

POPPY REMEMBERING

1939 - 1945

To My Beloved Father, Sol Roth,
--- Marion Amsellem

FOREWORD

"Poppy". That's what I called him. My friends had other names for their fathers. "Dad", "Father", even "My old man". But, they were born in America. I was born in a Displaced Persons camp in Bachnang, Germany. And I had my "Poppy".

He was a gentle man. Everyone knew that. You could tell as soon as you looked into his eyes. They were the clearest, softest grey, just like the picture of his father that hung in the den. Those same kind, gentle eyes, looking out from behind the glass, above his soft-looking, untrimmed beard and below the large, black skullcap that covered his head and perched just above his smooth, wide forehead.

My Poppy looked just like that, but without the skullcap or beard. He wasn't a very religious man, except at the beginning and towards the end of his life, but he never went out without a cap on his head, covering his baldness, just exposing his semi-circle of close-cropped, white hair.

There was a bit of vanity in that, too, not just the cold of New York winters, or the blistering sun of New York summers. Even though he had lost most of his hair at a rather young age, in his mid-thirties, he still, at almost eighty years old, didn't quite believe it when I told him "Bald is beautiful".

His cap, or hat, had to be just so, color-coordinated to match whatever he was wearing that day. It was usually some shade of olive green, his favorite color. He would dress very carefully,

socks matching shoes, matching pants, etc. and go out into our Brooklyn neighborhood for long walks. Since I had moved to California in 1967, I never realized how much these walks meant to him, or to the people around him. I know that they allowed him to smoke his few cigarettes of the day, without my mother telling him how harmful they were for his health. But, also, he met so many people on those walks. People in the neighborhood who looked forward to seeing my Poppy make his daily rounds, talking to each of them, becoming a part of their lives.

It was when I returned to Brooklyn for my father's funeral, during the week of Shiva, that all of these people I had never known came into the house to pay their respects. They covered a wide spectrum of humanity. Even in this rather orthodox Jewish neighborhood of Flatbush, my father befriended an incredible variety of people who were so touched by his goodness and kindness that they came to the house, many for the first time, to share their experiences of my Poppy with me and my sister. There was the very dapper English gentleman, with his very beautiful wife, both in their seventies and about six feet tall, telling me, in his wonderfully proper English accent, how elegant my father always looked, and how he always tipped his hat when he greeted them. Across the street from our house, lived a little German man who came to the Shiva and cried and cried with me over the loss of his dear friend. I had never met this man, but he told me how,

being German, he felt like an outcast in the neighborhood, but that my Poppy would always stop, on his walks, and sit on the steps outside his house with him. They would talk for hours about what it was like living in Europe. He told me he would be sorely missed.

The Isaacsons came in one day. Rachel was in the last few months of her pregnancy and I didn't think she would make it up the stairs to the apartment, but she and Shlomo said that they had to come to talk to me about my father. They were Orthodox Jews, who had moved into the neighborhood about ten years ago. They bought the house three doors down from my parents' home. Shlomo knew nothing about all the headaches a new house could be and he told me how incredible my Poppy had been. He helped them settle in. Whenever something needed fixing, he was always there. He built cabinets and shelves, aligned doors, everything a carpenter does. I never knew any of this. But, that's the way Poppy was. He hardly ever talked. Just smiled, and did things.

Another time, a man walked into the apartment to pay a Shiva call. I asked my mother who he was because he did not come immediately to the living room where we were sitting on our low stools, but stopped in the dining room, looking at one of the paintings my father had done. She told me she didn't know his name, but he was someone in the neighborhood that Poppy met while on his walks. After studying the painting for several minutes, he

came into the living room and I spoke with him. He told me how much he would miss his conversations with my father, what a good man he had been. I asked him what made him stop so suddenly in front of the painting. He said, "Those are Polish trees in the painting". Then he recited a short poem in Yiddish.

"Unter Poilische beimale,
Sitzen nicht meir kein
Yossele und Craindele."

I had chills. It meant, "Under Polish trees will no longer sit a Yossele and Craindele" (two very Jewish children's names). The horror of the holocaust was brought back by this very simple painting of trees -- trees that, to this man, were Polish trees as he remembered them from his youth.

This was the reason my Poppy started painting. Not as much to forget the horrors of the holocaust, as to remember the positive times before the holocaust. All the time that I was growing up, I knew that Poppy loved to draw. Then, at about age 70, my sister gave him a set of Grumbacher oils and he started to paint. He was constantly collecting all sorts of pictures and prints, sometimes finding them in garage sales, and he would paint over them. This new found means of expression truly changed him.

I remember, when I was about 12 years old, I was awakened one night to the sounds of my Poppy in his bedroom, screaming in German. He often had nightmares, that I knew, but this was the

first time I had heard him yelling like that. He never wanted to talk about it, but, all my life, I had been surrounded by stories of the holocaust -- sometimes from my father, more from the friends that surrounded him.

He had a group of friends who had been in many of the camps with him. This was the environment of my youth. Every Friday night, these friends, with their wives and children, would either come to our house, or we would go to theirs. There would be lots of food, drink, dancing and laughter. But, often, I would pick up bits of stories, some of the horrors that these people had endured, and survived.

Poppy loved music and dancing. He told me that when he was a little boy, he carved his own violin out of a piece of wood (and since he could never play because of his work, going into the army, and then the war, I was given the violin lessons). At every wedding or Bar Mitzvah, he was the first one out on the floor and, when my mother was tired, would grab any woman who wanted to follow him. As I grew older, 14 or 15, and they were playing more than just horas, waltzes and polkas at these gatherings, I had to teach him to cha cha (to the tune of "Cherry Pink and Apple Blossom White").

When he started painting, all of a sudden the nightmares stopped. The paintings are what would be called "naive". Scenes of farmhouses, with horses, ducks, trees, blue sky, chasidim in

long black coats performing the ritual called "Tashlich" -- throwing bread into a river to cast away sins committed during the year, farmers behind their plows, paintings of bouquets of brilliant flowers, village dances with the musicians playing in the background, paintings of sparsely wooded forests with migrating birds above, all the memories of his youth. Not one painting depicting the concentration camps, the ghetto, or any of the horrors he had seen in the four years he spent in the camps.

But then, about two years before he died, he decided to record his experiences from 1939 to 1945, the end of the war. Possibly, he knew that his end was near (though he was never sick, hated the thought of hospitals or doctors) but he recorded almost four hours of tapes. When I first heard these tapes, I couldn't believe this was my Poppy. Here was a man who hardly ever spoke, just smiled and looked at you with his twinkling eyes, and then, when I put on the tapes, from the cassette player came this rapid-fire Yiddish. I could hardly keep up with it, just listening, let alone transcribing.

What follows, now, is the transcription of my Poppy's tapes. I did not, knowingly, change any of the meaning of the words he spoke. Many times, I wanted to interpret various incidents, or editorialize at some of the more uncomfortable moments (for me) as far as the interaction amongst some of the Jewish prisoners was concerned. But, then, I decided that this was my Poppy speaking.

This was his story, and I wouldn't change it to accommodate my ideas of how things should be. This is how things were.

POPPY'S WORDS

I've suffered at the hands of the Germans from 1939-1945. I am the youngest of 13 sisters and 5 brothers. Even though there has been much said and written about these events, every one of us lived them differently. Not everyone suffered in the same way and perhaps, upon hearing my account, there will be some who will be interested in my tragedy and some who will find in my recollections bits of information about people and places they had known.

In August of 1939, I was drafted into the Polish army. On September 1, 1939, the Germans fell upon Poland with a superhuman force. In one week they shattered Polish positions and found themselves in a city not far from Lodz, in Povinitz. The Polish army was retreating from Lodz to Warsaw. On the way, we saw dead bodies, horses, animals, burnt forests and countryside. We were shot upon by German snipers, hiding in Polish homes. We went a little further and were bombed by German planes. We scattered and tried to hide where we could -- in the river, in the grass, anywhere. In this way, we endured the entire day and the entire night. In the morning, we arrived, exhausted, in Warsaw.

When we entered Warsaw, Polish women welcomed us warmly, coming out of their homes to give us drink and fruit to eat. They told us we could make camp there, but that we should report to the Polish army headquarters. When we got to Headquarters, we were assigned quarters where we fell, tired, totally spent, and passed the night.

In the morning, we were awakened, lined up and told we would be led to Polzowine. On the way, as we were walking, we looked back to see that the Headquarters had been bombed. We arrived in Lodz and were led into a garden where we lay down on the bare earth. Polish spies quickly informed the Germans of our position. Within a very short time, German planes came and started bombing us, from 10 in the morning, throughout the day. We lost many of our men in that garden in Lodz. At night, we were led into a school where we were quartered for a week. We continued our march and were brought to Polzowine where we stayed another week.

It was cold, damp, and we didn't have adequate clothing. We were frozen and tired, yet still had to exchange gunfire with the Germans. It was futile. For every Polish bullet fired, 100 German bullets flew our way.

All this time, the city of Warsaw was being bombarded without stop. At one point, the Germans dropped leaflets telling us to surrender since our cause was hopeless, we were lost and without leadership. Our unit leader, Richschmeerer, had run off to Rumania. Morale was low and the leaflets kept haranguing us, saying, "Return to your wives and children who are waiting for you." The next day, we received orders to give up our weapons - everyone, as a unit - and we, and all of Poland, surrendered to the Germans. We were returned to Warsaw.

Warsaw was being emptied by the Germans, with people being sent to Siberia. It became a city under marshal law. Only

military personnel, with special permission, could leave the city. We gathered all soldiers who had come from Lodz and attempted to return home. We were stopped just outside of Warsaw where we were given new orders from Polish army headquarters in Warsaw. We were told that all soldiers had to re-organize into 200-men units.

We returned to our quarters and soldiers from other cities arrived in Warsaw. When we amassed 200 men, we were sent to the city of Pruszkow where we were quartered in a hospital. There were many wounded soldiers there and we stayed with them in the wards. We were there several days. We were given no bread, just a thin vegetable soup.

The Germans took one of the soldiers from our Lodz unit and told him to bring a doctor and a medical aid to transport our sick and wounded back to Lodz. In this way, I was able to send a letter, with the soldier, to my wife, telling her I was well and saying we would meet again soon.

The next day, a doctor and medic came to take the wounded back in a truck and I was able to leave with them. As I had obtained a pass under the military mandate, I accompanied the doctor and his assistant to the truck. The Germans thought I was a member of their medical team and let me go with the wounded back to Lodz.

When I arrived home in Lodz, I didn't find my wife and son. They had gone to Pruszkow to try to find me at the last address I had given them. I was devastated and didn't know what to do. Late

that night, my wife and child returned and we were ecstatic. We kissed, we cried, we laughed. We thought that this was the end of our suffering in the war. We didn't know that our troubles were just beginning.

In the morning, we went into town. There was a feeling of celebration everywhere. The Germans were not bothering the Jews at all. Jewish stores were open and brisk trading was going on all over. Germans were buying everything in sight - and paying for it. We didn't see any trouble as far as the Germans were concerned. This did not last very long. Things changed drastically.

The Germans started to make enormous demands on Jewish storeowners. They started looting Jewish stores of gold and silver. Other stores that had sold out of merchandise could not be re-stocked. Bakers could not get flour for their shops and a bread shortage arose. Then the Germans ordered that all Jews had to sew yellow stars on their clothes.

Bread lines became familiar sights from morning to night. Jews were not allowed to line up for bread. German soldiers stood guard with rubber batons in their hands and, if they discovered a Jew in line, would beat him until he could no longer bear it.

The first Jews who felt the extreme hardship were the religious Jews. For example, a neighbor of mine, Menschel, a student at the Yeshiva Torah Vodas, would come by everyday to share

promise of bread drew them. They hadn't tasted bread in weeks. The poor came in droves. Older unmarried girls, poor young boys, all sent to their deaths. This is how, with lies, the Germans lured Jews out of Lodz.

I remember a day we called Bloody Thursday. The Germans barricaded the streets of Lodz and rounded up Jews for forced labor. They captured Jews and beat them in the streets, then sent word to their families to bring ransom money in order to free their relatives. Families came with money, but the Germans kept raising the price. They did free some of the Jews, but, for many others, the Germans kept the ransom money brought by the families and didn't free their hostages. They slaughtered them all.

One week later, the Germans came into Lodz and started breaking into Jewish homes, the most elegant homes in Lodz, on Pilsudskiego Street and Piotrkowska Street, gunning down the inhabitants. General panic spread after that. Jews started to leave their homes and the city. They had to settle in Baluty which had been designated as the Jewish ghetto. Polish families who had their homes in Baluty had to vacate these homes, by order of the Germans, to make way for the Jews' resettlement in this restricted area. All Jews in Lodz were resettled into the ghetto. In April 1940, the ghetto was officially established by German decree. It was encircled with barbed wire and, every 25 meters, a German was posted, rifle in hand. Jews couldn't leave the ghetto anymore.

