

# How They Lived to Tell

1939-1945

Together members of a Jewish youth group  
fled from Poland to Slovakia, Austria,  
Hungary, Romania and Palestine

Edith Ruina

Including selections from the written  
Recollection of Rut Judenherc,  
interviews and testimonies of other survivors.

© Edith Ruina May 24, 2005  
all rights reserved  
Printed in the United States of America  
Published 2005

MIXED MEDIA

**MEMOIRS**

Mixed Media Memoirs LLC  
Book design by Jason Davis  
[mixedmediamemoirs@new.rr.com](mailto:mixedmediamemoirs@new.rr.com)  
Green Bay, Wisconsin





# CONTENTS

Acknowledgment .....	v
Chapter 1 Introduction .....	1
Chapter 2 1939-1942 .....	9
1. The People in this Story	
2. The Situation of Jews in Poland	
Chapter 3 1939-1942 Poland.....	55
Before and After the German Occupation	
Chapter 4 1943 Poland .....	87
Many Perished—Few Escaped	
Chapter 5 1943-44 Austria.....	123
Chapter 6 1944 Hungary.....	155
Surviving in Hungary	
Chapter 7 1944-1945 .....	205
Romania en route to Palestine	
Chapter 8 Palestine .....	219
They Lived to Tell	

Chapter 9 .....235  
Author's Reflections

MAPS .....x

Introduction - Jewish Holocaust Losses

Chapter 3 - Division of Poland

Chapter 4 - Poland to Istanbul

Chapter 7 - Eastern Front  
- Flight from Persecution

Chapter 8 - Routes of Illegal Immigration

References .....x







## *Acknowledgment*

How did I come to write this book about the survival of a Zionist youth group from Poland when I am not one of those survivors? It would have been too daunting a task were it not for my personal history and the encouragement and contributions of many people.

I was profoundly moved when I heard about the survivors who are the subject of this book and wanted to learn more of their experiences during the holocaust. Over a period of several years, this became an all-engrossing venture into a self-education program about the holocaust and then into the intensive work of interviewing, arranging translations, and rendering this text.

My personal motivation stems from a debt I feel to my Polish born parents. I was born in the United States in 1924, only four years after my parents arrived here from their respective Polish *shtetls*, small cities. Most of my parents' siblings and their children, whom I never knew, remained in Poland and did not survive the holocaust. In the late 1930s, when I was in elementary school, I recall my mother reading from her father's last letters in Yiddish about his terrible fears for his family. I remember, too, wealthier relatives' futile attempts to arrange for their parents and siblings to leave Poland and come to the United States. I regret how little attention I paid to my parents' earlier life in Poland, and to their loss of brothers, sisters, and parents who did not have the good fortune to emigrate. I am the same age as the survivors in this book. It is only because of my parents' emigration from Poland that I did not suffer their fate. So,

in a sense, this book is a long-overdue way of paying attention to their losses.

Now for my gratitude to individuals who helped me in the process of research and manuscript creation. Antony Polonsky of Brandeis University early on encouraged my pursuing this. He thought it particularly valuable for insights into the situation in Silesia, the region of Sosnowiec and Bedzin where the subjects of this account lived.

On several trips to Israel, I had the opportunity to meet with other Shoah scholars in Israel. One of the first was Dalia Ofer, who has done important work on the illegal immigration of Jews to Palestine before the end of World War II. She introduced me to Avihu Ronen, a younger Israeli Holocaust historian and the child of survivors. He was most generous in suggesting other sources of information as well as his own work published in Hebrew that refers to the survivors in this account, who came to be identified as *The Group*. I have also had instructive meetings with other Israeli scholars: Israel Gutman, Yehuda Bauer, Shmuel Krakowski, Dina Porat and Shlomo Netzer.

I have drawn upon the publications of these people as well as of many other scholars. I made extensive use of Leni Yahil's masterful work, *The Holocaust: the Fate of European Jewry, 1932-1945*. It is encyclopedic in its coverage, an excellent and readable text distilled from the work of numerous holocaust scholars with an extensive bibliography.

In Cambridge I have benefited from several academic conferences on the holocaust. Access to the superb library resources of Harvard University allowed me to enjoy days of roving through the stacks to locate relevant historical texts. Staff members of the United States Holocaust Museum made it conven-

ient to avail myself of the library resources there. They also made it possible for me to attend the Displaced Persons Conference in 1999 sponsored by the Museum.

Upon arriving in Palestine in 1944 and 1945, the youngsters in this story stayed at the Hanoar Hatzioni Kibbutz Tel Izhak which is now a center for holocaust education in Israel. The archivist there helped me to locate relevant testimonies going painstakingly through hundreds of file cards since they had no computers. Archivists at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Jerusalem, too, were helpful. Yona Zimmerman, a talented bilingual Canadian student at Bar Ilan University, aided my exploration of the Yad Vashem materials, where (to my surprise) Hebrew is necessary to access their collection. Yona also translated English and Hebrew simultaneously when I interviewed survivors who did not speak English.

Yehuda Bauer wisely cautioned that this story required knowledge of Hebrew and Polish. I have compensated for my own language deficits by the help of excellent translators. Bauer and others encouraged presenting this exceptional survival story which is unknown to English readers.

I quote extensively from Rutka Judenherc's written recollection. That memoir which she contributed to me has made an immeasurable contribution to the rendering of this unusual history. Tadosz Szafar translated Rutka's story from Polish into English. Szafar was a refugee from Poland who reached the United States just before the war. Working on this translation affected him deeply. Rutka appreciates that he artfully rendered her text into English, not only because of his linguistic skill but because of his own experiences in Poland. Szafar died before I could thank him adequately.

Tusia Gutman, another of the survivors shared her privately published memories with me. Upon reading a draft of this text, she expressed her gratitude for my work.

I am greatly indebted to friends who have translated copies of individual testimonies that I found in Israeli archives. Geulah Pariser has been my loyal Hebraist. She was born in Palestine and lived in England during the war. It seems strange that her Jewish husband who had fled to England from Hitler's Germany was interned in Canada during the war because the British regarded him as a German citizen and hence an enemy alien. Shlomit Haber-Schaim, an Israeli who has lived in the United States for many years, also translated Hebrew manuscripts.

Two people translated Polish testimonies for me, Stasha Janowska and Anita Leyfell. Stasha's father led her out of Warsaw in 1939 when she was ten years old, to be raised by nuns in Poland. She became one of the "hidden children" who lost their families.

These women survived the holocaust in Poland and had successful professional lives there. Anita told me that the few Jews in Poland after the war could be readily identified because they never referred to relatives; their relatives were killed by the Germans. However, despite the few Jews remaining in Poland after 1945, a new wave of anti-Semitism in the late '60s caused them to give up their careers in Poland and immigrate to the United States.

Nadine Rodwin and Magda Tisza translated texts from German. Nadine's family moved from Russia to Germany and then to France just before World War II, when Nadine came to college in the United States. Magda is from Germany. Her husband, a refugee professor from Hungary, translated a bit of

Hungarian for me. Magda is an avid book collector and occasionally found relevant excerpts for me in old texts.

Sherwin Greenberg, an old friend and a talented photographer, carefully rendered maps to clarify the location and circumstances that affected the survivors.

My greatest regret about my commitment to this project over an extended period has been that my husband's picture of retirement did not include a wife unavailable for sharing what Robert Browning described as "this last of life for which the first was made." But Jack believed, as I did, that this story needed to be told and therefore warranted my time—and his. Without his continuous encouragement, careful reading, constructive criticism, and tender loving care through a period of serious illness, I might have forsaken this demanding and emotionally laden project.

Edith Ruina  
*Cambridge, Massachusetts*  
November 2004

**JEWISH LOSSES IN THE POLISH-SOVIET AREA**

Jews in Poland 1939 <sup>a</sup>	3,351,000
Jews in USSR 1941 <sup>b</sup>	3,100,000
Jews in non-Polish territory annexed by USSR 1939–41	<u>554,000</u>
Total Jews in Polish-Soviet area 1941	7,005,000
<hr/>	
Jews in Polish-Soviet area 1945 <sup>c</sup>	1,910,000
Polish survivors and repatriates from USSR	<u>300,000</u>
Total survivors	2,210,000
Jewish military casualties, Polish and Soviet	230,000
Total casualties, excluding military casualties	<u>4,565,000</u>
Total survivors and casualties	7,005,000

<sup>a</sup>Polish government figures.

