to plod daily through the mud.

At that time America planes flew over us more frequently, big fighter and bomber squadrons. They flew several times over the town daily and dropped bombs in the vicinity. It was a gorgeous sight to behold the avenging allies, the huge bombardments that shone in the rays of the sun. And then there were high altitude flyers that fired their machine guns

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(Illustration of prisoners)

again and again , shooting down the German fighters and aiming at the guards on the high towers. Sometimes there wasn't even an air raid alarm and already the ratata of the guns. The guards were terrified, they fled down from the towers, leaving all their arms behind. At that time everybody had to go indoors and nobody was permitted to show himself.

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It was a gorgeous moment when outside the bombs fell and the guns barked. The flak became weaker and weaker. I also hid in a neighboring block, I don't even know what number it was, but there was a relatively decent warden.

The sight of the deserters was terrible. They were usually Russian prisoners who out of desperation tried to flee but were caught. Their punishment was horrible. Terribly flogged they had to stand day and night next to the gate until they fell unconscious and then still the blockfueher beat and kicked them. Only half dead or dead they were hauled to the sick bay where they died in any case. It was horrible to see these poor devils

standing in the most terrible weather at night in the freezing cold just with a thin drill shirt without water or food.

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I didn't understand anything at the time but when I consider it today, I believe that I could have helped them a bit to assuage their suffering which was unbearable.

Sometimes, unfortunately rarely, when the Germans did not finish their meal, they gave it to me clean their plates. I emptied the plates ravenously and returned them to them washed. They did not get any special food, but it could not even be compared to what we were getting even if the soups in Melk were better than the ones in Mauthausen or Osviecim.

I got to know the SS men better, most of them were beasts, only a few were more decent and kinder and The Head was terribly strict but very fair and nobody was punished without cause. But if somebody was caught--woe to him. I could write a lot about those moments,

p.27

minor reminiscences of Osviecim, of the conceited tailor, who then sewed buttons on for me, the friends, comrades, prisoner acquaintances, etc. there was a lot but for a brief summary it may not even be necessary.

During these memories I constantly see before me the terrible destitution of the wounded and sick and 20year olds looking like old men, the hunger, etc.

III. Duty with the Electricians

On the block I rarely saw the other boys I was at work at 6:30 A.M. and came home only late at night. The only advantage was that I was able to exchange my old pants and jacket from Osviecim for knickers and a newer jacket, since my old clothes had really been ruined in the potato kitchen and now I represented something better.

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My laced-up boots were stolen and I got some wooden clogs as replacement. As I was now a runner I managed with great difficulty to get new shoes.

Sometimes I was able to chat with Osers, at the same time I heard that they did not like Zbynek (who was in my place) I had hopes that that block guard would take me back but that did not happen.

One day the Dutch or Belgian of the gate (whom I replaced) was restored and the Capo took me to the electricians, I don't even remember how that happened.

The electrician was a terrible person, with a crooked head on a thick neck with a typically criminal face. He was from Germany, i.e. some kind of thief, swindler, (illegible). Already in Osvietim he had been the capo electrician and now he was in charge of a small

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shop where he also slept. Next to the shop there was a room for the workers, maybe four Frenchmen, all decent chaps about whom I shall write more later.

That capo (I don't remember his name, how could I remember, since I came in contact with so many people from different nationalities. I have it in my subconscious, somebody would have to remind me but I see these people constantly in front of my eyes) was a terrible pedant, everything had to be whistle clean.

And how one often heard things, he was already very hard on people in Osviecim, and here too; in his shop there were four Frenchmen, nice chaps who did not readily accept his treatment. Aside from that, he had some kind of relative who went out in the commando. He always prepared cream of wheat for or him at night because he had some kind of stomach trouble and could not stomach KZ food.

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Then I took over that work. I got up early, ran to the electricians (I lived in Nr. 1) to clean, cook, etc. And at night back to Nr. 1. I had a lot of work; I still remember that, the capo always found something for me to do: scrub the floor, peel potatoes, clean the boots, etc.

As I already said, the Frenchmen were nice chaps. I see them in front of me and remember exactly what they looked like. Pleasant, cheerful chaps. They frequently gave me potatoes and I

learned a few French words. And as I already had forgotten my Polish, I remember no more than ten French words.

So these French lads (the capo did not do anything, he just cursed and complained) were responsible for the entire electric grid of Melk, the primitive lights in the camp, the lights all over the camp and the strong reflector lights. Even lighting in the SS barracks where the lights had to be repaired most frequently.

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If there was important work to be done for the officers, the capo usually went himself or he sent Willi who was the leader of that "famous" group. Usually they brought something nice back: a smoke or a meal or they returned after a good lunch.

The shop was about five or six meters long and three meters wide. In the back the capo had his bed and a chest for his things and then there were tables and shelves with all sorts of equipment. In the adjoining room there were two bunks, that is beds for six people and another bed on which Willi slept. In each room there also was a small (illegible).

I completely forgot to mention that there also was an old electrician, a very nice Hungarian who also had to work hard because the Capo was always mad at him. The good Frenchmen helped him where they could.

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IV. Transport to Mauthausen

Again in the Potatoes

There had been talk about it for quite a while because other camps in the region had been evacuated. I don't know how it occurred but one day we had to leave block No. 1 and went back to no. 8 or 9 (?) beyond the motor vehicle repair shop (that had previously been a jail) where there were two blocks. There they housed us young ones from the potato brigade on poor shelves with insufficient planks, bad and thin straw, blankets full of holes. I always slept with Harry Goldberger and there I also slept with him. It was said that they were isolating us and that in a few days we would leave, most likely to Mauthausen. And what there? Nobody knew. Why just us, the young ones? Do they want to get rid of us?

**(no page 33)
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We were worried when we thought of it. Now to perish, after we had survived so long! No, we had to survive.

I frequently prayed that my mother should survive and I believed it sincerely. I told myself that I had to endure because Mother would be terribly disappointed.

But nothing happened. However I had to return to the potato brigade and about 10 or 20 days later we returned to block No. 1, second floor.

At that time I quite frequently visited Osers whose block supervisor wanted me back, instead of Zbyshka, but we decided that it could not last much longer and we left it.