These guards were specially chosen "Volksdeitchen", in blue armbands, stationed in Lodz, who would order Jews to approach them, then would shoot them down. We soon learned that if a guard called to us, we didn't dare approach his station.

Jews in the ghetto received 14 ounces of bread and 8 marks a month with which to buy foodstuffs. Food was delivered every two weeks, but the quantities delivered kept getting less and less. At any rate, the amount of food we could purchase with 8 marks was not enough to satisfy our hunger for two days, let alone two weeks. Most people couldn't stretch their rations and hunger was rampant. Demonstrations were organized, but the Germans came into the ghetto and broke them up with beatings, shootings and trampling of the demonstrators.

In Lodz, before the war, there were 350,000 Jews. 200,000 were moved into the ghetto. The rest, the Germans had already killed even before establishing the ghetto.

A Jewish elder, Chaim Rumkowski, started to organize police, firefighters, specialty workers, and a Jewish union, establishing order in the ghetto. He began allocating work for transporters, utilizing their wagons for various tasks in the ghetto. Some transporters still had their horses, but very few. For the most part, people had to pull their own wagons. For every handwagon, Rumkowski assigned three people to work. Every four-wheeled wagon employed six people. Transporters' wives were allowed to work with

them. Runkowski wanted to determine who had been a professional transporter and asked one of the Lodz Jews, we called him Roise's son, a professional transporter, to compile a list. This had to be done because so many men came begging for work. I went to his office and, luckily, he hired me. When I left the office, I met a young boy, an acquaintance of mine, who pleaded with me to get him work. He asked that I tell Roise's son that he had been employed by me as a transporter before the war. I wanted to do him this favor and returned to the office with him, asking that he be hired. Roise's son yelled at me, "Who do you think you are? I only hired you because you had horses for your business. You were never a transporter. If you continue, I won't hire you either." I left the office shamefaced. But, I got the job, removing and transporting rubbish from the homes in the ghetto. My wife pushed the wagon with me.

That summer, people started dying in increasing numbers, from 150-200 dead each day. 100 dead was considered a light day.

Winter came. There was no heat. We slept in our clothes. In order to cook our daily soup, we had to burn what little furniture we had and anything else we could find -- an old sock, a rag, some old shoes, anything.

My young wife caught a cold and couldn't get out of bed. I hired a young boy to help me push the wagon. I shared my money and piece of bread with him. My wife started to complain that I

was eating more bread than she. I explained that I had to give part of my bread ration to the young boy. My son, a little boy of seven years, heard this dispute over the bread. When I came home the next night, he presented me with a piece of bread that he had hidden from his mother and saved, all day, for me to eat. This was his ration for the day. That simple gesture tore at my heart. I told him, "Eat, my son. I was given bread at work." I'll never forget that day.

My wife regained her health and, again, helped me to push the wagon. I had to let my young helper go. This is how my wife and I left for work every morning, leaving my child alone in that cold apartment. The child understood everything -- like an adult. He would get into bed, pulling the bedspread over his head, and entertain himself with the few toys he had and whatever else he could imagine, without crying, until we returned home at night.

One night, my wife went to the window and saw the young helper I had hired when she was sick, pulling my wagon away from our house. She yelled at him, "What are you doing with our wagon?" He quickly left the wagon and fled.

Work was very difficult for my wife and me. We had to pull the wagon through snow and mud, all the time trying to forget our hunger. It was a very cold winter. When we finally got into our cold bed and managed to doze off, we woke several times during the night to urinate. The soup we were able to cook everyday was

mainly water. We even joked that the soup, in the cold night, stood by itself watching us get up and lie back down.

In the ghetto, there was a horse that pulled the wagon that transported the dead bodies. Whenever we saw someone who looked really ill, with swollen eyes, we joked that the horse had already winked at him.

On March 9, 1941, at six in the morning, Jewish police came into our home and yelled, "Does Salek Roth live here?" I was still asleep. They woke me and told me to go with them, that there had been charges filed against me. My wife and I were very frightened. We didn't know what this was all about. What did the police want with me? They put me directly into jail. Then a policeman returned to my home and demanded that my wife turn over my bread ration card to him. Otherwise, I would not receive any food in prison. That was the last time I ever saw my home, my wife, or my child.

The next day, March 10, they called me for the hearing. It seems the young helper I had hired to replace my sick wife had brought charges against me. He had robbed a woman and accused me of having done it. He even described me to the woman in great detail. She was brought into the courtroom and immediately identified me as the thief. The judge said to me, "You don't look like a thief. What happened to you?" The prosecutor stated, "Oh, he's just a ghetto thief." I thought I would have a heart attack.

The judge told me that if I would return the stolen goods they would set me free. My insistence that I was innocent fell on deaf ears. The next few hours were unbelievable. I was convicted of robbery and taken into a separate room where two policemen started to beat me. They were expert at beatings. They, then, took me back to prison - beaten, bloody, bruised on my chest and face. The other prisoners, upon seeing me, started talking amongst themselves, saying, "There's the criminal -- a real one." This completely demoralized me.

A few days later, a man was brought in who had been accused of peddling. This was not allowed in the ghetto. The Jew had a piece of bread with him. At night, someone stole the bread. They needed a culprit and who better than me. They turned me over to the police, who beat me again, reopening the same wounds, bloodying me again.

On April 9, 1941, I was sent to the camps near Danzig, Poland. It seems that my bad reputation had come with me to the camp.

The camp was composed of men from Lodz, mainly transporters. There were many brothers, cousins, male family members, all together, each trying to protect their family unit. They watched over the few personal belongings each one had brought with them from home. I was considered, and treated as, an outsider since I was not really from Lodz. I am from Lemberg. I enlisted in the Polish army and, in 1932, while in Lodz, I fell in love with a

beautiful girl, an orphan, and married her. This is how I came to live in Lodz.

I didn't have any relationships with the other camp inmates. The few pieces of clothing and towels that I had brought with me to the camp disappeared the very first day. There was no one to complain to.

After a few weeks in camp, we were taken to work in the woods. One of the prisoners, Shtilsach, had hidden his piece of bread under a tree and couldn't find it. Almost predictably, my past experience was repeated and I became the scapegoat. Shtilsach told the German guard that I had worked in the spot where he had put his piece of bread and that I must have stolen it. This time, the SS beat me, almost to my death.

They brought me back to camp and told the Jewish Kapo what had happened. He agreed that I probably committed the crime, since everyone knew that the prisoners always put their bread in that place. They, again, made me pull down my pants and beat me on my bare skin. When I returned to the barracks, there was a great to-do among my "friends". Everyone putting out their hands to me. It seemed when one Jew was beaten, the others were happy.

I couldn't stand it anymore and decided to escape from the camp. A few days later, when everyone was asleep, I took two small breads from camp, ran outside, pulled apart the barbed wire and escaped. There were no real forests surrounding the camp, only

young, thick growths of trees here and there. I was able to make my way, among these trees, to about 20 kilometers from the camp. The first two days I ate well. At every home I came to, I was given food. However, after that, I couldn't get food in the same way. I knew that if I returned to the same house a second time, they could become suspicious and inform the "burgermeister" (mayor) of my whereabouts and he would then turn me over to the Germans. I lay in the woods and just ate bread and drank water from a brook. Once, late at night, I knocked at a door and asked for bread. The farmer, very frightened, handed me a large loaf of bread that I was able to make last for several days.

The second week, the Germans found me and returned me to the camp. They asked me all sorts of questions, but I never responded. I was sure they were going to kill me so why should I give them any information. Then, the Germans gathered all the Jews in the camp and formed a circle with me in the middle. They lay me across two benches and pulled down my pants. One SS held my head, while the other held my feet. They then inflicted 150 lashes on my bare skin, using iron-tipped whips that cut through the skin more easily.

In the barracks, someone else had already taken my bunk, and I lay on the ground under a table. In the morning, early, the German SS took me out and put me on a wagon full of barbed wire. In my bare feet, I had to toss the bales of barbed wire from the

truck. A German guard stood on either side, beating me with sticks and preventing me from getting off the truck. They had also brought German shepherds with them and, when I tried to step off the truck to give my feet a rest from the barbed wire, the dogs jumped at me and bit my feet and legs.

During that time, a German officer drove by. He was the overseer for the work camp. He saw what the Germans were doing with me and started yelling, "What's going on here?" One of the SS saluted him and, laughing, told him what I had done. The officer told them they were doing things wrong and to stop immediately. The German guards left with their dogs and the officer came to me and told me to get down from the truck. I got down and he asked me to explain what had happened. As before, I kept quiet. I didn't say a word. He came closer to me and put his hand on my shoulder. He said, "You can tell me everything. No one will beat you anymore." My heart almost burst. I couldn't speak for the lump in my throat. He again spoke. "You must understand. This is a war. Your comrades are living in the same conditions. Why did you try to escape? Tell me."

A well seemed to open up within me. I started to tell him about my experiences in the camp, and how it was different for me. That my "comrades" all came from the same city and protected each other. I was an outsider to them. That my few clothes were immediately stolen and that I longed to be home again. I also told

him of being falsely accused of stealing bread and of the beatings I received for this, unjustly. The officer's eyes filled with tears and he told me not to worry. To return to my barracks and no one would molest me further.

I came back to the barracks and lay down on my bed -- the same one which had previously been taken over by another prisoner. I started to cry and could not stop. For hours, I just lay there crying until I finally fell asleep. I slept the rest of that day and the whole night. The next day, I couldn't get out of bed. I had a very high fever. I stayed there, in bed, and at the end of the day my fever broke. I felt extremely weak, but no one bothered me.

Two weeks later, I was taken to work again and received a worker's food ration. This ration was almost impossible to live on. Once a day, we received a liter of soup made of cabbage and water with, sometimes, some sweet radishes. We also received 6 oz. of bread. Nothing more. We were given this meal at 7 at night and knew that we had to wait until 7 the next night for this, our only luxury.

As usual, with lies, the Germans stifled any rebellion. The officer who had seen me unloading the barbed wire had spoken to me with compassion and pity. But to the camp's officer, Menner, he said, "This is not the way to do things. If the Jew were guilty, he should have been shot on the spot." Then he told the other

officers and guards that shooting was the only punishment to be meted out. After that, any infraction or dispute, even minor, was met with immediate reprisal -- by gunshot.

Once, two German officers came to the camp. The head of the camp wasn't there, just one of his Jewish assistants, an attorney from Lodz named Kruschow. He informed the Germans that the camp officer would be back soon. They awaited the return of Menner, the "Lagerfeuhrer", and told him that the Jew had introduced himself as the "Assistant Lagerfeuhrer". Menner immediately gave orders to have Kruschow shot. The SS took him out and shot him on the spot.

Another time, one of the prisoners accused a Jewish man, Tzola was his name, of having stolen his piece of bread. He told Danziger, the Jewish Kapo, who informed Menner, the Lagerfeuhrer. Menner did what he had done with me, but with a tragic difference. He gathered all the Jews into a circle and put the accused, Tzola, in the middle. He blindfolded him and told him to kneal down. Menner stood behind Tzola and shot a bullet into the back of his neck. Whether or not he was guilty we can never know. At any rate, Tzola kept repeating that he had not stolen the bread -- right up to the moment the bullet was fired.

Another time, the SS took a young boy from our camp and threw him into a small room because he had dared ask for bread. They were ordered by Menner to bring him into the field. The Germans

had to drag the boy by his arms because he could barely stand on his legs. Menner followed from behind, and when they came to the middle of the field, he shot the boy in the back of his neck. This became Menner's trademark -- shooting from behind so that the bullet came out the throat of his victim.

Once, two Jews left their work stations to get a piece of bread. The Germans caught them and brought them back to the work area. One of the Germans went back to camp to inform Menner of what had occurred. Menner ordered the two Jews shot. The Germans took the Jews into the woods, shot them, then brought them back to the camp. When we returned from work, we had to bring the dead bodies into the center of camp and form a circle around them. Menner then berated us, saying, "Any Jew accused of anything must die as these Jews did." This happened time and time again.

At one point, Menner made a list of 20 Jews who had complained or created problems. He told them that he was sending them back to the Lodz ghetto because they weren't strong enough for hard labor. He had them all pile into an open wagon, drove them into the woods, and shot them.