<sup>b</sup>Population of 3,020,000 in 1939 plus natural increase by June 1941.

<sup>c</sup>Natural increase from 1945 to 1959 deducted from 1959 population of 2,268,000.

**TABLE 13.2.**  
**TOTAL JEWISH LOSSES IN THE HOLOCAUST**

Polish-Soviet area	4,565,000
Germany	125,000
Austria	65,000
Czechoslovakia	277,000
Hungary	402,000 <sup>a</sup>
France	83,000 <sup>a</sup>
Belgium and Luxemburg	24,700
Holland	106,000
Italy	7,500 <sup>a</sup>
Norway	760
Rumania (excluding Bessarabia, northern Bukovina and northern Transylvania)	40,000
Yugoslavia	60,000 <sup>a</sup>
Greece	<u>65,000</u>
	5,820,960

<sup>a</sup>May be underestimated.

Jewish Holocaust Losses

Source: Bauer, Yehuda, A History of the Holocaust

## Introduction

*(They) told me (their) story in the matter of fact way that all the refugees I met spoke of their personal tragedies. The hurt was too deep and familiar for tears.*

—I.F. Stone, 1946

On September 18, 1946, several large crates of an incomparable documentary treasure were laboriously dug out of a bombed-out cellar in Warsaw, Poland. The archive, *Oneg Shabbat* (Joy of Sabbath), assembled during the war by Polish historian Emmanuel Ringelblum, who did not survive, records in detail the lives and deeds of Polish Jews from the outbreak of war to the complete liquidation of the Jewish communities of Poland. The archive was smuggled out of Poland by the underground. Ringelblum, anticipating his own death in the Warsaw Ghetto, paid special tribute to “our heroic youth of all orientations, with those faithful to Eretz Israel (i.e. the Zionist youth) in the foreground” (Kermish 1986).

Indeed, most of those desperate and daring young people “faithful to Eretz Israel” perished during the devastation of Jews in 1942 and 1943. This book tells the story of the few survivors of one Zionist youth scout organization, Hanoar Hatzioni, from the twin cities of Sosnowiec and Bedzin, Poland<sup>1</sup>. Parts of their story are known in Israel from various references in Hebrew but they have only been referred to in holocaust histories in English.

These young people kept in touch with each other from the time of their flight from Poland until the war’s end, though they were often dispersed. In March 1944, they joined in a loose association with other Polish Hanoar Hazoni survivors who had

individually escaped to Hungary from towns near to Sosnowiec and Bedzin and came to be referred to as *The Group*.

Zionist youth members in communities all over Poland tried resistance and escape but few survived. These young Hanoar Hatzioni survivors—teenagers in 1939—endured the hardships of occupation and a perilous journey to bear witness to the Nazi horrors and to achieve their youthful dream—Aliya, settlement in Israel, then Palestine. How they survived is a chronicle of unprecedented circumstances, extraordinary responses, and fortuitous encounters. Death stalked their every move. It is a tale “full of sound and fury”.

Immediately after the war, Philip Friedman was entrusted by the new Polish administration with the directorship of the Central Jewish Historical Commission to gather data concerning the Nazi war crimes.<sup>2</sup> I have drawn upon Historical Commission information that related to Sosnowiec and Bedzin.

Leni Yahil, in *The Holocaust: the Fate of European Jewry, 1932-1945*, translated from Hebrew, discussing the historical work of Philip Friedman<sup>3</sup> emphasized its uniqueness because he submitted the events of the holocaust to rigorous examination *immediately* after they had occurred. Most testimonies of survivors of the Shoah were recorded some years after 1945.

This account is based to a large extent on survivors’ memories recorded shortly after the shoah. The detailed memoir of one of the survivors, Rutka, recorded in 1945 and 1946 is especially valuable and is quoted extensively.

Rutka is not a professional historian but she is an unusually careful observer and reporter. Quotations and my text, based upon interviews and testimonies in various archives of others in *The Group*, enlarge Rutka’s story. Given their desperate situation,



survivors could not have given much priority to keeping records at the time. Indeed they did not even have paper and pencils.

Knowing the hazards of relying on memories, I quote Yehuda Bauer. "I would argue that when we have ten independently recorded, converging and comparable testimonies, they are more reliable than a document about the same situation written by some German or Jewish source, or by a Polish bystander." I think that these collective testimonies of *The Group* members meet Bauer's criteria. (*Bauer, The Holocaust and History*)

Bauer deplors the lack of acknowledgment in holocaust accounts of the roles of Zionist youth in saving Jews. For instance, histories of the Jews in Hungary in 1944 credit international representatives from other countries who aided Jews. There is little or no mention of the continual significant resistance activities of Hungarian Zionist youth and the Polish youth who aided them. (*Bauer, Jews for Sale*). The survivors who contributed to this account told about their participation in resistance activities with the Hanoar Hazoni youth in Hungary.

One of the issues, given the deficit of contemporary documentation is the quality of retrospective accounts. As Irving Howe, in *Writing and the Holocaust* stressed those who share their recollections must not "flinch from anything, neither shame nor degradation, yet refusing] to indulge in those outbursts of self-pity...that understandably mar a fair number of Holocaust memoirs." (Lang 1988) I was often surprised at how candid survivors I interviewed were in discussing with me their own conflicts and conduct during this terrible period.

I realize that readers may find confusing the number of people and their unfamiliar foreign names and want to know more about each of them. However, this is a collective story told from

the perspective of several individuals, most of whom I met with and/or whose testimonies I found in archives on visits to Israel. They could write their individual stories in much more detail than I know or could convey. Yet they told me enough to provide at least one example of the dilemmas posed for survivors.

Making a coherent account of the numerous interviews, testimonies, and historical context has been rather like putting together a patchwork quilt with the pattern discernible but some pieces missing. The patches are vignettes cut from *The Group* members' spoken and written words, testimony I gathered in Israel, complemented by archival records. They are stitched together with some historical information, sufficient I trust to illuminate the circumstances affecting these young people in each country.

There are gaps in the account because no one could recall details. Rather than invent fictional fill-ins, I have chosen to tell their story from the combined memories of the survivors, trying to leave as few holes in the fabric as possible.

This book is but one of many by or about Hitler's Jewish victims. Most accounts are those of the few concentration camp victims who survived. The special contribution of this book to the history of the holocaust is that it tells about the survival of a small but significant group of youth, who maintained its cohesion while fleeing to Slovakia, Austria, Hungary and Romania. Though certainly not easy for an individual to survive, it was virtually impossible for a group to do so in view of the severe penalties for assembling imposed by the Germans.

I learned place and people's names as they were spelled in Polish or Hebrew. In many instances, it seemed better to take the

liberty of phonetic renditions of names to be more comprehensible for English speaking readers.

I use the words *Holocaust* and the Hebrew word, *Shoah*, interchangeably. Holocaust is derived from Greek meaning something burned or destroyed and came into use in the 1950's referring exclusively to the destruction of Jews<sup>4</sup>. Shoah is a Hebrew word used by Jews implying annihilation.

I have italicized verbatim excerpts from my recorded interviews with survivors. Quotations from other sources are identified with "quotation marks".

Regarding statistical information—different sources give different figures regarding population, deaths etc. drawing often upon incomplete sources. I have used approximate figures that are sufficient for my purposes here and are "in the ballpark."

Herewith is a brief summary of the structure of this book. The next chapter begins with the history of the Shoah particularly in Poland. I introduce the people who are the source and the subject of the following chapters with a chronological summary of their experiences.

The subsequent chapters include a detailed chronological rendition of the survivors' experiences. I use interview material from different people as the means for conveying the story. To provide some sense of context, in each chapter I include brief summaries of the situation of Jews in the countries to which *The Group* members fled.

I am not a professional historian with an ethic of being non-judgmental. I spent a long time immersing myself in the tragic history of the period. I found it impossible to remain a disinterested recorder of the experiences of these people who lived to tell their story. However, I have attempted to minimize the

intrusion of my own views and to confine them to my Reflections, the final chapter.