So I again went to the kitchen in the morning and home at night. It was unpleasant work, to sit in the humidity and to scrape potatoes with that inefficient knife

p.35

but what could one do? It had to go. We peeled into 25 liter barrels from where the potatoes were emptied into huge cauldrons. Sometimes we worked all night, if more potatoes were needed. The worst thing about it was that most of the potatoes were rotten or about to rot.

Nothing lasts forever not even our stay at the work camp Melk. True, we had expected it for a long time, but when it came so suddenly we were all surprised and frightened. At about ten o'clock our block warden came for us to the potato room, told us to go back to our block and collect our things (what did we have, I had nothing...) and line up for roll call. Everybody got a blanket at that point but later we had to return it. In return everybody got a piece of bread and within a half hour we were all lined up and stood in the court yard. Everybody was frightened, especially by the view that

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opened itself up to us. It was indescribable. The "Krankenbau" was to leave with us and it was horrible. A host of wretches and living corpses, people without legs, hands, severely wounded, with communicable illnesses, all these poor devils who waited

for death as deliverance, were wheeled or herded out to the gate and separated into rows. Then came ordinary carts pulled by horses loaded with the wounded and corpses; we were counted and led to the railroad station. We walked behind this funeral cortege, surrounded by guards.

We were in a terrible mood. Where are they taking us together with all these sick people? To Mauthausen? That could not be anything good. Into the gas? It was better not to think about it.

And liberation was so close! After work we observed the town and what pleasure that view gave us!

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Hundreds of people evacuated and dumped onto the population, away from Vienna. Lots of freight trains on the tracks loaded with soldiers and inhabitants. Where could they go? From the South the Russians neared, from the North the Americans, there is only a small piece of earth left, where then?

Were we to give up these chances? To be taken into some kind of defeated part of Germany or yet another concentration camp. Or perish?

Yes, that was our situation!

Now they herded us into closed cattle wagons, 22 SS men came with us and we were riding towards new hardships, who knows where.

Unknown where? Soon we realized where they were taking us: to Mauthausen. We were dejected when we crossed the Danube bridge and saw the vertical precipice of the quarry and on the top the stone fortress, a factory of hungry people, the martyred millions of prisoners,

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the Concentration Camp Mauthausen. On the already familiar railroad station, they herded us out and again lined us up in rows. A walk through the town followed, supervised by German soldiers. Much had changed here. Previously the proud population had worried when they saw troop trains daily going to the front which was coming nearer. And what was the army now like: old folks with shaking hands, unskilled 13 to 16 year old youth, yes, these were supposed to save them from the

advancing allies. And especially the air raids. The sirens were whining constantly and above the towns constantly heavy bombs from the U.S. airplanes. Even the people with the beautiful insignia on their sleeves and double iron crosses did not feel like smiling now! And what about the pretentious offices that used to be there in the winter, they were all hospitals now.

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All that reminded us of Freedom. Again we ascended with difficulty up to the KZ, were counted and let in and herded to the 1st block in (illegible).

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Melk on the Donau is a pretty little town with a castle on top of the hill (during the war there were military hospitals there like everywhere). I do not have pleasant memories, but I'll come back to that later.

(Illustration of barbed wire with guard tower)

p.40

Part III

THE THIRD CAMP

Here, in the 3rd camp in the Zeltlager (tent camp) and Guns kirchen I lived through the last and most difficult period of my imprisonment in concentration camps, which fortunately ended in time because a few days later I would have been dead like so many millions others of typhus or dysentery.

Again here we are, our beloved sauna, a second time, but this time it was worse, we lost our clothes and everything. I still had

p.41

a pretty coat from Osviecim and also wearable pants, and now we had to put everything in a heap and wait patiently until our turn came. In the mean time we saw that close by in the kitchen they cut up pieces of horse flesh for prisoner soup.(?)

When our turn came we ran through a luke-warm shower and obtained large, torn underpants and a shirt, and that only with special pull because at the distribution there was a Czech,

because most of the others got either a shirt or pants. And then they took us about 20 blocks to camp no. III all the way in the back. Those were the worst blocks where one slept only on the floor.

Some of the boys went to # 29, others to # 30. In that camp which was ever lower than the others there were five buildings. On # 29 the Blockaelteste was our former SA from the men's camp in Birkenau.

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So they actually separated us into two groups. Those on # 29 were a bit better off, we had an impossible block warden, I believe the worst one of the whole camp. He beat and hit just on sight, a brute, a thief from the German Reich. He lived in luxury. From stealing our bread and margarine he had himself a good meal, he stole from us where he could, from that he lived comfortably. He was well dressed, so what was he missing?

So now to our lodgings. At night they spread on the raw floor some blankets (to keep the floor clean) and on top of that they put straw mat. The floor was polished every day, we were not permitted to enter the block with our shoes on, we had to carry them in our hands. When it rained they herded us inside and we sat on the barren floor, sometimes they even made us stay outside in the rain. At night they herded us with clubs quickly inside and with blows and whacks from batons they shoved us on the floor

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to lie down on our side head to toe and with blows they forced us to lie as close to each another as possible so that everybody could fit into the barrack. Such brutes I had never seen before.

I remembered that there were Czechs in block 21 and that is why I went to look for Misha Gruenwald who was on # 29. We went to the gate together but of course we were not able to go out. Franta was next door in the second camp, head of all Stubendienst (maintenance of rooms) and the recognized leader of all Czechs imprisoned in Mauthausen. In the wall between camps II and III there was a large round hole through which the prisoners of the two camp conversed. And so after some effort we asked a prisoner to go to block # 21, Franta was not there but another man and said that he would send Franta to see us.

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And the next day he came, he gave each of us a piece of bread and promised that he would come again soon and look after us.

And again the days dragged. At noon a half liter of impossible soup which at first we could no stomach and vomited, at night a spoonful of rancid bread and a whack with the baton to wish us good night. If you had to get up at night (because of diarrhea) you usually were not able to get out over the human bodies between which there was no space. And if once you got up you did not find room to lie down again. In the morning they woke us up with beatings with rubber truncheons. The whole day stand outside or sit in the mud, look at the misery and watch the horrible happenings as if it were a sport. The prisoners were obliged to run around in a circle and on command, lie down on the ground, get up again and run again

p.45

continuously. If someone was not able to lie down and get up again fast enough, the SS men stepped on him and tore into him with their heavy boots. I once also got a serious head wound when I did not run out of the block fast enough.