So passed the summer of 1941. I received a letter from my wife. I had written, telling her to sell my suits and other possessions so that she could get some money with which to endure the hardship in the ghetto. She wrote that she didn't need the money and that she was keeping everything, even buying more things,

because I would need them when I returned. She had heard, from the Germans, that we were earning money in the work camps and that, at any rate, they had promised that all men working in the camps would return home to their wives and families for the winter.

I even received a package from my wife. She sent me clothes, towels, a pair of pants and even a winter coat. Very seldom did anyone get a package like that from Lodz. The other Jews were very jealous. Two of them, Schmerel Yichobalicz and Abraham Pozanke, said that they had been robbed. Schmerel stated that he had recognized a pair of his underpants that I had stolen from him, together with two Deutschmarks. They told me that they would tell the Lagerfeuhrer, Menner, what I had done. I became very frightened. My wounds had just barely healed from my previous beatings. I had to give them everything I had in order to keep them quiet.

Winter came. They had told us that in winter we would be freed. That was a lie, like everything else. Winter was very difficult. The snow blew into the barracks through the cracks in the window. It was difficult to sleep through a whole night. We were completely blue from the cold.

They took 20 men and put them in a punishment cell, Barracks Room #3. I was one of them. It couldn't be otherwise for me. We had all been accused of committing some infraction of the rules, however slight. Whenever there was especially hard labor to be done, we were chosen to do it.

Once, a lastauto (flat-bed truck) couldn't get out of a deep snow and they came to our Room #3, took us out in the night, and made us shovel the snow, all the way up to the camp, working through the night.

Another time, New year's Eve 1941-1942, they gave us double rations of soup. The Germans laughed, saying, "Now that you have two liters of soup, you can gorge yourselves to death." During the night, the Germans got drunk and, in the middle of the night, laughing, they came to our Room #3, dragged us out to wash the commandant's feet, then our own, remaining barefoot in the freezing snow and ice.

We lived through the winter of 1942 in great need and distress and, on October 9th, they sent our whole camp of Jews to Lithow, to a camp named Polomones, near Kolno. They locked us in railway cars and gave us 2 kilos of bread for the voyage. We were dehydrated, very thirsty, with only the bread, no water. Luckily, it was raining, and the train made several stops. We were able to bend a metal spoon, push it through the iron grates of the train car, and catch some drops of rainwater. People started pushing and fighting their way to the iron grates to try to get some water. When the people closest the grates had somewhat quenched their thirst, they started passing spoonfuls of rainwater back to the others behind them. In this way, we spent two days and two nights. On the third day, around 9 in the morning, we arrived in Lithow.

They led us out of the wagons, directly to the work stations, pushing and beating us to make us hurry. One of the prisoners said, "How can we work just yet. We've spent the last 48 hours shut up in that wagon. How can we work?" The German answered, "We don't want you to work, we want you to die."

We were brought back from work to the barracks at 6 in the evening. We were given one liter of soup. It was made of bits of leftover bread and water and was very bitter and watery. At 8PM we received 6 ounces of bread and a mug of burnt barley groats as ersatz coffee. At 9PM they told us to take to our beds. These "beds" were just wooden planks nailed together. There was no "bedding".

At 4 in the morning we were awakened to go to work. The work stations were 8 km from the camp. It took about a half hour to take roll call and at 5 AM we were led out of the camp to work. We did different types of work. There was digging up the earth and filling sandbags. Sometimes we would cut down trees in the forest. Sometimes we were put to work building various structures. We were constantly being beaten all the time we were working.

At 12 noon, the Germans took a half hour for lunch. This was our half hour rest break. We did not get any food. After this half hour rest on the earth where we lay down, it was very difficult to get up again.

We returned from work around 6:30 or 7 at night, when we were given the same soup made of old bread and water, then an hour later, the 6 ounces of bread and a mug of ersatz coffee. This went on every day.

After several weeks we were given different work to do. We had to unload wagons of cement. These were 50 kilo paper bags of cement. There was a board placed against the wagon for us to walk up and down on, carrying the bags. The board shook under the weight and made us dizzy. We worked in this way day after day. Once, a Jew from Lodz, named Kaliski, slipped on the board and dropped the sack of cement. The Germans beat him horribly, then threw him into the water. They kept him in the water by throwing rocks and boards at him. At the end of the day, they told him to drag himself out of the water. When he finally got out and stood up, the Germans shot him.

The Polomones camp was unbearable. Several Jews managed to escape to the ghetto in Kolno. One Sunday, two of the guards left their posts and I, together with another Jew from Lodz named Wolf Levine, was able to get away through the camp gate. We planned to try to get to the Kolno ghetto. On the way, we were stopped by the police. They arrested us and called the camp officers to ask what should be done with us. Two German guards came to take us into custody. As they were driving us back to camp, one of the guards, named Kolze, ordered us into the woods. The second, named

Stolzberg, said "Let's go straight back. I'll teach them not to run anymore."

They brought us back to the camp. They laid me across two benches, one German holding my legs and the other my head. Kolze then came and started beating me with a heavy stick. When he finally got tired, another German came and said, "I'll cure him", and started beating me again. After the first few blows, I became quiet and they thought that I had fainted or died. They threw me into a damp, dark cellar and returned to do the same thing to Wolf Levine.

Lying on the cold, damp earth, I was finally able to catch my breath until I was somewhat revived - to the point of feeling the pain in my body. Wolf and I lay like this all night and, in the morning, they took us out to go to work. They told the foreman what we had done and that he should watch us carefully. He said, "They were probably trying to run to the Bolsheviks. I'll take care of them." He ordered us to gather the rocks around the work area and carry them up a hill. He didn't beat us but shot around us with his pistol, all the while berating us. "You're the culprits. You wanted this war. You want world domination. You pray to your God that Hitler loses the war." It's amazing that we were able to make it through that day.

The second time, the Germans caught two Jews who had escaped from their work stations, Moshe Bogalski and Abraham Shtufter.

They shot Abraham on the spot. They brought Moshe back to camp, wounded, but he died several hours later.

A few days after that, they took 20 Jews who could no longer work and told them they would be brought to a hospital. They were taken into the woods and shot.

At the end of July, they took 60 Jews, myself included, and told us we were to be taken to Riga. To us, it meant that we were being taken to our deaths since we knew that, from Riga, Jews were sent to be gassed. Everyone received 1 kilo of bread, and we were put in wagons on a train and brought to Riga.

At the Riga station, we were lined up, double file. A camp officer came and asked for the German in charge of the "new shipment". He stated that he needed 50 men as laborers. The officer from our camp said, "I've brought 60 men, but they're very weak." The Riga officer said he'd just have to make do with us.

They led us into the baths where we were allowed to take a hot shower. It had been years since we had taken a shower and we felt revived, refreshed, but very hungry.

I had brought with me, from Polomones, a little tin can containing a piece of bread, a towel, a spoon, a piece of knife, that I had to leave in a room before going into the showers. They had led us through several rooms before arriving at the showers and I couldn't find my tin can. I started to raise such a ruckus, shouting, that the Germans stationed in the showers

thought I must have lost quite a treasure. They went room to room until they finally found my little tin can. When they saw what was in it, they laughed and laughed. They gave it back to me and I was overjoyed to have retrieved my "fortune".

We were brought into a large dining room where tables had been set with bowls of hot bean soup. The soup was thick and fatty. It was delicious. Till this day, I've never tasted anything as wonderful. I even had a piece of bread that I had saved to go with it. Not everyone was that lucky. I felt like a king.

After eating, we were brought into a large room with beds. Each bed had a straw sack for bedding and straw pillows. There were even two blankets for each bed. Each person took his place. About an hour later, we received a half kilo bread and a cup of sweet, black coffee. This was the first camp in which we were given sweet coffee and straw for our beds.

They had given us this half kilo bread for our evening meal and to keep till morning for breakfast. But no one was thinking about the next day. All any of us wanted was to feel satisfied, not hungry, at least once. At 8 PM we went to sleep.

We were awakened at 6 AM and led to the showers. We were given coffee again. We had no more bread, but, that didn't matter. We were accustomed to not having anything to eat or drink in the morning.

The work area was not far from camp, only a ten minute walk away. We worked till noon, then we were brought back to camp and taken to the dining room where we were given a liter of thick noodles. We worked from 1 to 5 or 6 PM at which time we were given our evening meal. At 7 we had another half kilo bread and sweet coffee. Since I had some time in the evening, I kept myself busy in the following way.

In every camp, I had been able to find what, to me, were small treasures. I had found a hammer head, without a handle, pieces of leather and nails that I had taken from the soles of old shoes, and bits of wood and wire. After work, I made myself a small box, made a handle for my hammer, and, with the leather strips, I was able to fashion a belt for my pants. Everyone remarked how beautiful the belt was, made out of little interlocking bits of leather. Out of an old blanket, I was able to make a pair of pants, without pockets of course, I'm not a tailor, but they were better than the ones I was wearing that were ragged, thin, torn and full of holes. I also, incredibly, found a new pair of plyers that brought me luck.

We worked in Riga through the month of August 1942. At the beginning of September, the work was finished and we were sent to two separate camps near Lithow. Again, the Jewish overseer chose 20 men to be sent to a small camp. I was one of these 20. We were to be sent to our certain death, since the head of the camp was the

infamous Yuzick Ressler. The others were sent to another camp and they all survived, except for an older Jew named Kappelman. Out of the 20 men sent to my camp, I was the only survivor.

35 Jews worked in this camp, many from Lodz and some from Ozorkow, near Lodz. Yuzick treated these 35 men better than others in the camp. They were his internal spies. They would ask all sorts of questions of the newcomers and run to Yuzick to tell him exactly what he wanted to hear.

When we told them that in Riga we had good food and beds, they told Yuzick that we were not good workers. We were lazy. That's all he wanted to know. They also told him that before coming to this camp, we didn't know that there were Jews here, that we had run away from work in Riga to beg at Latvian homes in the area.

From the very first day at the camp, September 13, 1942, our trials began. Just after midday, Yuzick drove us to the sea to bathe. The water was extremely cold. I was the first to feel Yuzick's crazed eyes on me. He had recognized me from the camp, Polomones, since he had been the one to inflict the heaviest blows of my beating, just before throwing me into the damp cellar.

As soon as I got into the water, Yuzick started firing his pistol and yelling at me to go deeper and deeper. I went in until the water was up to my neck and I started swimming. When Yuzick saw that I could swim, he watched me for a few minutes, then he put his pistol back in his holster. Again, my luck was with me.

We were brought out of the water and taken back to the camp where a fire had been started, not far from the barracks. We were ordered to throw everything we had brought with us into the fire. Whatever clothes we had on our backs, as well as any other pants, pieces of rags, towels, etc. Then they gave us our meal, a liter of soup with a few pieces of potato and some green leaves floating in it. We couldn't tell what type of leaves they were but they were very bitter.

The next morning we were sent to work. Of the original 35 men in the camp, there were 10 singled out as good workers. These 10 men worked in a separate work area. One of the 10, named David Shpringer, said, "Oh, Roth comes with us." He knew me from a previous camp. We had worked together and he knew that I was a good worker. Yuzick listened to his advice because David had a good reputation. This was the second time in this camp that my luck intervened to keep me alive.

The other 9 men in this elite group were not happy that I was working with them. They were jealous of their preferred status. Whenever I was placed on work detail with one of them, they would start yelling at me, "You're pushing too hard on the saw" or "You're not keeping the saw straight." Each one would yell and curse at me until the foreman took me off that detail and put me to work on the machines, gathering planks and sweeping the sawdust. I had to work very quickly because the foreman now had the

impression that I was lazy and didn't want to work with the other men.

At home, we had fields and forests in which I worked, cutting and sawing trees. I knew very well how to handle a saw. My fellow workers in camp were from Lodz, city people. They didn't know as much about the work we were supposed to do, but they were masters at ordering others and cursing. It was difficult for me to work through an entire day with them.

Happily for me, the Latvian foreman, who assigned us to the work details, had asked me to write a letter for him, in German, to his girlfriend. I don't know who told him that I could write German but again, luck was with me. He took me away from the work details to do various tasks for him. I wrote letters for him every week, and made belts and straps for his boots. He even let me go, sometimes, to get a piece of bread.

In the camp, there was a young man from Lodz who worked with us, name Dovche Balekowski. His brother, Rudy, was a cook in the camp. Taking advantage of this situation, Dovche did a great deal of bartering. Whatever he wanted from one of the other prisoners, it could be gotten by trading for some soup provided by his brother. I had to trade the pants that I had sewn for myself, for the ragged and torn pants that Dovche was wearing, and a liter of soup.

Woe to him who crossed either Dovche or Rudy. It meant life or death. Being killed without a bullet. Rudy, in serving the soup, could simply decide not to serve the few pieces of potato available to the person he did not like. Taking away this meager nourishment meant certain death, and there was no one to complain to.