<sup>1</sup> For this reason I usually refer only to Sosnowiec rather than repeat “and Bedzin” each instance

<sup>2</sup> He was a witness at the Nuremberg war crimes trials. Friedman later came to the United States and taught at Columbia University.

<sup>3</sup> Friedman died in 1960. His essays conveying the Polish situation for Jews were translated from Polish, Yiddish, and Hebrew and published in 1980.

<sup>4</sup> A July 2004 publication of the American Association of Polish-Jewish Studies points out that the connotation of “holocaust” does not include the impact upon Poles. Including military, resistance, and labor camp casualties, about three million Poles perished as a result of German actions during the war. However, the German goal of eliminating Jews did not apply to Poles. Virtually all 3 million Polish Jews were Nazi victims.

*Chapter 1*



## 1. *The People in this Story*

## 2. *The Situation of Jews in Poland*

*We had such rich lives—the Zionist scouts from the time we were seven or eight, school, reading books, playing the piano—every day life was urgent. We went for two months' vacation in the summer and skiing in the winter...*

—Sofia comment

### *The People*

Who are the people in this story who were among those few Jews who defied Hitler and lived to tell? They were members of the Zionist youth organization, Hanoar Hatzioni in Sosnowiec and Bedzin, Poland<sup>1</sup>. Their lives were transformed when the Germans invaded Poland in September 1939 and annexed the western area of Poland to the Reich.

From 1939-1942, Jews in Sosnowiec and other communities struggled to maintain their lives in ghettos. Many suffered or perished by virtue of German actions. By 1942, the Germans determined to annihilate all Jews. Then the youth in this story through complicated actions obtained false documents identifying them as Polish workers, enabling most of them to survive in neighboring countries.

I have used the individual experiences of several of these people, learned from meeting with them or from their records in Israeli archives. These individual experiences illuminate the complexity of their group survival. I quote extensively from the memoir of Rutka because of its specificity and detail and its sen-

sitivity. Over a period of several years, I have visited Israel and met with survivors and read testimonies of others.

It was exceedingly difficult for an individual Jew to survive but even more remarkable for a group to do so since the Germans imposed severe sanctions on any form of assembly. Hence, their story is a rare example of young people who together managed to maintain their connections with each other even when dispersed for periods of time in their flight from Poland.

Their names, originating in Polish or Hebrew are not, like “Dick and Jane”, easy to recall for Americans. Here, I introduce the individuals who are the major subjects in this account. I recorded interviews with them and also read their testimonies in the archives at Kibbutz tel Ithak or for Yad Vashem.<sup>2</sup>

Many years ago Lusia and her husband Yulek, my husband’s cousin, visited us in the United States. Lusia told me how she survived the Shoah. Some years later, in Haifa, my daughter and I sat at Lusia’s kitchen table as she and her dear friend, Sofia spoke movingly about the terrors and privations suffered in those years after the German occupation of Poland in 1939. That conversation with Sofia and Lusia was the real beginning of my immersion in this story. Sofia died a year after this meeting.

Lusia later introduced me to Rutka<sup>3</sup> who arrived in Palestine in 1945 at the age of 20. While her memories were fresh, she wrote a remarkable detailed recollection. She generously contributed this to me. I quote extensively from her moving text that I had translated from Polish. She tells about her personal experiences and also provides a great deal of first hand information about others.



## Chapter 2

Rutka and Lusia have been my primary continuous connection with those in this account. We have become friends over the years. They introduced me to others who were members of Hanoar Hatzioni from Sosnowiec and Bedzin. They were generous in sharing their story and I hoped to help in fulfilling their goal of living to tell about their Shoah experiences.

Danka Furstenburg Gilboa, was the youngest of 12 girls, who fled with Lusia and Rutka to Poland, Austria, and Hungary.

I met with four of the people who assumed various leadership roles after 1943. They included three men, Leon Blatt, Karl Tuchsneider, and Manus Diamant. Leon played a particularly significant role after the youth had fled from Poland in arranging for their escapes from one country to another. I also met Tusia Gutman Herzberg, who had been a member of Hanoar Hazoni in the neighboring city of Bedzin. Tusia, had known the Sosnowiec leaders from frequent meetings of Hanoar Hatzioni leaders in Sosnowiec and Bedzin. She hardly knew the younger girls until they came to Hungary in 1944. In Hungary, Tusia was one of the few with forged documents never discovered to be Jewish. She served as liaison between the youth and Jewish officials as well as Hungarians.

There are a few other members of Hanoar Hatzioni from Sosnowiec or Bedzin mentioned in this account, whom I did not meet but learned about from their testimonies in Israeli archives as well as from the accounts of others.

Two of the older girls in the Sosnowiec Hanoar Hatzioni , Fredka and Lolka played daring roles as couriers crossing the border between the Reich area and the GG. Lolka was killed in 1943. Fredka went to Palestine from Hungary in 1944. I did not

meet her but an Israeli friend translated Fredka's book in Hebrew about her experiences.<sup>4</sup>

I did not meet Zelig Bayuk, always referred to as Bayuk, a leader of the Krakow Hanoar Hatzioni, who in 1943 arranged to procure forged Polish identity documents from the GG for Sosnowiec members who were in the Reich area. He knew the leaders in Sosnowiec from pre-war meetings of Hanoar Hatzioni members from various Polish cities. The acquisition of forged documents through Bayuk proved to be the primary factor in their escape from Poland even though it could not immunize them against being suspect or discovered as Jews.

Bayuk later joined the Sosnowiec members of The Group in Hungary in 1944. Rutka and he married in Palestine soon after they arrived there. Later, they settled in Haifa. By the time I met Rutka, Bayuk had died.

In the text, I mention other Sosnowiec survivors of the Group whom I did not meet including Lesia Montag, Sara Bergman, Lusia's mother and Felusia—her younger sister. I have found testimonies in Israeli archives by a few people including Kuba Rosenberg from Bedzin who arranged temporary hiding places in the nearby mountains while the young people waited for their forged documents.

Aviva and three other girls were the first to leave Poland in early 1943 and survived in Germany. Aviva reunited with her youthful friends from Sosnowiec in Palestine only after the war was over. I met several times with Aviva and her husband in Israel and when they were visiting Boston.

Moshe Beisky, who had known Bayuk from their youth in Hanoar Hatzioni helped Bayuk to procure the forged documents for the Sosnowiec survivors. He survived in Krakow

working for Schindler.<sup>5</sup> Beisky went to Israel from Italy as part of the post-war Bricha, immigration to Palestine violating the British immigration quota. He eventually became a member of the Israeli Supreme Court and later Director of the Israeli Commission on Righteous Gentiles established to honor those who had aided Jews in significant ways. In my meeting with him, Beisky provided valuable perspectives, as a survivor and then a jurist, on some of the dilemmas posed during the Zionist youths' efforts to survive.

The survivors have conflicted memories of Moses Merin. The Nazis delegated him to be head of the Jewish communities, the Judenrat, in much of the Reich area. At the time, they despised him for cooperating too readily with the Germans in deporting Jews. In retrospect, survivors have a more nuanced view of his behavior under their grim circumstance. Merin disappeared in 1943, presumably killed by the Germans.

The survivors know of too many other Jews who made comparable attempts to avert the almost inevitable doom at the hands of the Nazis but all for naught. Hence, these survivors would not want this story to portray them as heroes and heroines but rather to provide a sense of the terrible dilemmas that confronted them every moment of the night and day. They recognize that their survival as well as that of almost any Jew in that period could only be attributed to miracles.

I recount their experiences chronologically in successive chapters.

*1939-1942*

I include a brief description of the childhood experiences and expectations of the young people in the pre-war years.

After the German invasion of Poland in September 1939, their lives changed dramatically. Just as did many others, those in this story strove to maintain a semblance of normal life in to compensate for the deprivations of the German occupation and the cruelty to Jews. The Nazis' efforts to eliminate all Jews including intensive utilization of concentration camps, changed the youths' lives ever more drastically. As late as 1942, most Jews could not imagine their elimination by the Germans. However, the Zionist youth were readier to believe the threat to their existence.