And washing! Once in a while, they herded us in the Waschraum, (washing room), there we had to undress and wash under cold water; out right away all wet back into the dirty clothes.

And then came the questions: what will happen to us, we are only in a temporary camp? We heard rumors about the Tent camp, yes terrible rumors, frightening, about the dead. Hunger, cold, heat, thirst. About the camp to which all the Jews would be sent to die there of disease and hunger. We called Franta who hadn't been to see us in a long while. He had had a fight with our Blockfuehrer, After several days

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he sent a comrade who escorted us to he main camp. Franta waited for us there and we went to the camp office and to various other blocks where he knew people. He told us that there were here several Jewish boys who pretended they were Aryans and the camp office changed their identity so that they would not have to go to the Zeltlager (tent camp) there to perform all sorts of small jobs. Beautifully said but it did not work: the office did not want to cooperate and so, dispirited, we

went back to our camp #3 and we never saw Franta again. He was a wonderful person who did what he could.

And so it became a certainty—the Blockfuehrer wrote us up and told the Poles to take our better boots and leave us the worse ones; we defended ourselves but against the blows of the Stubendienst it was difficult to do anything. They took away the last better clothes

p.47

and the second day they assembled us in the most desolate state. At that point I had two numbers, the tattooed one from Osveitim and the one on the cardboard card around my neck from Mauthausen, which counted here.

We again went out through the same gate—for me, it was the fourth time. Outside commandos were toiling in the quarries, everywhere shouts, the wounded, desperately calling. We were surrounded by some kind of Statspolizei (state police). We walked along the barbed wire, along houses, guards, machine guns, down next to fertilized fields. On the side there stood five large circus type A shaped tents. The guards step away. The primitive gate opens and we are herded in. So, here you are, the gate closes—do what you want here, you cursed Jew!

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4. ZELT LAGER (TENT CAMP)

So! And now what? We stood there clueless and looked around. Several soup cauldrons stood there, a mound of corpses here, over there lay a few prisoners, a bit further guards walking around. Now a man comes hurrying towards us, registers us and leads us into about the third tent. So, this is where we are going to live, for how long, who knows. We walk out to reconnoiter, wait, we know this chap from somewhere, yes. He came from Osvietim and he lives here already for a month—a month in this hell.

However, he is better off. In the camp above he knows somebody who brings him bread with sausage which nobody has. He sleeps in some kind

p.49

of hut near the gate. He promised to give us (illegible) and that he did but then, he turned out not to be a good guy after all, an “impostor” he beat others and roughed them up. He told us about horrible conditions. Apparently not long ago there were so many people here that they had to sleep on the ground because they could not fit into the tents. Into that crowd fell a bomb (may be thrown by the Germans themselves) which killed lots of people, and then they cooked the human meat. Brrr!

Where did all these people go to?

Somewhere to Wels, I don't know where it is. Apparently we will follow them soon, the SS leader said, a horrible man, recently he shot somebody.

Who all is in this camp?

Mainly Hungarian Jews who came here directly from fighting against the Russians or from their homes

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so they are not yet so bedraggled and hungry. The SS men come here secretly to exchange bread for jewelry and there are even a few pretty girls here. The Hungarians even have backpacks with clothing and blankets.

Some of the things we heard, others we witnessed. I don't know how long we were there, maybe 14 days. But it was the worst fate. At night we lay on the muddy earth, covered by a thin canvas—and about eight of us lay under it. The poorly anchored tent did not protect us either from the wind or from rain. The whole camp was on a hill so that the downpours brought the water straight into our tents, half of the camp ground was under water, so that we had to lie even closer to each other. Human bodies somehow nudged closer together towards the drier side. Only the solidarity of our Czech boys saved us from the stronger

p.51

Hungarians who were in the majority in the camp. There too people died constantly—without medical attention, pushed away by the healthier ones. It was a hard battle, except for an Austrian comrade whom they then hauled into the tent of the dying.

Food, yes food, the thing that was supposed to keep us alive, What were the changes? Less we could not get. Instead of the half liter of a horrible liquid which was called turnip soup we got

(when something was left for us) only a quarter liter and almost never a spoon of rancid bits of bread.

The rumors! It was horrible. Several times the Hungarian leaders announced that the war is over, that Hitler died, that the Germans are capitulating.

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Was there some truth to it? Maybe, Hitler was dead but otherwise. Maybe it gave us a bit of courage for survival, but mainly we were encouraged by the daily over flights of the American bombers that thundered above us.

The over flights were night and day. I remember one in particular. In the distance the bombs were falling, we heard explosions and then the flak approached. One of the planes was hit. Not far from the camp and above the woods four clouds descended. At first we did not know what that was. Then we realized that four American fliers have bailed out. Immediately the German soldiers run into the woods, then gun shots and then quiet. Later we heard that all four were shot in the Mauthausen KZ.

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Again there was talk that we would leave and that we would go to Wels where a month ago the first Hungarians went. What it would be like there, who knows.

Apparently a large camp, 10,000 people. Some people say that the Red Cross would hand us over there to the Americans. The pessimists say that there will be gas chambers. Nobody knows anything concrete.

But one morning we get up and dash to the lower gate, where they let us out in groups of one hundred, accompanied by the Schutz Polizei (security police). All Austrians, already a bit more reasonable than the fanatical SS men.

The camp looked terrible, corpses and again corpses! The groaning of the sick, rags, filth and stench. We get to the gate, one hundred. Four guards--- los, let's go.

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(Illustration of map and camps in Mauthausen area)

5. GUNSKIRCHEN

It was most likely April 28 when we hustled along in the bad boots with protruding nails, in the heat near the quarries, the feared quarries of Mauthausen. How many more camps we saw there, how many more prisoners, fighting with the stones. What was our destination —Wels?

I. AGAIN WALKING.

It was close to noon when we walked through the small town of Mauthausen.. What did it look like there? Like everywhere else where we had been. Shabby soldiers, volunteer guards, and again the army, camouflaged cars, horses and tanks, especially before the bridge

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across the Danube where we waited a while. In groups of a hundred we went across the bridge and then on through the village and the small town. Terrible heat. We didn't rest much. There already was disorder, the hundred counts got mixed up, the formations collapsed, who could have dared escape when there was army all around.