Dovche Balekowski always had enough to eat and was still not badly dressed compared to the rest of us. Furthermore, by remaining near the stove, he kept a ruddy complexion. The German overseer noticed this and decided to make Dovche his aide, a model prisoner. Dovche could now get anything he wanted from the overseer. For example, once he said that my hands were dirty and called over the overseer to look at them. He was always drawing attention to me. Another time, he told the overseer that I was full of body lice. I was not the only prisoner afflicted with lice, but I was the one who was pointed out and became the scapegoat -- again. The overseer ripped off my shirt and paraded me and the shirt in front of the other prisoners. They all oohed and aahed in wonder as if they had never seen lice before. If they had taken off their shirts, they would have seen the same wondrous sight.

The foreman then said that I should be taken into the woods and a bullet put through my head. I answered the foreman, saying that this was the only shirt I had. I didn't have another to

change into. That it was winter, and cold, and that it had been many weeks that I had been wearing the same shirt and couldn't sleep at night because of it.

The overseer took my shirt to one of the machines and sprayed it with fuel -- a sort of filthy, benzene-diesel fuel mixture. I then had to put it back on, wet with fuel and returned to work.

Two days later, swellings started to erupt all over my chest and back, probably from the wet, benzene-soaked shirt, and the cold. The swellings became bigger and bigger. They became very painful -- drawing the skin and feeling as if needles were poking me all over. I couldn't lie down or sit. I could only sleep, tortuously, lying on my stomach. These swellings then started to crack open and blood and pus oozed out. Then other swellings developed on top of the old ones. I had to be very careful that no one found out about my illness. If anyone had discovered what was going on, Yuzick would have been told. It would have been just another opportunity to kill one of us. He already found enough reasons, I didn't need to give him another one. All this time, in great pain, I had to continue working.

When we got back from work, one day, we found that there was a blanket missing. Yuzick informed us that we had till the next day to find out who had stolen the blanket. Otherwise, we could all prepare ourselves for the worst. This was not a good sign.

One of the twenty elite in the camp, named Wollrach, remembered that I had sewn a pair of pants out of a blanket. Again, a black cloud descended on my head. If I had had the pants, I could have shown that it was not the same blanket, not the same color or fabric. But Dovche Balekowski already had the pants, since I had to trade them for a liter of soup. I became the culprit again, but this time a double felon. I was accused not only of stealing a blanket, but then, to make matters worse, I had "sold" the pants I had made from this blanket. I could feel death standing before me. What would happen the next day when Wollrach would tell the commander, Yuzick, that I had stolen the blanket.

That night, an incredible, unbelievable thing happened. Wollrach died in the night. I don't know how. All I know is, the next morning, we informed Yuzick of Wollrach's death, we were all sent to work. The case of the missing blanket was mentioned no more.

Out of the original 35 other prisoners in my little camp, 25 worked in one area and I, as the eleventh man, worked with the ten other "preferred" workers at another work area. One week, two men were sent over from the other area to work with us. After they had worked for about an hour, the foreman told one of them to stop working, that he was being sent back to his original work station, and to follow the officer. The poor man told us, "Friends, I'm going to be shot." That's exactly what happened. He was taken

into the woods and killed. The officer returned and said to the second man they had brought over to follow him, that he was being returned to his original work station. This second man gave out a yell and said, "But, I'm working. I'm working well." The officer told him that he had been ordered back, and that's what he would do. This second man was led through the woods and shot, also.

In this way, Yuzick ordered two men killed, every week, of the 25 who were in the weaker work station. The overseer at our work area had been given a roster with the names of the men to be killed. He put a little stripe next to the name of the person to be killed that day. When it was done, he put another little stripe there, making it into a cross.

Besides the people dying from this little game, and those dying from the hunger and deprivation, the overseer at the other work station, a Latvian policeman named Vasili Horlovoff, also did his share to kill his Jewish prisoners. One, named Kimkovsky was shot because Vasili said he was trying to escape. Another Jew, named Fogel, was shot because he was lagging behind during the forced march. He couldn't keep up with the men coming back from work.

Another time, Vasili Horlovoff invented a new game to play. He would make a cross on the back of the Jew who he decided was not working well. Yuzick would stand and watch the men coming back

from work, and if he saw a cross on someone's back, he would take him away and have him beaten horribly.

Once, Vasili marked with a cross, a young man from Ozorkow, near Lodz, named Yonick Kessler. Yuzick took him out of the line and started beating him. The young man started crying from pain and yelled, "Better to be shot." Yuzick asked one of the prisoners, Shlomo Tachman, what the young Kessler had said. Shlomo told him and Yuzick ordered his officer, Bellick, to bring out his pistol. The pistol was brought and Yuzick killed the young Kessler with one bullet to the back of the neck.

In this way, with these games and hardship, these 20 men from the Riga camp were finished off.

One day, one of the overseers at my work station, named Piotov, came over to me and asked me where I had gotten the belt that I was wearing. I told him that I had made the belt. He said, "Give it to me." I took it off and gave it to him.

When we got back to the barracks, Yuzick came out of his offices to count us, as he did every day. Piotov called him aside and they both returned to his office, leaving us to wait, standing outside. They came out and Yuzick came over to me and asked me if I could make more belts like that. I said, "Yes, of course. But I don't have any leather or tools." He didn't say anything, but, after dinner, Yuzick's aide came to me, bringing the little box that they had taken from me, containing the tools and scraps I had brought from Riga.

The next day they left me in the camp to repair torn shoes and I didn't go back to the "Baustelle" (building site). From time to time, I was sent to the work station, but not every day. The ten men who worked there, the elite, started to treat me better. Everyone wanted me to fix their shoes.

A new policy was instituted whereby two of the ten men were allowed, everyday, to go into the woods and gather potatoes to cook at the work station. At noon, the foreman would place equal portions of potatoes on a large plank. He made sure the portions were exactly equal - a larger potato with a smaller one - then he went to each one of us and told us to get our portion.

I started to feel better. The sores and wounds on my body were healing. But, by my appearance, one could tell that I was still sick. I was very pale. I had acquired an enormous appetite. The few potatoes I was given, I swallowed almost whole, with trembling hands. I didn't have the patience to peel them. The wind and frost bit at my hands and face, but I was warmed, eating these hot potatoes.

We were also given small fish, caught by Latvian fisherman working near the camp. We cooked these fish at the work station. Each of us got 8-10 little fish. Not everyone liked to eat them because they were cooked in seawater. This was the only water available there. Also, not everyone of us was famished. Whoever didn't finish their fish gave the rest to me. I found them delicious.

Even the days when I stayed at the camp, I didn't feel as hungry as before. The cook kept giving me morsels of food here and there. I just had to make sure that his shoes were always in good repair.

One day, I fashioned a pair of wooden soles to replace the soles in my shoes that had been worn through - almost completely open on all sides. I pulled off the leather tops from my old shoes and nailed them to the new wooden soles I had made. Yuzick saw them and was amazed at my ability. Now, anytime someone's shoes were worn through, I made wooden soles for them, too.

I, now, mainly stayed in the camp. Day by day, my body was healing, and I was feeling better.

Once, I was in line, after our meal, freshly-shaven, and Yuzick noticed me. He remarked to everyone, "Just look at him, how he's healed. I was sure he was going to die."

I was sent to the Baustelle very seldom now - only when I didn't have much work in the camp. It was getting more difficult because they had moved the work station further away. They had to take us by lastauto. It was very cold and frosty. For us, it was better when we could walk to the work station, it wasn't as cold as in the auto, and the walking warmed us up. We were given bread to take with us for our noon meal. Of course, we ate it in the car on the way to work. It tasted wonderful.

One day, at the noon meal, I was sitting by the fire, and Piotov, the foreman, came over and sat next to me. He told me, "You know, shoemaker, I already had a little stripe next to your name. All I had to do was make another little mark and you would have been crossed out. But, I told Yuzick that it would be a shame to kill you. You are a shoemaker and you make such beautiful belts. That's why you're still alive today." I had been ordered killed, but was again reprieved at the very last minute.

Piotov had a penchant for killing Jews. One day, he had singled out his victim, a Jew named Jaganski. He made him climb up a mound, about 3 meters high, then went up himself and started pushing and beating him until he was tired out. Then, he ordered two other prisoners to drag Jaganski under his arms, and bring him to a clearing. Piotov then proceeded to shoot Jaganski in the back of the neck. He warned the rest of us to tell Yuzick only that Jaganski had died, not that Piotov had shot him. We didn't have to worry. No one asked us anything. But, it seems that the overseer had told Yuzick that he didn't want any swine like that working for him anymore. Yuzick must have known about Piotov's little games because, from then on, the guards watching us were not allowed to carry rifles.

We were in that camp, Plentzen, until December 1942 when we were brought to another camp named Mittlebach. There, we had two

commandants - the hated Yuzick, and the Lagerfeuhrer Spiegel. Yuzick was still with us until February 1943. Then, he received orders from the German army to go and fight on the Russian front. As he was leaving, he said to us, "Now, you will remain alive, but I am going to my death." We were very happy to be rid of him. But, the Latvian police stayed with us.

In the space of one week, three Jewish prisoners became ill and couldn't go to the work area. The three were Kojobrovski, Kennig, and Greenberg. They stayed in the barracks for several weeks. Once, a German officer came to the camp and found me breaking up a log with an axe. He asked the camp commander what I was doing. The commander Spiegel told him that I was building a contraption to draw water out of the well. Then, the German officer asked who I was. Spiegel said I was the camp shoemaker. The officer said, "How is it that a shoemaker is building something like this?" Spiegel answered, "Ya, this one can make anything."

The officer then went into the camp barracks and saw the three Jews. He asked each one what was wrong with him. Kojobrovski said that he felt very weak and needed to rest a little. Kennig showed him his wounded knee, and Greenberg also said that he was ill. The officer then said, "We must send you to a hospital."

When the officer left, the Lagerfeuhrer Spiegel and the Latvian policeman, Vasili Horlovof, got drunk and, late at night, when we were all asleep, came into our barracks. They woke

Kojobrovski and told him that he had rested enough on his bed and had to step outside. They led him outside and killed him. Kennig said, "Friends, let's see what's happened with Kojobrovski. Maybe he fell into the toilet." At that moment, Vasili came in again and said to Kennig, "Now, you have to step outside." Kennig turned to us and said, "Friends, come with me." Vasili hit him and pushed him outside. He shot him on the spot. Then he came back and told Greenberg to come outside. Greenberg knew what awaited him and said to Vasili, "I've left a wife at home with five children." Foreman Vasili yelled, "When the Lagerfeuhrer says step outside, you step outside." He then took the butt of his rifle and hit Greenberg in the head. When he was down, Vasili fired one shot into Greenberg's head, bent down, verified the bullet hole, and said "Primo!" - meaning good shot. Then Spiegel came over to me and said, "Shoemaker, tomorrow you will make forty pairs of shoes." "Ya wohl", I answered. "Remember," Speigel said. Then he turned and left the room.

We slept another few hours, then six of us were awakened, including myself, and we were told to take the bodies out and bury them. We carried them into the woods to their graves. It was still dark outside and we almost couldn't find our way out of the woods. Vasili started shooting, thinking we were trying to escape. We were very confused, turned around, but we finally made our way back.

A few days later, Vasili went out at night to visit some Latvian women. It seems that someone may have been jealous of him and shot at Vasili from a hiding place. He got Vasili in the leg, through to the bone. Vasili was taken to the hospital where they had to remove his leg.

About nine months later, Vasili Horlovo came back to the camp for a visit, without a leg, on two crutches. His face looked like death. He said to Shlomo, the Jewish Kapo, "It would have been better if they had shot me." He was a really pitiful sight.

Without anyone knowing, I wrote a letter to Vasili, but it was returned to the camp a few days later. Lagerfeuhrer Spiegel opened the letter, read it, and brought it over to me. He showed me the letter and asked if I had written it. I studied the letter intently, then said, "No, I didn't write that." Spiegel then gave me a pen and paper and ordered me to write something.

I do everything with my left hand. I work and can even write with my left hand, but I am accustomed to writing with my right hand, as I had been taught. This time, I wrote, with my left hand, "I did not write that letter." Spiegel compared the handwriting and saw that it was different from the letter. He then dismissed me.

We stayed in this camp, Mittlebach, a few more weeks. Then they sent us, in the last wagon, to Thausen, in Latvia. The Jewish Kapo, Shlomo Teichman, had amassed clothes that he had taken from

other Jews. He had allowed Jewish prisoners to go into the woods, to try to gather some food, in exchange for various articles of clothing. From one man he acquired a sweater, from another a pair of pants, from another a shirt, and so on. Whatever someone had, he could trade it for a trip to the woods.