Each of the survivors I met with related the tragic deportations and killing of most of the Sosnowiec and Bedzin Hanoar Hatzioni youth in 1942 and 1943 including their leaders Juzek, Bolek, Chaim, Hipek, Janek and Somek. They assumed that the world must not have known what was happening to Jews under Nazi domination and determined that some must live to tell. Had it not been for their urging, some of the younger girls might not have dared to flee from Poland.

In mid- 1942, most of the Jews in the annexed Reich area were deported to Auschwitz and killed by the Germans. Most of those remaining were killed in 1943 with the exception of a very small number among whom were the survivors in this account.

*1943-1944*

They had experienced four years in Sosnowiec during the German occupation of Poland. Then, with forged documents identifying them as Polish workers, Aviva and three other girls went to Germany in May 1943 to test the feasibility of passing as Poles.

## Chapter 2

Most of the Group spent some time in the Beskidy mountains nearby while they awaited the preparation of forged documents identifying them as Poles. A few, including Tusia and Bayuk, were smuggled into Slovakia from the mountain-hideouts near Sosnowiec in the late summer of 1943. Within a few weeks, they continued to Hungary where they had pledged to reunite, not anticipating that Hungary would soon be occupied by the Reich. .

Later in the Fall of 1943, Rutka, Lusia, Sofia, and Danka left from the mountain hideouts with their forged documents in a group of 12 girls passing as Polish workers en route to Austria, where they remained for several months.

A mixed group of 20 including Karl also escaped to Austria. Ten of these people were not members of Hanoar Hatzioni and were caught and sent to Auschwitz, as were a few of those affiliated with Hanoar Hatzioni.

Leon also escaped from Poland and joined those in Austria but escaped to Hungary in October 1943.

Those in Austria, with their forged documents, dispersed to various jobs close to Vienna. However, within weeks of their arrival, they were suspected as spies.

1944

Leon arranged for the Hanoar Hatzioni members in Austria to be smuggled into Hungary in early 1944, only weeks before the Germans occupied Hungary. By late 1944 the War was ending. Hungary and Romania were attempting to join the Allies.

These Sosnowiec youngsters became the core of The Group in Hungary. They are the major people in this account. I refer to them throughout as The Group. However, The Group eventual-

ly consisted of other Hanoar Hatzioni members who had also managed to flee to Hungary from Polish communities in or near Sosnowiec and Bedzin to Hungary and joined with them forming a loose association of about 40 young refugees.

Their four years of experiencing the German occupation of Poland led to their influencing and cooperating with Hungarian youth in resistance efforts in 1944.

After the Russian advance into Romania and Hungary, some of the Group escaped to Romania. Palestinian agents had arranged for illegal transport from Constanta, Romania on the Black Sea to Istanbul. This wartime transport to Palestine is referred to as *Aliya Bet*.

1945

Some departed from Romania legally in 1945; others stayed on in Europe and later left illegally for Palestine as part of the much better known *Bricha*, the post-war movement of illegally transporting displaced Jews from ports in Europe to Palestine. Most have spent their lives in Israel. A few members who joined The Group in Hungary settled in countries in Europe

*Jews in Poland*

Over three million Jews lived in pre-war Poland constituting 10% of the total Polish population.<sup>6</sup> No other country had such a high proportion of Jews. Germany, for example, had a pre-war Jewish population of about 500,000, 1% of its total population.

The Jews tended to cluster in urban industrial and commercial areas and small towns (*shtetls*)—more so than the majority of Poles, who lived in rural areas. In the rural areas, Jews tended to

sell food and goods in the local markets patronized by the Polish farmers. Often those Poles even spoke Yiddish when they shopped.

Over 60 % of Poland's Jews lived in *shtetls*, small towns, with populations of less than twenty thousand. In the period between the World Wars, these poorer shtetl Jews carried on the last important chapter of the rich Yiddish-speaking Ashkenazi culture. Ironically, it is the lives of these unassimilated Jews from the East that have been celebrated and romanticized as in productions of *Fiddler on the Roof*. These *ostjuden* (literally Eastern Jews) were looked down upon by more educated and assimilated city Jews and by those in western Europe.

The Group members observed sadly that these shtetl Jews, rich in culture and religion but lacking wealth or worldliness were often among the first to be exterminated in concentration camps in 1942 and 1943.

In most of the largest Polish cities, Jews constituted more than 25% of the population. The same was true in many of the smaller cities like Sosnowiec and Bedzin, in the area referred to as Zaglembe, a rich industrial and coal-mining region. The combined population of the two cities was about 180,000, with approximately 50,000 Jews.

As in other large Polish cities, most Jews in Sosnowiec and Bedzin were occupied as tradesmen and small shopkeepers. However, some Jews became a significant proportion of middle and upper class businessmen and professionals, as was the case for the parents of most Group members.

Most Polish Jews used Yiddish as their primary language. However, about 10% of Polish Jews spoke Polish as their primary language as was did the families of the Hanoar Hazoni mem-

bers from Sosnowiec. The living conditions and education of such middle or upper class Jews were similar to the Poles of comparable socio-economic status. Business activities involved relationships with Poles as well as Jews, but their social and cultural associations were mainly with other Jews of similar educational, political and economic backgrounds and they tended not to be religious.

During the worldwide economic depression of the pre-war years, approximately 1/3—about a million, of the country's Jews were underemployed or unemployed; Jews who were urban shopkeepers and factory workers were the most profoundly affected. Poland's economy was among the weakest in Europe. At that time, Poles were absorbed in their own survival efforts and susceptible to seeking scapegoats for their suffering.

Characteristic of Jewish life was considerable factionalism in degrees of religiosity and in political views. Politically Jews were Zionists and anti-Zionists, socialist and communist

Influenced by the increase of nationalism in pre-war Europe and with it, anti-Semitism, some Jews became Zionists determined that Jews too should have their own home land. The Zionist youth in this story shared this sentiment and dedicated themselves to *Aliya*, immigrating to Palestine which would become the Land of Israel.

In the pre-war years in Poland, about 2% of Polish Jewish youth were in Zionist youth organizations—about 7000. Nevertheless, during the Shoah, they became a strong influence in Jewish communities. They thought that their pioneering education preparing them for living in Palestine made them better able to believe the Nazi threat than were their parents. Zionist youth organizations in Poland as well as in other Eastern



European countries attempted at first to minimize and later to counter Nazi ideology and destructive actions. (Bauer in Perlis)

Many Jews supported the ideals of Zionism but did not contemplate settlement in Israel. They revered Israel for historical or religious reasons without being particularly interested in establishing a Jewish state. For example, in Germany, Austria, and Hungary, Jews by and large identified with nationalism and thought of themselves as patriotic citizens 'of the Jewish faith'. In Poland relatively few Jews hoped to become an accepted minority. Jewish Socialist Bund members identified themselves as Jewish but yet were Polish nationalists who feared that the Zionists' emphasis on immigration to Israel was disloyal to Poland and exacerbated anti-Semitism.

Some Jews became Communists. The Germans exaggerated the number and the impact of Jews favorable to communism and to the Soviet Union. They decreed that the Jews were dangerous *Bolsheviks*. Hitler employed the threat of Bolshevism as justification for destroying Jews, a view that became prevalent in every eastern country in Europe fearing the power of the Soviet Union. This exacerbated the endemic anti-Semitism existing in most countries.

The young people in this story, born in the '20s, grew up in the period between World War I and II. Some of the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles calling for political and economic equality for minorities were implemented. During the administration of Marshal Pilsudski (1926–1935), Polish Jews fared comparatively well albeit with a sense of the endemic Polish anti-Semitism. After Pilsudski's death in 1935, the situation of Jews became less favorable.

By the mid 1930s, nationalist fervor was on the rise every-

where exacerbating the prevalent overt and latent anti-Semitism. In Poland it took the form of pressure for *Polonization*, an increased emphasis on Polish culture in schools, politics, and the arts. Identified as one of several ethnic groups in Poland, Jews became increasingly subject to governmental edicts limiting their educational and economic opportunities and also subject to random violence.

In Poland, many Catholics blamed Jews for killing Christ. One survivor commented, "*If you see crucified Jesus killed by the Jews three times a day in church, you cannot help hating them.*" Polish anti-Semitism is acknowledged now by Poles, as well as by Jews. The Catholic Church also has acknowledged its history of anti-Semitism.