Always ahead, with the heat and the bad shoes. Not only we were exhausted; the guards too were tired because we were led by elderly Viennese of the Schutzpolizei (Security police). They were pretty decent with us and socialized with us. But every once in a while the leader of the whole transport came around and ordered us to walk faster. In the rear there were SS men who here and there shot a poor devil who was not able to carry on.

I remember that road very well, the villages crammed full of soldiers,

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the ridiculous youngsters in uniform, the tanks, the guns, the cars, the exhausted rows of prisoner. At every well we eagerly gulped down water. And always further.

Many places, many incidents, many experiences were engraved into in my memory. We walked somehow, as night started to fall and in the sky the moon appeared. And still we walked.

Maybe it was about 11 at night when the convoy started to slow down and we waited at the edge of the road for our turn with the food wagon. The food was not so bad. Soup and then a piece of bread with margarine, something we had not seen in a long time.

Everywhere it was dark, the kitchens were apparently standing in some big farm. Then they herded us onto a large lawn where we lay down on the we grass and in spite of the cold and the dampness we soon succumbed to sleep—because we were exhausted and had no more strength.

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The sun hadn't come up yet and already we continued to walk. The kitchen wagon went ahead of us so that we would have some soup to eat at night. At times we even got a piece of bread at lunch time.

And again we walked. The next night we spent in Weiskirchen, again somewhere on a lawn near a wood. At night we got soup, in the morning piece o bread and the third day, we continued. It started to rain, then to pour. The tempo increased. We put our last strength into the march. Wels. From above the town to which we were coming looked pretty large. Everywhere encampments, Red Cross clinics, damaged houses. We cross a long bridge over a dirty river. It is still raining. We march through the town and still we continue. When will this end? Where are they taking us? We were looking forward to coming into pleasant houses where we could dry out, eat and sleep comfortably after this exhausting, tiring march. And there weren't that many of us from the tent camp who made it to here.

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How many are already lying dead among the trees, how many died on the way and how many are still falling onto the muddy road.

We turn from the road, on a path into the woods.

II Disappointment

It is still raining. We are soaked to the skin. We traipse in puddles and mud on the woody path. Here and there are some primitive huts near which tanks and soldiers are standing. Even airplanes are hidden here. The forest becomes denser. We come to woods that are surrounded by guards. What—this is supposed to be a camp!

Terrible! They herded us into those buildings with earthen floors. Without air, only small windows, we steam here without blankets on the ground in soaked-through rags.

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So that is the camp! Impossible. We sit crowded together on the bare earth. Soon we fall asleep, without food, soaked through, terribly disappointed.

Yes, this is the camp of the dead, forgotten among the dense trees, without air or sun. Only huge muddy puddles around the building. In the back there is a primitive latrine, that's all.

Only Hungarians, they argue and hit each other, a terrible lot.

Our hopes for a better camp vanished. A yell awakes us. I go out for the morning roll call. My teeth are chattering. I stand there under a thin, torn blanket together with Misha Gruenbaum—sick. We already lost hope that we would survive, and only a bit more was missing.

I have to hold out said the thought of my mother. She certainly saved herself and without me she would be unhappy. I have to hold out.

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Those were terrible, hopeless moments in the forest and the muddy pools of water, where no sun shone and where even in the summer it was cold. Ten days it lasted, horrible ten days.

The night was terrible and so was the day.

During the day we either sat in the building (our spot was near the entrance so that everybody kicked or jostled us) or we teetered through the puddles in that dense forest. And at night. Nobody could sleep on that piece of hard earth—damp without cover, we shivered in the cold. There was no room.

Those who were the sickest were thrown out into the rain, where they either died after a few days unable to move or drowned

themselves or were thrown into one of the puddles. That is how terrible it was there. Several times during the night they threw out some of these wretches. I remember that Harry Kraus wanted to take the shoes of one of the dying.

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It was hopeless, we cried from hopelessness, cold and hunger. Everywhere everything was totally soaked by the downpours and no sun shone there.

III. Red Cross Packages

And what was the food like here? Every day a bit of soup, that was all. Otherwise nobody bothered about us. Only several times a day the SS men herded the more capable men to bury the hundreds of corpses.

There wasn't even any water here. For these several thousand persons they brought daily one demijohn. That wasn't even enough for drinking. Everybody also had lice, it was terrible. They were crawling over everybody.

I only prayed and hoped. My support came from the memory of my mother; the memory of my father that said: "survive and avenge".

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And then came what completely undid us psychologically. Red Cross packages came. They will be given to children under 15.

We stampeded to the kitchen. But the SS men stole the packages and only a few lucky ones received them and then they got sick from all the good things they ate.

With us slept a Slovak boy. He was so sick that he could only lie down and had horrible diarrhea. Of course it was impetuous. For weeks he had hardly eaten anything and now he drank condensed milk and ate chocolate.

We were always waiting that we would get these packages but we didn't wait it out. I can not describe the terrible moment, the terrible craving for the sweet and the hunger. I am not able to

describe it. One had to have lived it; otherwise you can not understand it.

Some went mad and constantly went to the kitchen. Some were shot because of this, others beaten to death.

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IV. A Great Day---May 7, 1945 Liberation From Evil

Daily the fighting increased and came closer. That was noticeable but how much longer would it take until it came to us? It was most likely the American army that would get to us, but when?.....

These horrible Hungarians here would hit, ruin or kill us. I will hate them till the end of my days, just like those terrible Polish Jews and also the ones from Podkarpatska Rus (Carpathian Ruthenia). Some gang!

One evening word came that the Germans had left. We did not believe it, after the experiences in the tent camp. It also was not true.

But we waited it out—the next evening it was true. The SS men left in a car with a white flag. It was May 6, 1945 (of course at the time we did not know the precise date)

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There was jubilation, joy, but not much! There were only a few who could still move. Those swooped into the kitchen and fought over the contents. They fought among themselves, they even threatened each other with arms that the Germans had left behind. It was gorgeous and terrible.