Before we left for Thausen, Teichman distributed these extra clothes to the prisoners in the camp. I got a shirt and a sweater, another prisoner got a pair of pants, etc. until Teichman had given away all that he had accumulated. He did not want to be seen carrying excess baggage to the new camp. He knew that any extra baggage would be confiscated. He distributed this clothing, with the intention of recuperating everything when we arrived at the new camp.

Several days before our departure from Mittlebach, Shlomo Teichman brought me a white ribbon with black thread and told me to sew the words "Jewish elder" on the band. I did as he asked, and he put the band on his arm.

When we arrived in Thausen, in the train station, on the sign that would have indicated the village name, was written "Judenrein" (Jew-free). Arriving in the camp itself, we met with many other Jews who had been brought from different camps. Among these Jews were Jewish policemen, who recognized their former Chief of Police, Danziger. He had been police chief since 1941. He was in the camp, together with his aide, Herr Schpretzer. Schpretzer's title,

and respect for it, were very important to him. He was one of those "respectable people" who did everything for his superior. He couldn't read or write, but he was a fine craftsman with his whip. For this, the Germans liked him.

We came into Thausen and were all called to a meeting of the prisoners. We were assembled in a large stable with stalls and straw on the plank floor where the Jews from Latvia were gathered and sent to their deaths. At this meeting, we were assigned a Lagerfeuhrer named Herzberg. He came over to Shlomo Teichman, our Kapo, and stared at the band on his sleeve with the inscription "Judeneldster" (Jewish elder). He asked Shlomo, "What's the meaning of this?" and tore the band off his arm.

Men from our camp told Danziger what Teichman had been doing in Mittlebach, doling out favors in exchange for clothing, then distributing the clothes to us just before coming to Thausen. Danziger informed the Lagerfeuhrer Herzberg who ordered that Teichman receive 50 lashes. Then he asked us who had gotten clothes from Teichman. Herzberg told us not to return any of the clothing. They were now ours. This was Teichman's loss. Shlomo Teichman had now fallen from grace -- no longer the powerful overlord he considered himself to be in Mittlebach.

In Thausen, we didn't have any hard labor to do. Only shoemakers and carpenters worked. I continued to make the wooden shoes I had made in Mittlebach.

We also had enough to eat in Thausen. Latvian children would come and push pieces of bread through the cracks in the stable where we lay. This didn't last very long, however. After two weeks, we were sent to a camp, also in Latvia, called Gevaisen. In Gevaisen, we suffered tremendous hunger. We were taken over by a Lagerfeuhrer named Tomas. For our food, Tomas bought fish heads to make our soup with. This, together with the usual 6 oz. of bread, was what we received once a day. The fish heads did not smell very good, especially in the heat of the summer, and we could smell them as we walked back from work every day.

Once a Jew was caught leaving the camp to try to beg a piece of bread from the neighboring villagers. Lagerfeuhrer Tomas inflicted the beating himself. He was very sadistic. He then gathered all of us and gave us a lecture, saying, "You don't have to be begging for food. You have enough food right here. We've brought fish for you. Our soldiers on the front don't have more than that. You must behave or you must die. Anyone caught begging will be shot immediately."

We worked in the woods, cutting down and sawing thick trees. I worked with another man named Koviolski. We were both adept at this type of work. The German overseer noticed our proficiency and told us, "I can see you've both done this before." We said, "Yes, we're well accustomed to this work." From then on, everyday, he gave us his bread ration, which was about 1/2 pound of bread for

each of us, Koviolski and myself. This additional nourishment kept us alive, but never satisfied our hunger.

One Sunday, I was making a pair of sandals for Mendel, the cook. As I was working on the wooden soles, the Lagerfeuhrer Tomas came by and noticed me. He stood and watched me fashioning these wooden shoes for some time. Then he called the Jewish policeman, Danziger, and told him that I was not to be sent out to work in the woods anymore. I was to stay in the camp and continue making my wooden soles in the cobbler shop, where leather uppers would be attached to the soles. Danziger led me to one of the workman in the shop -- a simple, uneducated, peasant -- who had some tools and I made my wooden soles in the shop.

The German overseer from the work station in the woods came back to camp and asked where I was, why didn't I come to work. I don't know what they answered him. All I was told is that the overseer had asked for me. That same week, my former work partner, Koviolski, ran away from the woods. To this day, I don't know what happened to him.

I continued to work on my wooden soles with my peasant co-worker. The first few days, I didn't get any extra food. I kept creating new, useful things from pieces of wood. For my co-worker I made a pair of wooden shoe lasts, for the cook I made a large wooden spoon, a rolling pin, and, in this way, everyday, I received a noon meal.

Later, some Jews in the camp gave me things to trade for them. Since Latvian people used to come to the cobbler shop, I was able to trade for wheat, flour, groats or beans. For these Latvians, I also made wooden lasts for their shoes and they would always bring me something to eat. This arrangement caused jealousy among some of the other Jews in the camp. One, in particular, a known informer named Sandorvif, was watching me. When he saw that I had gotten a bag of food, he went directly to Danziger who came back to the cobbler shop and confiscated it. The man I had gotten the food for, in exchange for a shirt, accused me of having taken his shirt without paying for it. I went to Danziger and told him that I would bring him a bottle of whiskey if he would return the bag of food to me. He agreed, but only when he had the whiskey in his hand would he return the food. From then on, everytime I traded for foodstuffs from outside of the camp, I would have to bring a bottle of whiskey for Danziger. In this way, life in the camp became a bit easier for some Jews.

The Lagerfeuhrer Tomas was ordered to report for army duty. The Germans brought in a new Lagerfeuhrer, an older German officer. We didn't know his name, but he resembled a Polish Jew we knew named Kaporick. This became the name we used when talking about the Lagerfeuhrer - Kaporick. He was much better than Tomas. He didn't beat anyone, nor did he kill anyone in all the time he was with us. Danziger was worse than he was. Kaporick also got us better food than Tomas had.

We stayed in this camp through the summer and in October, 1943 we were transferred to a camp, nearer to Riga - the camp Alleye. This was much better than the other camps we had been in and our Lagerfeuhrer Kaporick, as we called him, was with us.

In the camp, Alleye, after we were there several weeks, Jews were brought in from Vilno. There were men, women and children. Everyone worked on the Baushtelle. Only the little children were left in camp with several older women. Some of the women were left in the camp with the Lagerfeuhrer and Danziger for special inspection. These women still had some valuables with them -- some silver articles, a silver cup, spoon or fork. Lagerfeuhrer Kaporick was rather cursory in his inspection. But, Danziger was much more thorough. When Kaporick had inspected a woman, and passed on to the next one, Danziger would follow behind and do a more thorough search of the same woman. In one woman's bosom, he found a pouch with a pair of gold charms and a golden chain. He then held up his bounty and said, "See, Herr Lagerfeuhrer. You didn't find anything, but I sniffed it out."

"Yes, yes Danziger," Kaporick replied, "I can always count on you."

Danziger became friendly with a young woman named Chaike and made her Kapo over the other women. Danziger was from Konin, in Poland, and he was a diamond cutter by profession. Here in the camp, he had also made a good life for himself. Just before the second world war, Danziger was sitting in prison. When the

Germans overran Poland, they freed these prisoners, Danziger among them. In the camp, Alleye, Danziger was given free rein. The Lagerfeuhrer Kaporich gave him total power over us. He could do with us what he wanted.

In Alleye, there was a women's camp as well as a men's camp. Danziger didn't allow anyone into the women's camp. Whenever he caught a male prisoner trying to steal into the women's camp, Danziger would personally beat the man, then stood him against a wall with his hands tied over his head. The prisoner would be made to stand like this for several hours. He once caught me in the women's camp and was going to tie me up against the wall. However, Danziger's aide, Herr Schpretzer, told him, "You can't keep him standing against the wall like that. If the Lagerfeuhrer Kaporich finds him, things won't go well for you." This time, Kaporich saved me. Danziger then ordered me to go back to my barracks to sleep but warned me that if he ever caught me again, he wouldn't be so lenient.

Once, when I came into the camp with the wooden soles that I made, the Lagerfeuhrer noticed me and took the soles in his hands. He turned them over and over, then said to Danziger, "Imagine. I thought that this one knew nothing, completely dumb." Danziger answered, "Sure, he makes only three pairs of soles a day. He can make a lot more, but he doesn't want to." The Lagerfeuhrer said, "But, these are very good," then turned to me and asked, "Have you

eaten lunch?" Danziger motioned to me to say yes, which I did. The Lagerfeurer then said, "Good. Are you still hungry?" Again, Danziger threw threatening looks at me. I said I was not hungry and the Lagerfeuhrer said he was glad to hear that. However, I was far from being satisfied.

Later, when I became better acquainted with the camp, I was able to get extra food from the Latvians. They were much better than they had been in 1941. They were already aware of the fact that the Germans were not doing well on the Russian front. When a Jew would come to them for food, they would give him whatever he wanted.

I came to one house, to a Latvian woman who spoke German, and she gave me all sorts of foodstuffs -- butter, fats, food for an entire week. I told her, she was so good. I hoped that a time would come when I could repay her for her goodness. She answered me, "I don't want you to thank me. I'm doing this because you are one of our friends and the Lord Jesus told us to feed our friends. This is why I'm giving you this food."

I never managed to return to her house, but I continued to trade at other Latvian homes. The Jewish women in camp, as soon as they found out about my bartering system, would give me articles of clothing or personal belongings they still had, to trade for them for food.

In general, Jews in camp Alleye had enough to eat. The person responsible for bringing us to work was a Polish overseer named Kochorofsky. He had a swastika on his arm, but he used to allow Jews to leave their work stations to try to get food.

We were then men, craftsmen, who worked outside of the camp in a workshop. Blacksmiths, carpenters and locksmiths. The Lagerfeuhrer told me to take command of this group. The overseer was not sent with us and, since I was the only one in command, everyone did exactly as he pleased. They considered me as the tenth man of this group, not anyone they had to obey. I had asked them to remain together, as a group, at least as we were leaving the camp to come to work. They laughed at my orders. They remembered how, in the other camps, I had suffered so much more than they had, and had so many problems with the authorities, and now, I was to give them orders. They couldn't accept this.

In the workshop, we cooked, we washed our clothes, even the few extra pieces of clothing we were able to accumulate, and we were able to get more food. As usual, this situation did not go unnoticed. Someone informed the Lagerfeuhrer who came to the workshop and took everything from us. he brought us back to camp and told us to get Herr Schpretzer who was to search us.

When Herr Schpretzer searched me, he found 20 Deutschmarks. This angered the Lagerfeuhrer. He hit me -- not very hard -- and demanded to know from where I had gotten this money. I told him

that I had made a pair of boot blocks for a German foreman. "Did you ask me for permission to make these boot blocks?", he yelled. "No", I answered. He then said, "I thought that Roth was a respectable man, but I see he's a dog, just like the rest." When he finished with everyone else, he came back to me and said, "Roth, did I every hit you?"

"No."

"Do you know why I hit you now?"

"Yes, because I swindled you."

He laughed and said, "See, this Roth makes the best impression. He tells the truth."

The Lagerfeuhrer brought us into his quarters, and had us stand, single file, with our hands in the air. He sat, looking at us, sipping at the bottle of whiskey he had also confiscated from us at the workshop.

"This is your whiskey. Do you want to come into Riga as respectable people or as lawbreakers?"

We told him this would never happen again. He kept us like this for one hour. Then he led us into the woods where he placed each of us against a separate tree, told us to put our arms around the tree, then bound our hands. He said he would be back in four hours and that we must all remain just as we were.

He had bound my hands rather loosely and, as soon as he left, I was able to free myself. I, then, untied each of the other men.

Just before the four hours were up, I retied each of the men to their trees and put my arms around my tree and my hands back into the ropes. When the Lagerfeuhrer came back, he noticed that the ropes were not tied in the same way. He gave me an angry look but didn't say anything. We were given spades and told to start digging and turning the earth in a garden. We worked until dark. The next day we returned to work as before and it was calm in the camp for the next few weeks.

Then, one day, a lastauto arrived from Riga carrying some children, cleanly dressed, along with SS guards. We were all assembled in the center of camp and one of the German officers spoke: "Since the Russians are coming closer, we will need to leave here. We will have to march rapidly and very far. This will be very difficult for the children and the older men and women. Because of this, we have arranged special quarters for children and older people. We have brought these children from the quarters to show you how they are being cared for. Don't worry. You can give us your children in full confidence and peace of mind."