Lusia recalled that in 1938, before the German invasion, it was no surprise that "*Polish men were standing in front of Jewish shops saying 'Polish swine buy from Jews' and pushing Jewish women on the streets.*" Polish Jews became acutely aware of the looming threat. Though the teen age youth in this book kept up with the worrisome news in the 30's, no one could foresee that Hitler would take drastic measures to annihilate Jews everywhere he could.

In September 1939, on the eve of the invasion and rapid German conquest of Poland, the German and Soviet governments concluded a pact dividing Poland. They agreed that Poland east of the Vistula River would become Soviet territory. Germany divided the area west of the Vistula into two regions. The western section, including Sosnowiec and Bedzin, was annexed as the *Reich Protectorate*. The eastern area between the new German border and the Vistula was designated the *General Government (GG)*, ruled by the brutal Hans Frank.(cf. map)

The annexed Reich area of western Poland had almost 700,000 Jews in 1939. About 100,000 of them perished from disease and malnutrition or were killed in the period from 1939-1941. Most of the remainder were killed in 1942 and 1943. About 250,000 Jews had fled to the Soviet Union and constituted the majority of Polish Jews who survived the war. (Gilbert Atlas)

In October, 1939 the Germans designated various locales to centralize Jews from all over the annexed area and the General Government. Sosnowiec became one of those collection areas. Leon, for example, had to leave his home town of Katowice and go to Sosnowiec where he joined with the Hanoar Hatzioni organization there. German officials in the GG with the knowledge and consent of the highest authorities in Berlin carried out this early centralization of Jews and deportations to labor camps and still later to extermination camps. One of the major concentration camps, Auschwitz, was located in the Reich area south of Sosnowiec. (Friedman, Yellow Badge) .

Despite their 1939 treaty, Germany invaded Russia in 1941, referred to as Operation Barbarossa. Subsequently the Soviets became Allies of the Western powers.

In January 1942, at the Wannsee Conference (which took place in Wannsee close to Berlin. German representatives of Hitler formulated detailed plans for the "Final Solution." Then plans for destruction of the Jews were accelerated and coordinated.

In the ensuing years since the Shoah, Poles and Jews have argued about the extent to which Poles could have minimized the extermination of Jews. Moshe Beisky told me that the Commission on Righteous Gentiles has sought Poles who

helped Jews but by 1995 had found only about 4000 who did so. He attributes this to the long history of Polish anti-Semitism.

Though Group members deplored Polish anti-Semitism, they cited many instances where individual Poles extended themselves to help them. A few took the chance of committing a spontaneous good deed that saved a Jewish life—an official overlooking an obviously forged document or a doctor refusing to acknowledge a Jewish boy's circumcision. And a truly courageous minority acted purposefully over a long period, sheltering Jews despite the threat of severe punishment or even death, by the Germans.

In *Polish-Jewish Relations during the Second World War*, written when he was hiding on the 'Aryan' side in 1944, Emanuel Ringelblum<sup>7</sup> summed up his view: "The Polish people and the Government of the Republic of Poland were not in a position to deflect the Nazi steam-roller from its anti-Jewish course. But it is reasonable to ask whether the attitude of the Polish people measured up to the scale of the catastrophe that befell their country's citizens. Was it inevitable that the last impression of the Jews, as they rode in the death trains speeding from different parts of the country to Treblinka or other places of slaughter, should have been the indifference or even joy on the faces of their neighbors? In the summer of 1942, when carts packed with captive Jewish men, women and children moved through the streets of the capital, was it really necessary for laughter from wild mobs to resound from the other side of the ghetto walls, was it really necessary for such blank indifference to prevail in the face of the greatest tragedy of all time?"

Emigration might have saved many Jews. Up until 1941, the

Germans encouraged emigration of Jews as the means to be rid of them. However, no country encouraged their immigration.

A high proportion of applicants for entry to the United States from European countries in the 30's and early 40's were Jews. The annual quotas of 160,000 total immigrants from all countries were not even filled in those years.<sup>8</sup> "...the United States never relaxed or adjusted its quota system and during the war when the quota was so far from being filled that 500,000 more immigrants could have been admitted under existing law, no offer of asylum or special entry visas was made...Britain's contribution...was to lock the doors of Palestine<sup>9</sup>..."(Barbara Tuchman in D. Wyman).

Most relevant for the young Zionist in this story was that in 1939, the British restricted the entry of Jews to Palestine to fifteen thousand per year over a five-year period. Though the majority of Jews were not Zionists, as the situation in Poland grew more desperate, Palestine seemed the only potential refuge from deportation and killing.

Knowing that the Gestapo was interested in the departure of German Jews, Mossad l'Aliyah Bet, the Israel intelligence service, had been formed in the late 30's to organize Jewish immigration beyond the British restriction of 15,000 per year. "Since the Gestapo was interested in the departure of the Jews by whatever means, it negotiated and cooperated with all kinds of illegal immigration operations, especially within Eichmann's domain in Austria." (Yahil)

By 1942, however, as the Nazis determined to eliminate Jews, emigration seemed almost impossible. However, as the experiences of the survivors in this story illustrate, the Palestine

Jewish community continued to engage in covert means to arrange for refugees to immigrate to Palestine.

It's not hard to see why at one time Hitler would observe that, "the democratic world, oozing sympathy for the poor, tormented Jewish people remains hard and obdurate when it comes to helping them" (Hausner 1966).

This brief summary of the general situation of Jews in Poland before and during the Shoah can only suggest what is in numerous volumes of history.

<sup>1</sup> Most of them were from Sosnowiec so I generally refer to that city rather than Bedzin as well.

<sup>2</sup> Kibbutz Tel Izhak has a collection of testimonies of Hanoar Hatzioni survivors, many of whom stayed there upon their arrival in Palestine. Yad Vashem is the primary Holocaust memorial Museum, located in Jerusalem.

<sup>3</sup> Rutka chose to use the name Rut Judenherc (her family name) as author of her memoir, which I quote extensively. After the war, she married Zelig Bayuk in Palestine.

<sup>4</sup> Mazia, Fredka, *Comrades in the Storm* (Hebrew only)

<sup>5</sup> Beisky in conversations with him provided Thomas Kenneally with much of the information for his novel, *Schindler's List*.

<sup>6</sup> About 1/3 of Poland's population consisted of various ethnic groups.

<sup>7</sup> Ringelblum was recording events at the time

<sup>8</sup> Wyman discusses the failure of Roosevelt to deal with the special problems of Jews during World War II.