Free. Thank God! We survived. In our heads swirled the memories of these horrible years, our friends. One of us brought a loaf of bread. We ate a little bit. Then came the comrades from the next block, they had a piece of horse meat. We deliberated what we should do. It was getting dark. Many people left the camp. We decided to stay the night.

I could not fall asleep for a long time. I reflected on my fate and I remembered my parents. But then I slept well. After all, we were free!

Early in the morning we walked around the blocks, where we cut off a piece of meat and we went on our way.

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We walked around the deserted buildings. Everywhere things were thrown around, signs of a hasty flight. We found a bicycle there on which Fink rode. It had no tires. We trudged with difficulty through the forest. Everywhere lots of prisoners. And look, over there, a road—and behind it--the first American soldier.

End Part III.

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While we were cut off from the world in Gunskirchen, the American army had advanced deeper into Austria. But not until May 7 also to Wels. It was the last day of the War in Europe. We would not have survived much longer. I had typhus. I did not even realize it at the time. I was only thrilled that the war was over and I stumbled on.

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Part IV.

1st Section In the protective care of the American Army

2nd Section On the territory of the Red Army

3rd Section In our homeland—again in the Republic

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Section 1

UNDER THE PROTECTION AND CARE OF THE U.S. ARMY

Hoersching-Linz-Melk

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HOERSCHING

1. Meeting the Americans—the first food.

We rushed out on to the road. So that is what American soldiers look like. It was the first person—and a liberator to boot—whom we encountered on our way out of captivity. He was just stopping a motorcycle with a German officer. He wanted to take his weapon but the officer showed him some paper and continued on his way. We were most surprised.

We continued to follow the others. There were a few huts standing by the road. We headed there. There was a pump. We drank some water. A peasant bought the bicycle from us in return for a loaf of bread and some lard. It was our first food. Each one of us had a slice and we continued.

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We passed soldiers who observed us and threw us candy. Among them there were Czechs. Some of them photographed us. They were nice boys. They rested near the road in full uniform.

The best sight was the endless convoy of cars and trucks that moved along on the better roads. What a lovely view of tanks with Blacks sitting on them.

A beautiful, well organized army.

They told us to continue straight ahead, that in the next village there were provisions and that we could fill up there. We stumbled ahead, everywhere nice looking soldiers, pressed pants, offering chocolates—and we continued. And still continuous convoys of tanks and trucks with supplies. We are approaching the village. It is as long as (illegible) Everywhere lots of peasant carts with crates of supplies. From where do they have it? Everyone fills his pockets. (And over there I already see many (former) prisoners. There is a crowd in front of a large one story building. Aha, this is the warehouse of the German army.

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II. Food Warehouse and the Road to the Hospital

We said to ourselves that there was no point in joining the crowd so we went ahead. Look, here is an unfinished something like a garage, without a roof. We go there; yes that's where we will stay today. We collect bricks, wood and we'll make a fire. Some of us go to get some food. Wow, what it looks like here! Bags of

wheat, corn, peas, flour, whole bags full of food and crates. The soldiers give people anything they want. It was some sort of army warehouse, the last iron reserve. There are even new cans, also sugar. The peasants take away carts full of bags and crates of cans. They must still have enough left over to consume now (1947).

We bring our food, we heat the cans. The best was oatmeal with sugar. And already some get sick, everybody has diarrhea—a nice mess (some windfall!) In the afternoon we wander around the surrounding villages to get bread. Some times they even give us soup. In the evening it begins to look like rain. We cover the remaining food and we go to the warehouse to sleep, upstairs on a stack of bags. There are not that many of us left.

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The most valuable foods like sugar, cans or oatmeal are already gone. We are all sick and continuously have to go to the toilet. During the night it starts to rain. In the morning we trudge toward the road. Some of us are already on the road when a truck stops. They call to us to hurry, that they will take us to the meeting point. Laboriously we run. I can't do it. Everything turns around inside me, I am the last. The car has already started when they pull me up. They are Frenchmen. They take us through Wels. Here we tank gas and we continue. Everywhere there is destruction and full of soldiers and American cars. Above us the planes circle. I am sick. After a while we drive by large buildings, a former Wehrmacht barrack. Now they bring concentration camp prisoners here. There are mainly Jews here. The car stops. We get out and lay in the grass. Somebody goes to fetch water and even brings (illegible). Then they assign us to a room on the second floor. Of course one has to lug straw mats up. I can't. I lay on the floor, I am deathly ill. The guys first think I am pretending but later they understand.

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III. Hospital

At night I want to go to the toilet but again I faint. I have no idea what the matter is with me. They help me to the toilet but I am no better. Harry was also terribly sick. The others lay the mats down and prepare for the night. In the afternoon I slept a little. Then somebody went to ask what happens with people who are sick. Upon hearing that they took us to the Krankenblock (infirmary). This was just in the process of organization so I had

to go to the attic. There they placed me among the other sick people on the straw, gave me two packages of biscuits and that was it. The guys left and I spent a terrible night.

I constantly wanted water and my neighbor who could walk and had a bottle of water gave it to me in return for the biscuits. About noon the second day they carried me downstairs, they undressed me, burned my clothes and disinfected me with some kind of powder. They gave me some clothes and carried me to the first floor to a lower bunk. The nurses were captured sanitation workers, they gave us sheets and covered blankets. Everything was very nice. But after that I lost consciousness for about a week. I just continuously sat on the toilet and the healthier patients helped me and ate my food. They said that there were incredible delicacies,

p.75

the best food and drink. Some lady brought me cold tea that was my only food. I was delirious and called my mother. They all thought that I would not survive. There were about eight of us in the room.

Then slowly I got better. I could not eat these delicacies and now, when I was feeling better the food was getting worse but so what, after all these years of hardship it was kingly fare.

I can't recall all these things, but anyway, it is not that important.

With me there were several Polish and Hungarian Jews who were continuously arguing with each other. Two died and one was taken to the isolation barrack. Outside the window there was constant barter, various foods for cigarettes and with the German nurses there were stupid conversations. I was the only one who knew a bit of English and pretty soon the doctors and nurses of the American Army came to visit me on my floor. They were good people, doctor Filtzer(?) nurses Kokauda and Orones (?) They brought me chocolates and American newspapers.