After awhile, the SS started rounding up the children that were holding on to their mothers' hands. The mothers were not letting go of their children and the Germans started hitting them with their rifle butts. Their screams and cries were heart-rending, lying on the ground, protecting their children. The Germans in our camp started helping the SS, pulling the children out from under their mothers, and throwing them into the lastauto.

Then, they started to take the older women. Another panic ensued. Daughters were holding on to their mothers, trying to prevent them from being taken. The beating started again. Rifle butts cracking the bones of these young women holding onto their mothers.

Lastly, the fathers of the children were taken. As far as the Germans were concerned, men who had children with them in the camps were the real criminals, the most expendable prisoners. In this round-up, they took with them six young men, skilled craftsmen, who had worked with us. Danziger had previously informed on these six, telling how they had gone into the woods and traded their wives' belongings for foodstuffs. Everyday after that, on our way to work, we could hear the screams and cries of these women who had their children, husbands, and mothers taken from them.

A few weeks later, another lastauto arrived. This time, the SS gathered together only the men. They chose 50 men to be taken to Riga. From there, they were to be sent to their deaths. Upon arriving in Riga the next day, luckily, the lastauto that was to have taken them on the final leg of their journey had broken down for some reason. The Germans took these fifty men, in the meantime, and had them unload wagons that had brought various property and personal effects taken from Jewish homes.

The fifty men already knew what awaited them. They became wild and, instead of simply unloading the wagons, they broke open the crates and boxes. They found bottles of whiskey and wine that they, as well as the German overseers, drank on the spot, getting very drunk. They broke open boxes of clothing and dressed themselves in everything they found -- sweaters, leather jackets. This went on that entire morning.

The German overseers didn't know what else to do with these Jews, so they brought the fifty men back to the camp. The Jews were gay, cheerful. The Lagerfeuhrer, named Zoller, started yelling at the guards. "Why did you bring this crap ("shaiser") back here after only a half day."

They answered, "Herr Scharfeuhrer, these are good-natured men. They unloaded the wagons very quickly. They're incredibly good workers." The Jews were ordered taken to the baths where, after hot baths, they were given new clothes. Over the pants and shirts, they were given new, numbered, camp/prisoner uniforms. Then, they were fed and quartered in the camp. The next day, they were taken to work and the Germans already knew that these were the "excellent workers".

All 50 of these Jews from camp Alleye remained alive. They were also very daring. They had spoken to the Germans there, in Riga, and had complained that Danziger, all these years, had not done any work, just caused problems for the other Jews.

The second week, they sent lastautos to continue the evacuation of Alleye, taking men and women to Riga. Everyone was taken to the baths there and given new clothes and new camp uniforms. Each prisoner was to sew their name on their uniform.

Twenty men were left behind in Alleye to clean up the camp and leave it orderly. Danziger and I were among them. The German guard from Riga, had come to Alleye to oversee these operations. He immediately singled out Danziger for "special treatment". He ordered Danziger to work hard and beat him as he was working. The others joked amongst themselves about this. Lagerfeuhrer Kaporich didn't have any power to do anything. He, himself, was afraid of the SS men and was not exempt from reproach. There was a doctor, an SS, who had found a case of moldy sausage in the camp storehouse. He called the Lagerfeuhrer to his office for interrogation and yelled, "Why didn't you give the sausage to the Jews to eat up ("aufzufressen")?" The doctor cursed, yelled, and insulted Kaporich. The doctor returned to Riga, leaving two vachman to oversee the clean up of the camp.

Herr Shpretzer spoke with Danziger, saying, "See, I told you not to fool around with the Germans. Now, who knows what they'll do to you." Danziger immediately ran to Lagerfeuhrer Kaporich to complain about Herr Schpretzer. He returned with the Lagerfeuhrer who beat Herr Schpretzer for the last time.

I and a few others were the last to leave the camp. Danziger had already been sent over to Riga. Among the few remaining Jews left in camp Alleye to finish the clean-up was Danziger's sweetheart, Chaike. We were all evacuated one morning and put in a lastauto to Riga. During the entire trip, Chaike was crying.

"What will happen to my Danziger. Before leaving I told him I was afraid for him and he tried to calm me, saying, 'Don't cry. What, will they kill me, these boys. Will they beat me. Let them beat me. That's all they can do.'"

When we arrived in Riga, they took us to the baths and gave us new pants, shirts and camp/prison uniforms. They asked each of us to indicate our professions. I, and a few other men, stated that we were building contractors. The next day, they led us to build bunkers. We worked very fast. The Germans tried to frighten us, saying that the Russians were coming and we had to finish building the bunkers very quickly. They told us that the Russians were terrible. These were young Germans. They didn't know that all we Jews wanted was that the Russians come - the sooner the better.

At any rate, we worked quickly and, in the evening, after our meal, the Germans assembled us and told the men who had worked on the bunkers to step forward. We were lined up, and each of us received another half bread for work well done. From then on, the men from Camp Alleye had a good reputation among the German overseers in Riga.

Riga was like a central clearing house for other camps in the region. Before our people from Camp Alleye arrived, many other camps were emptied and sent to Riga, where, men and women were brought in, given new pants and shirts or skirts and blouses, then sent off to their deaths. When we arrived in Riga, we saw that people from other camps were still being "processed" in this way, but our camp, Alleye, was kept as a unit to continue working in the camp Kaiservald. All the other camps around Riga were no longer needed. The Russians were coming closer and closer and the Germans were concentrating their efforts in Riga.

I worked a few days on the bunkers. Then a transport came to Riga needing equipment for horses. Harnesses and reins. They needed leather workers to sew this equipment. I said that I was a leather worker. Several other men joined me and we worked in the saddle shop for the duration of my stay in Riga, about two months.

Other Jews worked at loading wagons of confiscated Jewish possessions for shipment to Germany. Also, our good friend Danziger worked at this. The young Jews who worked with him avenged themselves on him. They hit him until he fainted, they then threw water on him until the German guards said, "That's enough." As the young men hit Danziger, they would say, "Here, this is for Sarne. And this is for the 20 men who were shot because of you."

Sarne was a Jew from Varte, a city near Lodz. One day, Sarne told the guards that he was sick. He was left in camp and, when everyone went off to work, he got through the barbed wire and ran into the woods to try to get a piece of bread. When he came back, Danziger caught him and turned him over to the Germans. Not just that. Danziger incited the Germans even more. He told them, "See, he's too sick to go to work, but not too sick to run into the woods." The Germans immediately ordered the foreman, a young German named Zaht, to take Sarne into the woods and shoot him. Zaht took two Jews with him, with shovels, to dig Sarne's grave in the woods.

When they came to the woods, Sarne begged Zaht to let him escape. He told him he had a wife and four children at home. Zaht let Sarne escape and turned to the two other Jews saying, "If anyone asks you, you buried him here in the woods."

A few days later, some Latvians caught Sarne and informed the camp that they had found a Jew hiding in the woods. Lagerfeuhrer Menner immediately left to get Sarne. He found him and shot him there in the woods. When Menner returned to camp, he ordered the young German, Zaht, brought and tied him to a tree. He assembled all the German overseers and foremen and scoffed, "You see. In 1942, you can still find a Jew-lover."

The next day, they took 20 Jews into the woods, and Zaht had to personally shoot each one as punishment for not having shot Sarne. All this was the fault of Danziger.

In Riga, from time to time, 20 Jews were taken for "schtitspunkt". That meant, burying the dead German soldiers on the front lines. When the work was done, the 20 Jews were shot. One day, when they were rounding up 20 more Jews for this work, Danziger was taken with them. That was the end of Danziger.

From Riga, the Germans sent, to their deaths, all the children who had come from Vilne and the neighboring region. Among these children were two little brothers, Moishke and Avraham Baron. One little four-year-old boy was hidden by his father under a crate which he covered with sand. There were several crates like that in the yard. Some of them were covered with sand, and passersby would throw cigarette butts into the sand. All day long, the little boy stayed in the crate and, at night, his father would come, lift the crate and bring his son back with him to his bunk.

One day, the Germans discovered the little boy. They pulled him out from under the crate. His father saw them and yelled across to his wife, "Rosjinke, they're taking away our child. Come with me." They both went, with their child, to their deaths.

In August 1944, in the lager Riga-Kaiservald, the greatest tragedies were taking place. Jews were being pulled from the barracks to be sent to their deaths. This occurred very often, once or twice a week, 50 men at a time. Extensive raids were effected. All the men were made to line up in a single file and the SS doctor would review each man, directing him to the right or

to the left. The right meant life, the left - extermination. There was also a third line for people the doctor had not decided about yet - whether to let them live or to send them to their deaths. My sort was to be sent to the third group. When the doctor had finished with the first two groups, he came over to the third - mine. When he approached me, I told him I was 30 years old and worked in the saddle shop. He ordered me to open my pants and palpated my stomach. He then sent me with the "living".

The same thing was happening the the women's camp. They took mainly older women, but many daughters went with their mothers to their deaths. When the turn came for Mrs. Baron, who already had her two sons, 10 and 12 years old, taken from her previously, she was directed to the "left". Her three daughters went with her. Edith - 16, Chaninke - 18, and Raisel - 24. These three young women could have remained alive had they not chosen to go with their mother. Many young women were killed in this way, willfully following their mothers to their deaths. Those young women who did not go with their mothers, managed to live long enough to see their freedom.

The same thing was happening in the Lodz ghetto. when the Germans began rounding up the children, mothers started hiding them. This is what my wife did. She hid our 7-year old little boy. Many women who had not managed to hide their children were captured. The children were taken away, and the women were sent

to the camps. Many of these women were set free at the end of the war -- never to find their children again.

Later, when these hidden children were found, the Germans gathered the children, along with their mothers, and lied to them, saying that they were going to be sent to their husbands in the camps. They were led to the Parsantine woods, outside of Lodz, and shot. My wife and child were among them. Letters were found, in which some of these women had written: "We have been stripped naked. We don't know what they are going to do to us." We found out that they had all been shot and buried in a mass grave. This was all done very systematically. First men were killed, then the children, and, lastly, the women.

From the camp in Riga-Kaiservald, in August of 1944, we were evacuated to Stutthof. In Stutthof, not everyone worked. There were thousands of Jews, as well as many Poles. We were kept there as "arrestees", not as "forced labor". From time to time, Jews were sent to work in the woods, dragging out felled trees. This was punitive work, accompanied by beatings without end. After a day's work in these conditions, we couldn't even eat our evening meal. But, we didn't remain very long in Stutthof.

At the end of September 1944, we were all assembled in a large open area and made to run in a giant circle. From the runners who were in the lead, 100 men were selected to be sent to a camp in Bougrade, in the Danzig area, to work as locksmiths.

In Bougrade, we met Jewish women from Hungary and Czechoslovakia. They also worked in the metal factory. A few weeks later, another 100 men were brought. In Bougrade, I worked as a shoemaker, along with 5 other men. I continued to make my wooden soles, as well as working with leather, as a shoemaker.

In Bougrade, command of the Jews was given over to a young man from Riga named Mishka Glicksman. He presented himself to the SS Sturmfeuhrer as a Kapo, which he had never been before. He was a healthy, strapping young man with a fresh mouth. He would berate, insult, and beat weaker Jews. When the German foreman asked him why he was beating us, Glicksman had the audacity to yell back at the German, "I have been commanded to keep order, can't you understand." The German backed down and didn't get in Mishka's way.

Glicksman kept order a little too well. When the German Lagerfeihrer became angry with a Jew, he would threaten him by saying, "I'm going to report you to your Kapo." This was the greatest punishment - to be turned over to the hands of Mishka Glicksman.

Mishka took as his aide, a young man named Chameck, who came from a small city near Lodz, Zdunska Wola. Chameck professed to being a boxer. Mishka and he acquired boxing gloves and practiced boxing. Every evening, after work, the camp Jews were gathered to be counted, to make sure no one was missing. Mishka and Chameck,

who had not worked all day, put on their boxing gloves and picked out some of the weakened Jews, who could hardly stand, and punch them for not standing straight, and so on.

In the month of December 1944, the Germans sent all the women from the Bougrade camp to Stutthof. There, we found out, many of the women died from the hardships and many were killed. We didn't see or hear from these women anymore. They were about 150 all told -- all young girls and young women. Several weeks later, we were all evacuated from the camp in Bougrade.

In the month of January, 1945, we were driven, by foot, from Bougrade to Gottensdorf. We marched from morning until late at night. When we arrived in Gottensdorf, we were herded into a large stable. We were several hundred men, and it was very cramped. We lay down on the wet earth, one person wedged against the next, unable to move. We were very tired, but it was still difficult to fall asleep in these conditions.