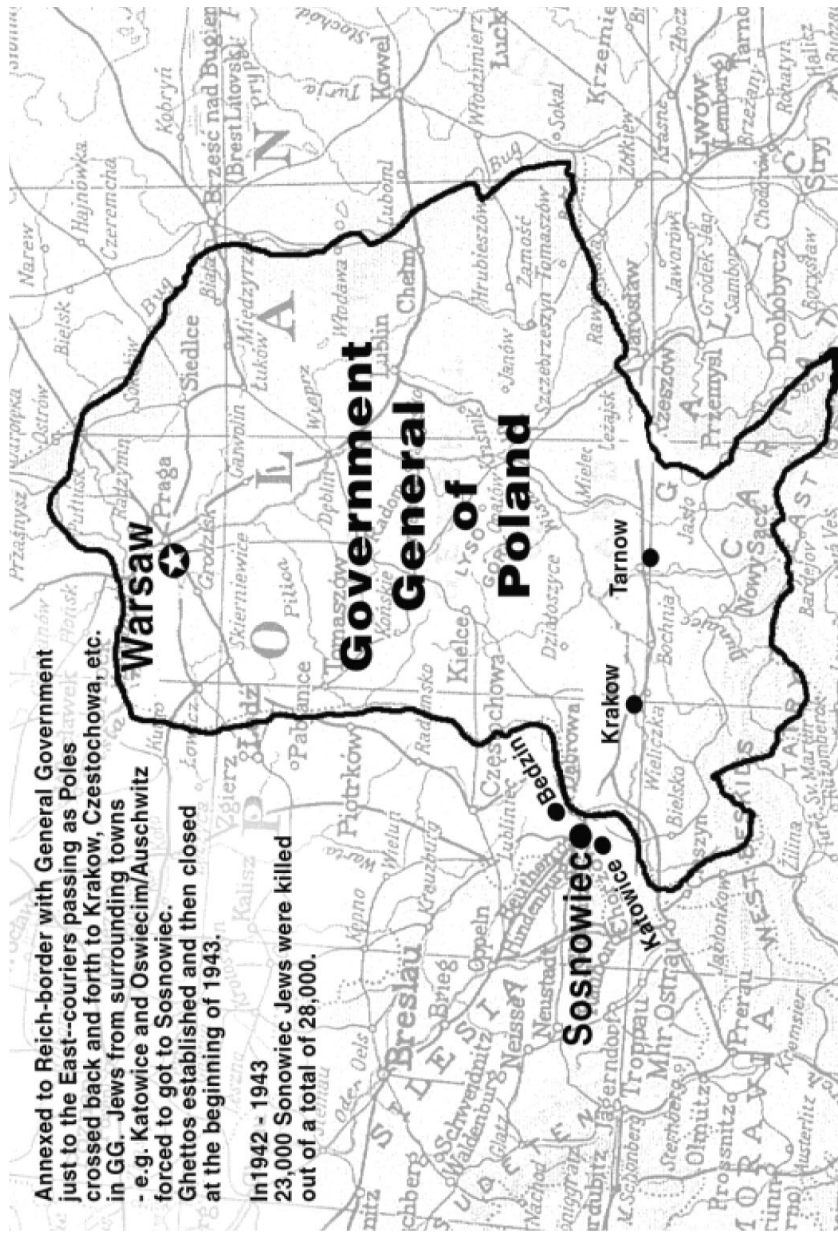
<sup>9</sup> Zionists referred to their goal as "Israel" but at the time it was Palestine which became Israel in 1948

## Chapter 2

Annexed to Reich-border with General Government just to the East--couriers passing as Poles crossed back and forth to Krakow, Czestochowa, etc. in GG. Jews from surrounding towns - e.g. Katowice and Oswiecim/Auschwitz forced to go to Sosnowiec. Ghettos established and then closed at the beginning of 1943.

In 1942 - 1943  
23,000 Sosnowiec Jews were killed  
out of a total of 28,000.

# General Government Poland





## *Before and After the German Occupation*

1939-1942

*“If I can send the flower of the German nation into the hell of war without the smallest pity for the spilling of German blood, then surely I have the right to remove millions of an inferior race that breeds like vermin...”*

*Adolf Hitler speech July 31, 1944*

It is February 2, 1942, in Sosnowiec, Poland, annexed to the German Reich. Rutka, a seventeen-year-old Jewish girl, stares intently at the sheet of paper before her. It is the oath that will make her a member of Hagana, the defense arm of the youth organization Hanoar Hatzioni.

*“I solemnly swear that just as I promised to live honorably, I shall be willing to die honorably to avenge the tragedy of our nation.”* She signs her formal name in her best handwriting, “Rut Judenherc”. Signing this oath had been an awesome decision for Rutka.

*I was given 24 hours to reflect. All night long I could not close my eyes, pondering the warnings. In principle, I had been a member of our organization since 1939...but its character was now very different. I still could refuse. This was not a play but a fight awaiting me, an underground fight that might mean death. I had to be ready to accept any order any time, to give up everything but our underground fight.*

That oath by Rutka conveyed the determination of Hanoar Hatzioni members to focus on resistance and escape. Rutka’s signing was sanctified in a solemn ceremony in the presence of the nineteen and twenty-year old leaders of Hanoar Hatzioni.

In September 1939, the German occupation of Poland , the

lives of the young members of Hanoar Hatzioni including Rutka had been transformed. For the following three years, they organized their members to maintain some modicum of their normal lives. By 1942, the German determination to annihilate Jews was evident.

Sharing their situation with other members of Hanoar Hatzioni sustained them through this terrible transition from the privilege of their previous lives to the torments of victimization for a period of six years.

In the pre-war years, Hanoar Hatzioni had a membership of about 500 and was the largest of several Zionist youth groups in Sosnowiec. About half the members were children, some as young as 10 years old. The combined membership of the other four Zionist youth organizations, Gordonia, Dror, Hashomer Hatsair, Hashomer Hadati was about 800. Each of the Zionist youth groups differed in their political orientation from left to right. Hanoar Hatzioni was centrist in the spectrum of Zionist groups. Though members of each group might know each other, they tended to stick with those of the same views in their separate organizations. (Sztternfinkel)

Rutka and the other young people in this story considered their membership in, Hanoar Hatzioni, virtually the center of their lives. There they developed lifelong friendships and a commitment to Zionism and the establishment of a Jewish nation.

Hatzioni was part of the international Scout movement. The Sosnowiec leader was Juzek Kozuch. Hanoar Hatzioni comprised several troops of young people divided according to age with separate boys' and girls' troops (kvutzot ). The troop that Rutka belonged to was called Tikva and it consisted of nine girls of the same age. Juzek's younger brother, Bolek, was the head of

three Hanoar Hatzioni girls' troops and one boys' troop, all of the same age. The Tikva girls in this story were especially attached to Bolek. Before the Nazi occupation, the youth held meetings at their elementary school and their activities focused on studies of Jewish history, Hebrew, and the history of the Zionist movement. The girls also learned domestic and agricultural skills to prepare them for pioneering in Palestine. They looked forward to higher education and eventual *aliya* —emigration to Israel. (In telling their stories, all referred to their goal as Israel though it was Palestine until Israel became a state in 1948.) Their allegiance to Israel and devotion to each other derived from these early experiences in Hanoar Hatzioni.

The number of members did not necessarily convey effectiveness. Girls became major actors. They all knew that Jewish boys could and would be readily identified as Jews by orders to pull down their pants down to see if they were circumcised since Poles were not.

Before the German occupation, the young people focused upon pursuing their education and careers. Rutka had contemplated becoming a pianist. Her father had died when she was very young. She lived with her mother near her grandparents. Her mother was a dentist. Two of her uncles had graduated from a university in Poland. One, an officer in the Polish Army during World War I, became a mathematician. Another was a judge. Most of her friends' fathers were affluent merchants or tradesmen. One owned a jewelry store; another represented a German-English firm that marketed soap products.

Rutka and her friends attended a private elementary school for Jewish students partially subsidized by the Polish government since it included the standard Polish curriculum in addition to

the half-day of Hebrew language and history—but not religion. Rutka's relatives and the families of the Hanoar Hatzioni members, though not religious, identified with Jewish culture.

In the 30's the young people were increasingly conscious not only of Polish anti-Semitism but also of the rise of Nazism in Germany. "*We were aware of Hitler,*" Lusia told me "*because you could not open a paper or listen to the radio without hearing how terrible the Jews are.*" They feared that an old pattern was repeating itself. Lusia's uncle immigrated to Palestine in 1935, "*just four years before the war. My grandmother finally decided to send him away because he was brought home so often by the police after fights with anti-Semitic Poles.*"

Yet as Sofia explained "*we were aware of anti-Semitism when we were ten or eleven years old. But life was so full for us. You knew intellectually, but it didn't mean much emotionally...We had such rich lives—the Zionist scouts from the time we were seven or eight, school, reading books, playing the piano—every day life was absorbing. We went for two months' vacation in the summer and skiing in the winter...I knew I was Jewish but I perceived myself as just a person...a human being.*" Being Jewish was one aspect of her identity.

By 1938, the youngsters knew about the terrible treatment of Jews after the German Anschluss of Austria and the takeover of Czechoslovakia which did not augur well for Jews anywhere.

Rutka though only fourteen years old on September 4, 1939 has a vivid memory of that traumatic day. "*The Germans pounded on each door and then smashed with their rifle butts. We sat virtually paralyzed in our fourth floor apartment. My aunt's brother, 19 years old, and a great believer in human rights approached the door saying 'I still have faith in the German culture'. Representatives of the*

*German culture shot him in the stomach at close range. He died that night."*

In fact, the Germans killed thousands of Poles and Jews in the Reich area almost immediately in their attempts to destroy the intellectual and political leaders there. About 1/3 of those killed were Jews. On that first day the Germans rounded up all Jews. They locked the men in a local factory without water or food, beat them, and threatened them with death.