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They visited every day. They socialized and they told me about New York City and other interesting things. When they left, they gave me their addresses and then they even wrote to me and I responded. Once I got a transfusion of two liters of blood. Then I got a bit stronger and was able to walk around the room.

It was a time of uncertainty and of hoping. Is my mother alive? Everybody encouraged me; I believed that she had returned. Then they transferred us to a different room and my acquaintances left. They were looking forward to going home and to their families. Kokauda was apparently part Czech, that is his ancestors were. He was born in the U.S

At that point I heard (via the window) that the other boys are somewhere on the air base which previously belonged to the Wehrmacht but now belonged to the Americans, and that Harry and Gorilla were in the hospital.

After a while I was able to walk to the hallway and I even tried to go downstairs to the courtyard. But I was still too weak and had to return quickly. They gave me pants and a coat. From somewhere I managed to get a pencil and a piece of paper and I started to draw, especially the plan of the towns.

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IV. First outings and meetings with comrades

After about five weeks in the hospital, I started out on the road to the air base. Everywhere it was full of jeeps with Negroes who drove like crazies. I walked slowly among their tents. Everywhere there was entertainment and fun.. They had all sorts of games but mainly they seemed happy. I went all the way to the back to the food crates which were brought there all the time. I inquired about my friends but nobody knew anything. I returned home. The next day I went to visit Harry.

Once I exchanged shoes for a piece of bread and three eggs, that was when I already had an appetite but the doctors were still very careful and would not yet feed us properly.

Again to the airfield. And there I found them. They were all there, only Gorilla did something crazy and they took him away. They were doing fine. At the air base they stole food parcels and they had what they needed. Chajim even made himself a collection of (illegible)

p.78

I then went there more frequently. I heard that the Lagerfuehrer from the Tent camp was caught by some of the guys when he came to clean the room. They recognized him and realized that

he was SS and then started to beat him with chairs. The Americans had not known that. Then guards came and stopped it and took him away. There were many such incidents. Sometimes I saw from the window Czech cars with license plates from Czechoslovakia. They had arranged to come to pick up their people.

At that time we received parcels from the British Red Cross with toilet articles that were very welcome. From the window I enjoyed observing the changing of the guards of jeeps or columns of tanks that connected the surrounding entities with the air field.

One day Mr. Gruenbaum arrived in the camp to pick up Misha. He found out about him from a Czech officer. And the next day he left with him in some kind of army car. The guys still scrounged them some gasoline.

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It was constantly being said that we would go home. The healthy ones who were Czechs were already counted. A lady from the Joint had come who was in charge.

And one day in the afternoon I again visited the guys. They were all ready to leave. They told me to go with them, that otherwise I would (illegible) Gorilla also went.

So I ran as best I could to the hospital, grabbed my toilet things and ran back. After a while the trucks came and we got in, about 500 Czechs, Slovaks, and mainly Jews from Podkarpatska Rus (Carpathian Ruthenia).

Basically I escaped from the hospital. Only Harry Kraus remained there. He somehow got home via Budapest

And then we went to Linz where apparently we would remain some weeks and then home, to our country.

Is my mother alive—that was my main worry and my main hope.

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With the trip to Linz ends my diary Section II—With Suffering to Freedom

It was really a critical time in my life. How few there were of us who survived. We, the young Czechs—maybe ten of us, maybe more, who knows? We were really only frighteningly few.

END

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**Map of Upper Austria
Diary II C**

HOME

To Nachod

TO THE MEMORY OF MY PARENTS

Thousands of people returned to their homes, everywhere only repatriate, everybody hurries home. What kind of upheaval were you able to create, Hitler! And those are just the few that are left, those who endured, and they will not forget!

p.2

p.2

Map from Linz to Nachod

p.3

Postwar Harassment

Part I

In the care of the American Army

Linz-Melk

**Camp in Linz
On the Donau by boat
Transfer in Melk**

June 1945

p.4

No page 5

1. The camp in Linz

The engines of the cars hum peacefully, we are approaching the town. Everywhere along the road are wrecked cars, but we also notice on the sides of the road hundreds of undamaged cars, either German or American. They are not in use. The victor has enough of his own and even they are in surplus.

We enter in the ruins of the town. Not one house is whole. Some streets are in ruins. The Western flyers did a job here!

Again they take us to a camp, a former concentration camp for Russian prisoners. A few wooden huts and mud.

I get out. A few people already live here. A person comes running to tell me where to go. Again we sleep on the barren floor- no blankets—but the feeling of freedom warms us and so we don't mind it any more. I am

p.6

very weakened from the hospital where I actually should still be. We are about 10 boys. Some of them have some food, others cigarettes (although they don't smoke). I only have my toilet things but this is enough for me.

And again it rains. In the evening they loaded us onto trucks (Studebakers) (?) and took us through the ruins

of the town to some sort of large building that wasn't even much damaged. There we undressed and were disinfected with some kind of powder. Then we drove back. At the gate there was some sort of truck and in it Gorilla. Apparently he thought it over and is going back to Hoerschingen.

We registered in some kind of roll call. Then we formed a group of about 20. In that camp we stayed about two days. Nothing special happened there. About the third day large trucks arrived and we got in groups

p.7

and boarded the trucks; in the last minute Gorilla showed up from somewhere. He seemed completely crazed, apparently they boys avoided him, saying that he was dangerous. Near the gate everybody got a ration for the trip. Since Gorilla was not registered, he didn't get anything but the boys who had supplies gave him some.

Again we crossed the town, this time on main roads. They took us to the harbor. We got out on some beach and went to quite a good looking ship.

2. By ship on the Danube.

They crammed us in the steerage so that we could not see anything of the ship yet. It must have been a good looking ship but

p.8

now when so many people were transported on it, it was pretty damaged, especially the inside. But we also saw some beautifully appointed rooms.

So we settled in there, got our rations and started to eat. Then we went up on deck and observed the landscape. The weather was quite good. Several times

we encountered Russian barges with guns. We were already in the territory occupied by the Russian Army.

On deck there were three American soldiers and a Russian officer. But boy, what a difference! The Russian looked like some hobo or street sweeper. The Americans had creases in their pants and looked like city dwellers. You couldn't even compare it and at that, the Russian was an officer and the Americans only soldiers.