In the morning, we got up and went outside to stretch and straighten our bodies a little. There, in the camp, we met Jewish women from many different areas -- from Vilno, Latvia, and also from Poland. These were all young girls and women who had been brought from many different camps. We were quartered in various barracks and homes. There was really no strict discipline there, since our guards were just older Germans. One SS, a younger Sturmfuhrer, even had German girls staying in the women's camp.

These girls were called "Blitzmaidlen". The SS allowed men to go into the women's camp, and the women were allowed into the men's camp.

There were not enough dishes or flatware for everyone in the camp. We had brought some bowls with us from Bougrade and when we had finished eating, the women would come in to borrow our bowls for their meal. The Lagerfeuhrer didn't concern himself very much with what we were doing. He was already walking with bowed head, knowing what his end would be. He gave over the entire command of the camps to the two comrades, former policemen, Mishka and Chamek.

These two had just recently learned to hold their heads high. Being healthier and stronger than the rest of us, they considered themselves better than us. The previous Jewish Kapos from Riga-Kaiservald had nothing to do here. Mishka and Chamek were rulers over them. It was very difficult for these former Kapos. Miska and Chamek beat them constantly. One, a German Jew named Werner, was a an educated man. In the previous camp, he worked in the office and was a Kapo. Once, Chamek had beat him ferociously and swore that he would kill him. The next day, Werner disappeared from the camp.

Hunger in Gottensdorf was unbearable. Many men died there from the hunger. The women were able to last a bit longer, but they, too, were dying from hunger.

Mishka and Chamek were the overlords in Gottensdorf. They had a separate storehouse with potatoes and other foodstuffs for their friends and colleagues. Luckily, they didn't exclude me from this privileged group. Chamek even nicknamed me "the Lodzer", and Mishka took care of his friends from Riga. So, I was given the privilege, from time to time, of going into their storehouse and getting some potatoes. I cooked them in the cobbler shop and shared this booty with the other shoemakers. I also helped some of the Lodzer women who were distant relatives of my wife. We also had some help from the cooks. They gave us more food than the others because they needed our services as shoemakers.

Mishka and Chamek became acquainted with some of the women in the damp and took two as mistresses, making them kapots over the women's camp. I make shoe lasts according to these two women's measurements. Many leather boots and shoes were being brought to our cobbler shop, taken from the Jews that had been killed. While tearing apart these shoes, to have the leather to work with, we found gold in the soles and heels, even American dollars. We, as shoemakers, had to remodel these shoes and boots to fit Mishka and Chamek's mistresses.

We had a great deal of work to do, but the shoes and boots for these Kapo's mistresses took precedence over everything. If we didn't finish some boots very quickly, Chamek and Mishka would come in and start beating us. I couldn't believe my luck in that

I never received a beating. So far, in this camp, no great catastrophe befell me.

Mishka and Chamek kept very strict discipline. Everyone had to report for roll call on time - to the second, and remain in very straight lines, like soldiers. The two Kapos would then walk around the lines with their boxing gloves on their hands and would call out who was to get a beating. One day, Mishka took a Jew, who had been late to roll call, and boxed him so severely that he died that night. There was no one to complain to, the Lagerfeuhrer had already given total command to Mishka and Chamek.

There was a Jew from Riga in the camp who played violin and sang beautifully. He was extremely talented. He would sing "Eli, Eli" and other Yiddish songs for us that tore at our hearts. This was our only entertainment. The Germans allowed him to keep his violin. They also enjoyed his playing and he had managed to keep this same violin with him through all the camps he had been in. Well, Mishka Glicksman came and stole the violin from the Jew. This was an offense to all the Jews in the camp.

Later, more Jewish men and women were brought to Gottensdorf. Among the women was Mishka's wife. We immediately had to make boots for her. His wife, however, helped us a great deal. She exerted her influence on Misha to the point where he became a bit gentler with the Jews in the camp. He no longer wore his boxing gloves and no longer kept such a strict discipline. He let Chamek take over more of the running of the camp.

Chamek also became more gentle. One day, he brought us all together to speak to us.

"You, comrades, should behave. I shouldn't have to fight with you. I'm with you. Yes, I'm with you." He spoke in German to us. He spoke German with a very coarse accent. He thought he was doing us a favor by being "with us", the bigshot. He didn't know that we were awaiting the day we could knock him down a peg or two.

A few days later, we were all awakened very early, about 4 in the morning, rounded up in the yard, rushing, running, and were marched out of the camp. We were not even counted to see if anyone was missing. The Germans were no longer doing inventory. With us, there were Poles and captured Russians. But, even now, the Germans still had the cold-blooded presence of mind to pull out ten Poles who had dared to try to lead a demonstration against the German forces and shot them on the spot. Among these Poles were several spies who had brought information to the Germans.

We were marching in all directions. The Germans didn't know where to take us. We marched like this all day until we came to a church where we were to spend the night. We were given no food. Hunger was starting to panic everyone. The only cries heard were "Bread and soup". For five years I hadn't tasted an onion, a drop of milk, sugar, fruit -- any of these good things. But my only thought at this moment was, "Bread and soup". This was my overriding goal, what I was striving for.

In the morning, we were led out of the church and continued our march. We came across a clearing in the woods and we were told we could rest there. They allowed us to build a fire and 15 men were selected to cook some potatoes, in their skins. When the potatoes were done, each of us could take as many as we wanted. I ate some there and put some in a pouch for later. After a few hours rest, we continued to march until late at night when we happened upon a vacant farmhouse with a large stable with horses in their stalls. We led the horses outside, took out the machinery that we found in the stable, and took our places in the stalls as sleeping quarters for the night. We were very tired. We all lay down on the straw and almost immediately fell asleep. No one even thought about food.

We slept until well into the next day, but no one woke us up. To this day, I believe in what dreams have to tell me, and, during that long sleep, I had the following dream. A relative of mine, Meffle, handed me a letter that was written very densely, with very small, black characters that, I could tell, were well-constructed, beautifully written. It was very difficult for me to read. At one point my vision blurred and, when I looked again, the letter was perfectly white, all the characters had disappeared. I woke up with a light heart. It was a beautiful sunny day outside and I fell asleep again, to dream - again. I dreamt of the Sassover Rebbe, from Galicia. I had once seen the Rabbi. When I was five

years old, and was to start learning Chumash, my father and mother took me to Sassov, to the Rabbi, so that he could bless me. There in the stable, I dreamt that the Sassover Rebbe gave me his hand and said, "Mi agreshou, mi tzilain." (He who expels, is He who liberates). With great joy, I started to eat the potatoes that I had set aside in my pouch.

One of the captured Russians came over to me, cried and begged me to give him a potato. I showed him my empty pouch and told him I had no more. This caused everyone to start thinking about food. They asked the German guard if we were to get food today. He said, "From where do you want me to get food in this place? We are also hungry?" A little later he came back and said, "Men, I have good news. I had a good meal. You can now eat each other." He turned and left.

I fell back asleep and, after awhile, I was awakened by the cries and laughter of the women. They were jumping up and down, hugging each other, laughing, making an incredible racket. Some of the men tried to quiet them, saying it was dangerous for all of us to make so much noise. But the women answered, "We don't see any of the German overseers or guards, nor the Jewish Kapos. We just heard gunfire. It must mean that help is on the way."

Everything became quiet and, after some time, the Polish kapot came in, yelling, "Boys, the Russians are here." The Polish Kapo didn't have to run away from his people as our Jewish Kapos did, together with the Germans.

The stable was closed. Just a small door was open and everyone started pushing towards it. From outside, we could now hear a great deal more gunfire. It was a very intense firefight. Through the cracks in the wooden stable walls, we could even make out the flashes as bullets flew from gun barrels.

I broke out one of the boards from the side of the stable and pushed my way through. Several other Jews followed me outside. As I looked around to the front of the building, on the narrow road coming up the hill to the stable, I saw a Russian soldier carrying an automatic weapon. He ran over to me and yelled, "Where are they? Where are the Germans?" The Russian was very dirty, ragged, but uniformed. I was so shocked, I saw only this one bedraggled Russian and I thought he was one of the captured Russians who had possibly escaped and taken a machine gun from a dead German. I pointed and said, "There, there are the Germans." I didn't know and couldn't even imagine that he was one of our liberators.

Then, suddenly, I saw another soldier with a rifle who looked just like this first Russian, then another and another and, after them, more and more came running. I caught one by the arm and asked, "Are you a Russian?" He said, "Yes." I grabbed him and hugged him to me, afraid to let go. I asked him, "Where shall we go." His answer -- "Go where you want, you are now free. But you better go in this direction, from where we came."

The civilian Germans who had fled from the Russians, left their horses and wagons behind them and disappeared. We took a wagon and went to find bread. I found a sack of sugar and started to eat it. All of a sudden, I felt a very sharp blow to my leg, as if I had been hit with a stone. But, when I looked down, I saw blood spurting from my pants and I knew I had been hit by a bullet. The bullet had gone right through my left leg.

I lay down on the ground. A Jew from Riga, named Polomacher, noticed me. We had become good friends in the camp. He ran to the others yelling, "Shloime Roth has been wounded." He used my first name, Shlomo.

A Hungarian woman, a doctor, came over to me with a sheet she had found on some bed, ripped it into bands, and tied my leg with them. We snuck into an empty house from which the Germans had just fled. There was still food cooking on the stove. Several Jewish women followed us. We finished the meal, then went over to the closet and took out some clothes -- a jacket, a dress, a hat -- which they put under my pillow. We then all lay down to sleep. The women had prepared food for me, but I couldn't eat. I had developed a very high temperature. We slept through the night and, in the morning, my fever had gone down, I felt much better. My appetite returned and I was very hungry. The women got together to cook for all of us. They even made latkes (potato pancakes) just like at home.

This good life didn't last very long. The Russians started to harass and molest the women, who tried hiding where they could in the house. Two of the women sat next to my bed. One said she was my wife and the other that she was my sister. Since I was wounded, they had to take care of me. The Russians left the two women alone.

The first few days, a girl named Zlatke Aaron, from Lithow, who knew me from the camps, would come to the house. She had acquired bandages and ointments and tended my wound. It seems that she was interested in me as a "cause" but, after a few days, she saw that I wasn't getting better. Maybe she had enough of my festering wound, maybe she met another man. At any rate, she never came back to me.

I didn't have much pain, but the wound kept oozing. I got out of bed, and, in one of the stalls, I found a horse who was, also, very hungry. I fed him, then went to look for a harness and reins so that I could ride away from that place.

I came to a clearing where a group of Russians was lying on the ground - drinking whiskey and singing. I told them I needed a harness for my horse. One of them said, "We didn't bring any harnesses for you from Russia." I told him that, there in the stable, I could find a harness. He said that I could take whatever I wanted since, now, I was the boss.

I took what I needed and returned to the house. I harnessed a few horses, with a wagon, and about 10 women (maybe more, I didn't count them) rode with me. We were driving to Lauenberg, Germany. We had a great deal of difficulty getting through. The road was littered with dead Germans, dead horses, broken wagons, clothes, bed sheets, even live horses wandering the roads without their riders. We pushed our way through until we arrived in Lauenberg and settled into a house there.

Another man, Beryl, came with his horse and wagon to join our group. It seems he had deserted from the Russian army. He had put on a camp/prisoner uniform as a disguise. We became very friendly. He found bandages and medicine for me and helped me a great deal.

After a few days rest, we went to a Russian captain who was giving out passes to be able to leave the city. There were many other men who had come to get passes from the Captain and we hid there overnight. In the morning, we were all taken to work. On the way, the Russian foreman saw that I was limping. He asked what was wrong with me and I told him that I had been wounded. He led me away to a hospital.

German medics examined me, there, and I heard them speaking amongst themselves. They said that, with the oozing and infection, my leg would have to be amputated. I immediately got out of bed and left the room. At the door, I saw a Russian guard and told him I wanted to go shave. He let me go and I immediately fled back to

the house where I had left the women and Beryl. One of the women had acquired a pass to leave the city and, early the next morning, we rode out of Lauenberg.

After riding a few miles, the Russians confiscated our horses. The fact that I had a pass from the Captain, stating that I was wounded, didn't help. The Russians said that they needed the horses. They gave me one horse that didn't have horseshoes. The horse was limping. He couldn't walk without horseshoes. I tore apart a sack and bound the horses feet. We were, thus, able to continue our travels, but very slowly.

Several women didn't want to travel with us any longer. Six of the women, and Beryl, continued with me.

We drove past some woods and I found a blacksmith who shoes my horse. As we drove further, I noticed a solitary, young horse in a meadow, just standing and grazing. We attached him to the wagon and continued our travels -- now with two horses. On the way, the young horse became sick and I had to leave him in a field and continue with the one horse.