They cleaned up "dirty Jews" by cutting off the side curls and beards of Orthodox men; they randomly shot Jews on the streets, seized their gold, cash, and radios, and expropriated their businesses and property. Some formerly Jewish-owned shops and factories closed and then reopened with German owners and Jewish underlings. A curfew barred Jews from the streets between 7:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m.

Everyone queued at the bakeries or the meat markets in the pre-dawn hours. Often a proprietor announced that supplies were running out and Jews should depart. Some Jews developed an ironic joke. They quote an unsympathetic Pole saying, "Of course the Jews always have the best luck! They don't have to wait in line like we Poles."

Over the next three years Jews were expelled from the best apartments and houses. They were forced to share one apartment among two, three, even four families. However, the Germans did not at first move all Jews in Sosnowiec and Bedzin to a designated area of the city, a ghetto, as they did in cities like Warsaw and Lodz. For the first few months, in contrast with Jews elsewhere in Poland, the Jews of Sosnowiec did not have to wear the yellow Star of David marked JUDE, identifying them unmistakably as Jews.

Forced to give up their money, their livelihoods, and whatever possessions they could not hide, many of Sosnowiec's Jews had no way to feed their families. Starvation weakened many. Desperate to buy food, a few pretended to be Poles and risked buying and selling supplies on the black market. Even young children scrambled to earn money.

Nazi edicts forbade Jews' participation in education and cultural activities. The Hanoar Hatzioni members then worked in the community to aid in education and welfare programs providing child care and even food for the increasing number of destitute Jews. After the German occupation, the older girls played increasingly important roles because the Germans could more readily identify boys as Jews since they were circumcised. (Szternfinkel)

The Germans systematically robbed the Jews of their individuality and slowly depersonalized them by restricting virtually every aspect of their lives — their housing, their professions or businesses, their education, even their food.

In the early weeks of the war, many people including some Group members, attempted to escape the Germans by fleeing east. Some Jews who fled managed to reach Soviet-occupied areas and survived there throughout the war, albeit with tremendous hardships. A few members of Hanoar Hatzioni set out for the East but returned to Sosnowiec to be with their families and Hanoar Hatzioni friends.

Often the young people were the ones to press their parents to flee. Many of the parents resisted. They had faith in the triumph of German culture and could not share the pessimism of their children. Some Jews, especially those who did not look Jewish and spoke Polish without a Yiddish accent, tried to sur-

vive the war passing as Poles. In time this became much more difficult.

It didn't take long for the Germans to manifest the full extent of their anti-Semitism. On November 25, 1939, Sosnowiec's Jews were ordered to sew the Star of David on all their garments. One Jewish man quipped that it was like Hollywood, with so many stars! Jewish irony persisted, even in this worst of times. Signs started to be posted everywhere: "Forbidden to Jews."

The Germans transformed the governance of the Jewish community to make it easier for them to exert control. Before the war, Jewish communities in Poland had been administered by community councils (*kehillot*, sort of local governments). By agreement with the Polish authorities, these councils had responsibility for the health, education, and welfare of their own communities, using funds allocated by the government and, increasingly, private funds from both foreign and Polish-based Jewish charities.

Almost immediately, the Germans capitalized on this existing council structure to create the Judenrat, Jewish councils, to carry out their orders. Most respected leaders of the Sosnowiec kehilla<sup>2</sup> refused to take on leadership of the Judenrat. However, Moses (or Moshe) Merin, a minor political figure, volunteered to take on the job of head of the Judenrat. Philip Friedman described Merin "as a man in his late thirties whose favorite pastime was politics, although "his political reputation was not above reproach" (Friedman).

A month after he assumed the Sosnowiec position, the Germans promoted Merin to head of the Central Office of the Jewish Councils of Elders for all of Eastern Upper Silesia. By

March 1941, he had jurisdiction over thirty-two Jewish communities in the area, including Sosnowiec and Bedzin. Until 1941, Merin's administration fulfilled community functions as well as possible. At first, he was important to the Jewish community in carrying out ordinary municipal functions and seemed able to mitigate the severity of the Germans. He even impressed the representatives of the United States Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), known colloquially as "the Joint", who trusted him to channel their limited relief funds to the Jewish community.

The Judenrat eventually employed as many as 1200 Jews carrying out the administrative functions for the Jewish community. Many Jews, including some of the older members of Hanoar Hatzioni and their parents took jobs as Judenrat administrators or policemen. In the summer of 1940 Merin was working with the German government to establish local factories under German management to produce goods for the German war machine. This strategy, he argued, would save some Jews from the labor camp deportations and mollify the Germans by providing them with cheap indentured labor.

The Judenrat also initiated occupational training to prepare Jews for the new factory jobs. Juzek and Bolek Kozuch, the two brothers who were Hanoar Hatzioni leaders, helped manage the program. As a result, approximately half the remaining Jewish population joined the work force in local German factories — several of which had been seized from their former Jewish owners. Some small factories produced underwear, brooms, or boot-black; the larger factories made uniforms, shoes, and coats for the German military.

As the search for forced labor intensified and the supply of



workers remaining in the Sosnowiec region dwindled, a strange role reversal took place. Jewish merchants and professionals — who were of no practical use to the Germans and whose careers terminated — now sought to learn crafts hoping to become shoemakers' apprentices or metal workers.

Sosnowiec was the gateway to the Reich for labor and materials from the East. To accommodate the flood of forced labor en route to the Reich, a transit center (dulag) was established in Sosnowiec in 1940. Emmanuel Ringelblum, the Polish historian, asserted in a 1941 report that the Jews of Zaglembe were better off than those of Warsaw. "Because of Moses Merin," he wrote, "no (sealed) ghetto had been established in Sosnowiec and Bedzin. Merin had resettled six thousand Jews from Oswiecim [Auschwitz], and...Merin and [Mordekai] Rumkowski in Lodz were confident that they could preserve their communities."<sup>3</sup> (Gilbert, *The Holocaust*).

The Judenrat expected the Jewish police force to maintain order and round up Jews to be deported to labor camps. One of the innumerable tragic aspects of the selection process was that the poor went first. A merchant or a lawyer might still be able to pay for a substitute, but not the impoverished laborer.

It was a bitter pill indeed that under the authority of the Judenrat, the Jewish police carried out German orders for selecting Jews for deportation with ever greater diligence. By 1942, the Judenrat had become only a channel for German orders. Consequently, Juzek and others then felt they could not continue as Merin's staff members.

The Hanoar Hatzioni members frequently referred to Merin in interviews and his too ready compliance with German orders. They quoted his justification: "I have lost only 25 percent

when I could have lost all...I always bear in mind the best interest of the community, for whom I am ready to sacrifice the individual at any time". Merin contended that his actions, even if at the expense of some Jews still saved most of the Jews in the community.

In accord with German orders the Judenrat strictly forbade meetings. At first the Zionist youth groups complied. But later, despite the Judenrat restrictions, the leaders of the local Zionist youth organizations decided to resume their activities.

Juzek Kozuch became chairman of the joint coordinating committee for all the Zionist youth organizations in Eastern Upper Silesia, which included the cities of Sosnowiec, Katowice, Auschwitz (Oswiecim) and Bedzin. The various youth groups cooperated with each other despite the political differences which had customarily separated them.

Every person interviewed expressed great admiration of Juzek and respect for his judgment. He was among those Jews who were employed by the Judenrat but terminated their employment as Merin's compliance with German orders became more extreme.

Juzek, born in 1921, was a charismatic figure. He had graduated from the Polish gymnasium but, in contrast to some Jews educated in Polish schools, he had no interest in assimilation. He came from a family of staunch Zionists. Before the war the Kozuch home was a center for Zionists in Poland, and they often entertained visitors from Palestine. (Netzer)<sup>4</sup>.

The youths embarked on a sustained program of mutual aid, self-help, and efforts to soften the harshness of the German regime. In their desperation, parents essentially forfeited leadership of the community to the young people who were more

daring and decisive. The young people were realistic about the Germans and concluded that their elders deluded themselves about what was really going on.