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And then somebody brought some water and we made ourselves some soup with the powder in the bags. It was a bit more fortifying.

And then we see a castle on top of a steep hill, turrets, stone quarries—we approach Mauthausen. That infamous concentration camp! Are there Germans in there now?

We again see that town closely nestled against the rock. Sadly we “doff our hats’ and for a long time there was talk about that horrible concentration camp.

And now we were close to Ybbs and shortly in the mountains that cut through the Danube, we saw the small castle in Melk as well as the town. The Danube is very wide there and creates several arms. In one of them we steered towards the castle in Melk where there were several ships and also a Russian barge, heavily armed with a curiously disheveled crew.

3. Hand Over in Melk

We again went on to a launch, they

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again kept us waiting on the riverbank, then came some bemedalled bums who began to give us orders and counted us. After that a few soldiers came out of the building with the American flag, they handed us over, entered their jeeps and left. We walked to the town, there we had to wait because the remnants of the Russian army—that was what it was called--had gone home or on to ransack another area. Ahead rode several of their cars, but after that only Studebakers (American tanks) and American weapons. The Russians were shouting and singing. After about 20 minutes we continued. Again the same route to that camp where we spent so many horrible weeks.

Now here there were only Russians. Full of refugees and former prisoners, the population had fled to the Americans, especially the women!

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Part 2.

On the territory of the Red Army

Melk-Wiener Neustadt-Bratislava

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1. Lager Melk

Instead of the SS a decrepit fellow with a gun stood at the gate. The men led us inside. Through the window acquaintances from other camps shouted at us. They led us to a block in the center of the camp, gave us bread with margarine and left. How long will we be here? Around us only Russians from the camps, we feared them.

We were not permitted to leave the camp. Instead of the SS guards there were Red Army guards. It was not

funny. They prepared a fairly decent soup here (of course there were no more American treats). The Russians were goodhearted, but they did not bother much with us. The next day we were all moved to a different block, we prepared to sleep on wooden planks and we waited to see

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what would happen with us, when we would be leaving. Some people had been waiting here two weeks.

We now thoroughly explored the camp because we were free to do so. Also the crematorium. There was plenty to see! A (illegible)oven, a basement to drown the victims alive and other contrivances.

A few days later, we were awakened early and were led down to the railroad station. At first we thought we were going by car because there were about 30 trucks (certain was that they were Studebakers) And so we said goodbye to that camp and trudged on, full of all sorts of thoughts.

2. The train trip

So here we are again, at the railroad station and after a while we enter into cars but this time regular railroad cars, no longer cattle cars.

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We are pretty crowded but we are sitting. Everywhere full of Russians, men and women. Next to us on a pile of luggage sits some uncouth Russian youth, who continuously has his hands under the skirt of his partner, healthy, merry Russians.

And after a while (two hours) we start. Slowly, very slowly but we're moving. Everywhere destroyed tracks primitive bridges and we advance carefully.

We pass through destroyed towns; everywhere destroyed bridges, derailed trains, shot-up cars and locomotives.

And then somebody comes to announce that the train will stop again, that someone from each group should go and fetch bread and margarine from a supply wagon. Three boys from our group get out at the next stop and dash to the front of the train. There is already quite a line there. But before their turn comes, the train starts to move and they have to jump up into the closest wagon. And that is how it goes all the way to Vienna when some brave guys

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run to the neighboring gardens and get some fruit. Everywhere just ruins and again ruins. In Vienna the train changed tracks for a long time. Finally the train managed to continue and at night we arrived in Wiener Neustadt.

There about 20 of us brave ones who were going to Bohemia and Moravia jumped from the train while the others continued. But we rejoined them soon again!

In the mean time we lay down on the wooden benches and tables and nothing was happening. I for example climbed up on top of a cupboard in the empty buffet. Around midnight they led us to a large railroad building where we slept on the floor until morning.

The Camp In Wiener Neustadt (V.N.M.)

Next to the railroad station there was pump

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where we washed up a bit and then we walked around in a park near the station. Out of one window we heard a radio speaking Czech. Most of the houses here were occupied, mainly by Hungarians.

One of the adults went to ask on behalf of all of us where we should go and around noon we started out again towards another end of the suburb, where there were several wooden houses and everywhere there were lots of repatriated people, primarily from the Czechoslovak Republic.

There we had again to be disinfected and with that receipt that they gave us we obtained permission for the trip home; we still had to fill out lots of forms for the Red Army.

With this document we again went to some former factory where they housed us. We found straw mats and made ourselves comfortable. We got bread and tobacco there. We observed the damaged tracks and also visited the cemetery where there were lots to see: the history of the whole

p.17

town in gravestones. The war had created many civilian graves (air raids), then graves of German soldiers and finally grave mounds of the Red Army. We were also present at the funeral of a Red Army officer. It was very beautiful and moving. Crying Russian soldiers, salvos, song, etc.

Czech soldiers were also stationed in that factory who then went home with us. We got soup in the Russian troop kitchen. There were several cars of the Czechoslovak army standing there.

In Wiener Neustadt we remained maybe a week or less, I can't remember any more. Then we heard that the railroad track to Bratislava was totally wrecked and that we would have to walk, a distance of about 100 km. The walk was supposed to take three days. Everybody who had any luggage (I had toilet articles, a (illegible) a loaf of bread

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a small box with tobacco which I had hoped to barter somewhere) packed it up, somebody scrounged three hay wagons pulled by horses which enterprising Jews from Carpathian Ruthenia probably stole somewhere.

Even Skola (?) found something on wheels onto which he and Werner tied their luggage. But in the end it fell apart somewhere.

And then one day we got going. A long column winds through the town. At the head a car with a Russian officer and a Slovak sergeant, and full of the luggage of these swindlers. Then the column lengthens, into many kilometers. Those who could not keep up stayed behind. But they all got to Bratislava, some of them with a weeks' delay. It was a colorful procession. Thus we walked through the whole town and continued in the North Western direction

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WALKING HOME (to CSR)

A long snake of returnees slithered on the road to Bratislava. The first stop was already in Eisenstadt where we ate red currants and apples in school gardens.