We rode all day and spent each night at a different Polish home. We plodded along this way for six weeks. When we approached Lodz, we were recognized as Jews. Young Polish thugs ran after our wagon screaming, "Zydzi yada, Zydzi yada." -- Jews are coming, Jews are coming. When we stopped in a woods and went into a Polish home to ask for some hay for the horse, the Pole started to interrogate

me -- asking me all sorts of questions. Beryl ran in, frightened, and said that a Polish policeman, carrying a rifle, was outside and wanted to take us to the police station. He was yelling, very angry. I went outside and the policeman informed me that he was taking us to the police station to find out who we all were and where he had gotten this wagon.

I had to turn the wagon around, Beryl and the women climbed in, and we followed the policeman. Two of the Jewish women who were riding with us had somehow acquired two baby carriages when we went through Germany. They used the carriages to carry their few personal possessions. As I was driving our wagon, behind the policeman, I saw a young Polish woman on the road. She approached the policeman and said that she wanted one of the baby carriages. The two Jewish women argued over who should give up her carriage. They were both adamant that the other should relinquish hers. Beryl and I begged them both to give up one of the carriages and not to draw anymore attention to us, but they refused.

The Polish policeman kept us driving, following him, until nightfall. I don't know if he was tired of all this, or what, but as night fell, he told me we could all go. I didn't ask for any explanations, just turned the wagon around and continued in the direction we had previously decided upon.

It was night. We drove to the Voitys (city alderman). He showed us an empty house in the woods where we could spend the

night. We drove there. I put the horse into a stall in the stable and we went to bed, very tired.

Late at night, we heard knocking on the window, and yelling in German, "Alle arous!" -- "Everyone outside!" The women went to hide in the cellar and I climbed into the attic. Beryl ran out through the back door. They caught Beryl, who grabbed one of the men by his rifle and yelled in Russian, "Surround them!" They thought Beryl was a Russian soldier and the bandit fired his rifle twice, as Beryl fled. He ran to the Voityts and returned with the him and two Polish policemen.

It started to rain. We got up, harnessed the horse and wagon, and continued our journey. We arrived in Vokslavick, a small city not far from Lodz. There we finally met other Jews and we started to feel more comfortable, in familiar surroundings. In Vokslavick, I sold the horse and wagon and divided up the money among the women, Beryl and myself.

We arrived in Lodz by train and settled into a large, three-bedroom home. We went to the Yiddishe Gemeinde (Jewish Community Center) where we received bread ration cards and clothing. I could not find any of my relatives in Lodz.

In the Gemeinde, I met Kochorofsky, who had passed himself off as a Pole in the camps. He wore German clothing, and was an overseer, but he treated his Jewish workers well. He gave them the possibility of getting a few extra pieces of bread. None of

the Jews in the camps could ever complain about Kochorofsky. We even, amongst ourselves, remarked how much Kochorofsky looked like a Jew. And now, we found out that he really was a Jew. We hugged and kissed, I said, "Kochorofsky, you're a Jew!". He laughed, "Of course, what did you think"?" We talked a little while longer, then parted company.

I spent all of the summer of 1945 in Lodz. In November 1945, I was able to make my way out of Poland. The Anti-Semitism was becoming unbearable there. The Jews I knew were always being ridiculed by the Poles and asked, "How is it that you few Jews came back here, again?" An organization was established, calling itself AK, for Armia Krajowa. The AK would harass and molest Jews whenever and wherever they were found.

I was able to get to Berlin, Germany, with several other Jews. After a few days rest, we traveled until we came to the American zone. We arrived in Frankfurt-am-Mein, but the Jews in the DP camp there told us it was full and we should travel further. We left Frankfurt and rode to Munich.

In Munich, we sought shelter in the German museum. There, many people were gathered, both Jews and non-Jews. I met a woman there from Lodz, who I had known in one of the camps. As we were talking about what we had experienced, another woman came over to us. She had come, together with my Lodz acquaintance, from another camp, in Leitheim, Germany. I was introduced to her and the three

of us stood and talked for awhile. Then my friend from Lodz went on her way and I was left with the newcomer.

She stayed with me in the DP camp and, after awhile, we became man and wife. She bore me two beautiful daughters. Today, they are also married and have blessed me with four beautiful grandchildren.

I now live on Social Security and am at peace. Still, my feelings for my dear, beloved first wife and child have not changed. The pain -- the wound in my heart -- is still very great.

AFTERWORD

Well, Poppy. I did it. I finished transcribing your tapes. It was difficult - for so many reasons - and raised so many questions in my mind.

I realized, for the first time, how an important part of your character was hidden from me - from the world. I always knew that you had to have been a strong person to have survived four years in the camps, but I never knew the details of your existence, and how very strong, and resourceful you had been.

You were always known as the "quiet, nice man" by the neighbors and by my school friends. Always helpful and smiling, but never saying much. To hear about the beatings you received and the escapes you attempted, in the rapid Yiddish that was so unlike you, was an eye opener for me.

You did, however, leave out one escape story I remember you telling me. You had been in a camp (you never said which one) and you had decided to escape. You ran into the woods and the Germans were following you, together with their dogs. You were running, and running, hearing the dogs behind you all the time. Finally, you were so exhausted that, when you arrived at a clearing in the woods, you said to yourself, "I'll stop here. Whatever happens, happens, but I can't run any longer."

The dogs came, let loose by their masters, and surrounded you there in the clearing. They jumped, barked, and snarled at you, but they didn't touch you as you stood in their midst. When the

Germans arrived and saw the scene before them, their officer said, "If the dogs didn't kill him, we have no right to." You were taken back to the camp, and beaten, but your life was spared.

There were so many stories, growing up. you had told me, when I was about 13 or 14 years old (was I not mature enough before?), that you had been married before the war and that you had had a little boy. I knew that they had been killed by the Germans, but I never knew the details, as I now do. And, I still don't know their names. You never said. And, looking at your face, I never asked. You did tell me, once, how you were all in your apartment in the Lodz ghetto and how bright your little boy was (about 5 years old at the time). The Germans were rounding up some Jews, with shouts and beatings, and your son said, "Don't worry, Daddy. I'll hide you under the bed. They won't find you there." As you said, Poppy, the pain is still great.

As you talked, Poppy, about the thin soup you were given to eat in the camp, and how you described eating potatoes as a luxury, it brought back to me more childhood memories. Having married a Frenchman, I talk about food with Jacques a great deal and, I remember telling him how poor we were when we first came to America in 1949. That we didn't have very much to eat. Jacques was surprised because, having spent his childhood in Algeria, fruits, vegetables, fish and bread were always plentiful. Not in the middle of East New York. At any rate, it reminded me of, much

later, when Mom didn't know what to make for dinner, you would tell her, "Just boil some potatoes". And that's what we'd all have. You, Mom, Nancy and me. Boiled potatoes with a glass of milk. I remember how happy you were, sitting over a big plate of steaming hot boiled potatoes. You didn't even wait for them to cool down. Now, I know why. They were still a luxury. Right, Poppy?

So difficult, your tapes, Poppy. And it's not as if I hadn't heard stories about the horrors and suffering all my life. But, still, there were times I couldn't even listen to what you were saying. The tears came of themselves and I had to stop. Only after several attempts at hearing the tapes could I start translating them. And what it brought back were so many of the people that surrounded me when I was young, who had created new lives in America after outwitting death in the camps.

People you knew from "Europe" as you called it. Like your friends Mr. Hirsh and Yankele who were with you in some of the camps, or Moishe Arfa who used to joke that he survived Auschwitz, Buchenwald, and other camps, but no one would believe him because the arm that had the numbers tattoos on it had to be amputated after he was hit by a stray American bullet at the Liberation.

Then there was the old man who used to come to the house and you would give him the Jewish papers he was too poor to buy for himself. I happened to be in the den watching (of all things) "Who Killed Anne Frank?" The old man passed the open den door just as

they flashed a picture of Dr. Joseph Mengele on the screen. He stopped dead in his tracks and started screaming at the top of his lungs in Yiddish, "Murderer! Assassin!" You and Mom had to drag him away to the living room and calm him down. I can't forget scenes like that.

Or, visiting Hannale Birenbaum on 2nd Avenue in Manhattan. I'd heard about the Germans killing babies and children, but I'd never known anyone who had it happen to their children and survived, physically and psychologically. You told me how she had watched her four children thrown in the air and machine-gunned, including an 18-month old baby, but remained sane and fought to stay alive, knowing she had hidden a fifth child, her son Freddy, who lived with her in Manhattan.

So difficult, Poppy. Difficult because of how you spoke about the way some Jews acted. I know you were all fighting for your lives. But that people could be so inhumane, one to the other, is so hard for me to accept. And you emphasize, in your tapes, the persecutions by the Jewish Kapos and Jewish fellow inmates. I guess the fact that the Germans were persecuting you was a given - a fact that could not be changed, no matter how impossible "The Final Solution" was to comprehend. So the occasional German who was not as brutal as the others was accepted as a savior, a friend. All the more difficult to accept the inhumanity of one Jew to the next -- one victim to the other.

These were the parts I wanted to editorialize, interpret, reason away. I've always believed in the innate goodness of man, so that the German who deviated from the brutal norm of his time, was normal to me. But, the idea of Jews persecuting other Jews, as you described it, was too much for me to accept. My gut refused to acknowledge it. I didn't want to write it. I'm still embarrassed by it. But, we must record and learn from these experiences or they can happen again.

So many memories. So many stories. I hope all the names and places are somewhat correctly spelled. I couldn't find them on any maps. I called Yankele in Florida, but he couldn't help me with the spellings. He did, however, start shouting and asking me if you remembered to write about Danziger.

I hope my translation is to your liking, Poppy. I really should talk about the family in New York and California, your coming to France and Israel to visit me. But, that's another story.

ADDENDUM TO POPPY REMEMBERING

Aside from the recitation that my father recorded of his experiences "from 1939 to 1945", he also told me stories of other experiences that were not included in that recitation.

There are two stories that have especially impacted my life and have empowered me in my belief that, though we may not know the reason at the time, there is a purpose to every event that occurs in our experience, every chance meeting, every life we touch.

The Belt

My father was always very good with his hands and enjoyed creating things, whether useful or not, with whatever objects that took his fancy. He was a carpenter, so there were always tools and bits of wood around his workshop. For example, he set the face and workings of a wristwatch into a brass table lighter, made candlesticks out of flanges and discarded metal, and even made an ashtray out of a tortoise that I had brought home to dissect for biology class.

After the Germans relegated all Jews in Poland to be placed in ghettos, my father lived in the Lodz ghetto. As is well-known, poverty became rampant. My father told me there was so little food to be had, and he was losing so much weight, that he needed a belt to hold up his pants. He found old shoes and other sources of leather, then cut out pieces of that leather into a very specific shape that, when placed together (I still don't know how), they interlocked and formed a strong belt.

The first time my father was sent from the Lodz ghetto to a concentration camp, he was in line to be sent to his death. One of the SS guards noticed my father's belt and asked him where he got it. When my father told him he had made the belt, the SS pulled my father out of the line and told him he would be working for the guards, repairing their boots. The belt saved my father's life.

After the war, my father made another belt just like that first one. I have that belt. It is the belt I am submitting to the Simon Weisenthal Center's Museum of Tolerance.

The Dogs

Because of the harsh conditions in the labor camps, there were many attempts by the Jewish prisoners to escape. The Germans used dogs, German shepherds, to pursue escaped prisoners and would often allow the dogs to run free, ahead of the soldiers, to capture the escapee. My father told me that the men and women who managed to escape were usually in such a weakened state that the dogs caught up with them rather easily and, when they did, the dogs usually ripped them to shreds.

The camp in which my father found himself (he did not tell me the name) was situated in a forest, surrounded by trees and far from any roads. My father described one instance when he had become completely overwhelmed with his situation and had attempted to escape.

He ran into the woods and, shortly thereafter, he heard the Germans following him, accompanied by their barking dogs. He continued running through the forest, becoming more and more weary. He finally reached a clearing in the woods and, in sheer exhaustion, sat down and waited for the murderous dogs to arrive.

My father then described the scene:

The dogs came to the clearing in the woods and, instead of pouncing on my father...helplessly sitting in the middle of the clearing...the dogs formed a circle around him. They continued their barking and growling until the SS soldiers arrived.

These are my father's words:

"When the soldiers saw me sitting there, with the dogs surrounding me, barking but not approaching, they said: 'If the dogs don't kill him, then we can't.' They took me back to the camp, beat me for a long time, but didn't kill me."

My father was not a religious man, but he said, "It was like the hand of God had come to protect me."

He survived that camp, and several others, met my mother in a Displaced Persons camp sponsored by the Americans, and created another family...my mother, my sister, and me.