Slowly we trudged along in the awful heat on the sun baked roads. We rested where we could, drank water, ate (illegible) which were plentiful on the road, w picked cherries and ate some of our own bread. The first night we slept in a ditch. From somewhere I got a blanket so I did not even sleep badly. In the

morning, we continued, always ahead. We kept to the main road. There were only few of us. At least half of the group was behind us. The second night we tried to camp in a barn but they evicted us, so again we slept outdoors near the road.

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We were exhausted. The third day of the walk, walking became arduous. But in the evening we saw the Bratislava castle. It started to rain. That night we already slept on straw in some farm. The fourth day we started out early and soon we overtook all the rest. We had to make frequent detours because the bridges on the main roads were crowded. We met thousands of horses that the Russians stole from the Slovaks and were herding away, cattle and carts.

At lunch time we pulled some potatoes out of the field and boiled them. In the opposite direction we saw lots of Russians from war prisoner camp, terrible guys, drunks, the terror of the environment. They stole, they killed; they carried away beer, (illegible) women and food. They rode on stolen horses and carts, terrible, the worst pack, Russians and Ukrainians.

We walked faster and came across only plundered villages, the owners were in the woods or in jail, beaten and frightened. The culture from the East had sucked them dry. What could these old folks do

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who worked hard during the war, of what were they guilty? Without food they lived in the region where twice the armies passed through. Without rest and hungry at hard work. And then come these scoundrels, rob them of their last goods and dirty their wives and daughters.

Petrzalka—examination by Czech border guards and soon we cross over a pontoon bridge over the Danube and we are in the Republic.

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3. Section

At HOME in CSR

Bratislava,-Praha-Kamenice-Stirin-Skalice C.-Nachod

(succinctly)
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BRATISLAVA

We were at the end of our strengths. It was evening as we walked along the Bratislava streets. People turned around and stared at us. We looked terrible. They led us to a new building that was supposed to have been a department store but now there were lots of repatriates staying on the floor there.. On the 3rd floor we sat down on the floor of a smallish room. Last night we still had gotten a piece of bread and coffee and one man on the street gave us about 20 KC (crowns)

We went to sleep early and fell asleep immediately after the exhausting trip. We were still not completely recuperated and that wandering was terribly taxing. We again spent several days in Bratislava. At the Jewish Community office they gave us 400 KC after considerable waiting with which we went to eat in the kitchen of the poor. The food was not anything special, but better than that of the repatriates. We even

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went to the movies there for the first time. Ivan the Terrible.

Daily we waited in repatriation offices for our turn to come. They issued us an identity card, we went to bathe and the next day we went to Prague. A lady gave us a loaf of bread, we hopped on a street car, went to the railroad station and without tickets got on the express train.

Our group dispersed. Herz and Goldberger got out in Brno where the train emptied out so that we were able to sit down instead of standing in the corridor. A man joined us who gave us a sweet pastry which for us was an incredible delight. In Pardubice Pavel Werner got out and at 2 A.M. only three of us stood on the Wilson Railway Station, Fink, Skoba and I.

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PRAHA

First we looked for the repatriation office. It was closed, it opened at 8 A.M .So we went to the Masaryk railroad station and I slept under a desk.

In the morning Harryk left us and we went to the Repatriation Office, across from the Representative House in the Hybernska. There we met Mr. Berger, an acquaintance from Terezin. They sent us to some sort of shelter on the Peter Square. Somebody gave us some money and a lady bought us a roll. We looked terrible and everybody noticed us immediately.

At the Peter Square I asked about relatives but nobody knew anything. I still hoped that Mother was alive but I began to have my doubts. It was a terrible uncertainty.

They sent us to the Milicova house where they

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received us cordially and told us that we had to get examined for lice and only then could we go to the convalescent center. So we went (by streetcar) to Vinohrady. They found that I had some scabs so that I had to go to the disinfection station and only late at night that came to get us again. In the morning I went to the Milicova again and then immediately went to the convalescent center by car with director Pitter

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In THE CONVALESCENCE CENTER

The car in which we were traveling stopped in Olesovice. It took in some food. Also we got out there and walked though the beautiful country side to Kamenice. It was the 19th of June. Yesterday was my birthday, in Prague in the disinfection station it was my 15th birthday. But now I feel good. I go with Skoba and a teacher lady to a pretty castle in a large garden.

There for the first time I ate again at a table with knife and fork, slept in a bed, went on outings and enjoyed the freedom. I began to correspond. With the Horaceks, the Bazelovs (?) and Vera then told me the sad news of my mother's fate. Later we went to Stirma (?)

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One day we drove to Pardubice and then to Skalice. Vera said that she will keep me there for the time being and a week later I was there again.

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OTHER FATES

1945-47

Skalice-Nachod

In Skalice I had a great time. I had private tutors there. In September I passed the exam to enter the 4th high school class and moved over to the Becks. In June 1946 the Goldschmids returned. I moved in with them in January 47.

1

At the Becks I stayed only half a year. I felt content there, really like at home. We understood each other well, especially with Ruda. Both of them had also been in the concentration camps. I was felt good there, it was a good Czech family, Ruda had a lot of friends and everything went well. (Details in Diary 1)

2. In the Goldschmid family there are three, the parents and Mac, 15 year old (born 1932). I don't get along so well with him

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I don't feel as well there, they have different interests, they were during the war in Palestine and Alice likes to go to Prague to enjoy herself, she doesn't care much about her household. The uncle is caring and good hearted, continuously worries about something and complains, he is 20 years older then his wife.

ENGLAND

I was supposed to go there already during the summer of 1946 but only in 1947 did the authorities give permission. I went there by airplane, I saw a lot of new things and improved my English. I was together with many foreigners and Englishmen, I only spoke English, traveled a bit, explored

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museums and churches, swam in the sea and played tennis. I was there for two months, obtained new ideas about instruction, observed English life and mainly got to know another country, an island country, the most Western in all of Europe with a high

level of culture, an old, conservative democracy. In the fall I returned to the gymnasium's 6th grade. That year I went to dancing school.

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And so came the fall of the year 1947, it ends slowly in pleasure and distress because at the Goldschmids one can never know what is going on, at times all is fun and suddenly yelling, unfortunately most of the time because the head of the family, who is—in contrast to other normal married couples—a woman—aunt Alice!

End

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