It became increasingly dangerous for the young people to maintain their customary pre-war relationships both with local members of Hanoar Hatzioni, and those in nearby towns across the border between the Reich area and the GG.

Surprisingly, the mail service continued to work. But there was always the danger that the Judenrat or the Germans would intercept letters. The youth devised codes for conveying their messages and were thus able to keep each other informed of events.

However, it was very difficult to maintain important face to face communication between the youth in Sosnowiec in the Reich area and their Hanoar Hatzioni friends in the GG since this involved crossing the border between the Reich and the GG. Some members became couriers passing as Poles, which was exceedingly dangerous.

In 1940 Hanoar Hatzioni members who had been forced to relocate to Sosnowiec from cities and nearby towns in the Reich area became active in the Sosnowiec underground network.

Meetings and assemblies were prohibited, yet in the winter of 1940 the Judenrat got permission from the Germans to open an ice-skating rink that became the young people's primary meeting place. At one time, they convened their entire organization to memorialize the death of Robert Baden-Powell, the British founder of the Scouts. The Hanoar Hatzioni took seriously its affiliation with the international Scout organization.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the prohibitions of assembling, Hanoar Hazoni

arranged a Chanukah party in the welfare kitchen where two of their members worked. The young people could not resist taking the chance of attending the funeral of a member's mother. Despite the secrecy, every mother knew her sons and daughters were involved. Another opportunity for the older youth in the various Zionist organizations to get together came in 1940, when the German district inspector for agriculture for unknown reasons offered the Judenrat about 75 acres of agricultural land. The Judenrat did not want to manage it and, fearing the young people's antipathy, hoped to win their favor by turning it over to the Zionist youth groups who were troublesome to them

Located about two and a half miles from the city, the farm provided an ideal planning and cultural center as well as opportunities for youth from various Zionist organizations to cooperate. They turned the land into a virtual kibbutz/cooperative, with about 120 young people farming and living there while others came and went as they could. They produced vegetables for the Jewish communities and sold surplus produce to Polish people — not an easy task, for they were often beaten by their customers and their produce stolen.

Merin attempted to form a Judenrat youth group at the farm but failed because of the young Zionists' hostility to his deeds. Instead the youth used the farm for covert meetings of hundreds of young people from all party affiliations and for preparing newspapers and fliers criticizing the Judenrat. They held various kinds of cultural programs, including lectures and classes in the fields and dormitories, and even had folk dancing on Saturdays (Ranz 1976).

Rutka and the other eight members of Tikva<sup>6</sup> were too

young to live at the kibbutz. In the spring of 1941, however, a hundred small plots of land each about fifteen-foot square were made available for gardens. About twenty youngsters, including the nine Tikva girls, worked there for an hour or two whenever they could. They used their meager earnings to help poorer people. They were very proud of contributing to the Jewish community's survival. They even used some of the money they earned to send to the Warsaw ghetto after a man actually came from Warsaw to ask for help. The Group members think that it is a little known fact that one ghetto frequently helped others.

Another focus of youth activity was the effort to preserve the remnants of Jewish cultural life. The Germans had closed all the Jewish schools and libraries and shredded most of their books. But people succeeded in hiding their most treasured volumes in private houses, and several of the Zionist youth groups established libraries for members.

Ringelblum recorded that "instructors risked their lives traveling around the country on false permits, mostly as Aryans, distributing publications and revitalizing organizations. There were leadership seminars for boys and girls in the GG and students were smuggled from the Reich including Bedzin and Sosnowiec to attend. Only one who knew the dangers involved in moving about on trains could appreciate the heroism of the young people thirsting for knowledge." (Suhl 1967)

Some of the Jewish girls who had first aid training got jobs as nurses in the Judenrat office assigning people to work camps. They tried saving people by certifying some as too ill to work. But as German measures became more and more severe, these young nurses knew that every chance they took could end their lives.

The youth were assigned to work in the local factories. Karl's home was taken over for a small factory and there he learned plumbing skills, which later helped in escapes from jail in Austria when some of the Group were arrested.

By November 1941, all women and men, even children of ten and eleven, were forced to work. Labor identity documents were issued in various colors that communicated the worker's degree of usefulness to the regime. German factories hired Jews for minimal wages to make clothing and shoes for the Wehrmacht. Each day they left in groups for work supervised by members of the Jewish police.

The Group members were grateful to some Gentile factory owners who helped them. Mr. Pscheidt, an Austrian, owned one factory and went out of his way to help the Hanoar Hatzioni youth both in Sosnowiec and, later, in Vienna.<sup>7</sup> The survivors think that Pscheidt also worked with the United States Joint Distribution Committee in directing relief funds to Jews.

Alfred Rossner, a German Social Democrat in the neighboring city of Bedzin, employed at one time as many as 7000 Jews making Wehrmacht (German Army) uniforms. He surreptitiously supplied the Zionist youth with uniforms they sold or used to disguise members as German soldiers. Then, they carried messages to distant Zionist groups, dangerous missions indeed.

Rossner was also instrumental in protecting many Jews by warning them when a German roundup of Jews was imminent.<sup>8</sup> The survivors believe that he saved more lives than Oskar Schindler, whose story formed the basis for the book and the popular film, *Schindler's List*.

The young people took risks despite the hazards of detection. Rutka explained that "*in the workshops we took out uniforms,*

*German uniforms. We put inside the pockets all kinds of leaflets for the soldiers*". One time a policeman questioned her because she looked suspiciously fat. Another girl screamed to distract the policeman and instead of Rutka he inspected her. Only then did others realize that she too was a member of the underground but they never discussed this until years later.

The young people could only continue these surreptitious activities until the increasingly severe German restrictions made it impossible. Soon mass deportations to labor camps started in earnest.

Their parents warned the youngsters repeatedly that there was no use resisting and that their actions only incurred reprisals against Jews. Here were proper middle-class parents watching their sons and daughters posting announcements on walls, collecting and selling junk to raise money for their activities, trying to free people who had been arrested. When the youngsters got forged papers, their parents despaired that their well-brought up children were troublemakers behaving like common thieves.

Their children were impatient because parents seemed unable to grasp what was happening. They were not just acting like rebellious teenagers; they could more readily believe where events were leading. That conviction combined with their Zionist idealism motivated their resistance.

In the beginning, it was the Judenrat that drew up the lists of men for transport to the labor camps, notifying them to report to the labor office, where they were processed and assigned to various camps. In May 1941, the Germans began roundups without even involving the Judenrat. The Germans took a thousand men from their houses. This was the first of many roundups, on the streets during the day as well as from

houses at night. What the Jews later realized, was that this was the first roundup for deportation to concentration camps.

Labor identity documents were issued in various colors that communicated the worker's degree of usefulness to the regime. The forced labor transports continued but young girls and those who were regularly employed were usually spared. However, on November 5, 1941, the Germans started to round up girls for the first time. By January more girls were rounded up, and from then on forced labor roundups never stopped.

People took drastic measures to avoid deportation. One of the Hanoar Hatzioni members tried to make herself ineligible for labor by pouring boiling water on her legs. She was declared "ineligible for deportation" but suffered desperately damaged legs.

To maintain secrecy, they planned a hierarchy of troikas; each group of three designated one member to be part of a higher troika and all were sworn to reveal information only to one other person. They wanted to minimize the sharing of information so if anyone were caught and tortured, he would have little to reveal. Information often could be more important than money and had to be dispensed with the greatest caution.<sup>9</sup> However, I talked with some members of other youth groups who resent the Hanoar Hatzioni for not sharing information with them. (Ronen)

The Zionist youth hoped to establish contact with the Polish resistance through Fredka Oksenhendler, who was one of the older members then in her early 20's, who could easily pass as an ethnic Pole. The survivors described Fredka as beautiful "*looking like a Polish princess.*" She was a prime example of one



of those feeling it obligatory to capitalize on her “good face” to benefit the Group.

The survivors in this story frequently referred to how significant it was to have a “good face”, one not readily identified as that of a Jew. Those who had “good faces” were less likely to be asked for identity documents by police or officials and to pass as Poles more readily. Some Jews, including those in The Group discussed here, considered that a “good face” made it obligatory to take risks for the benefit of friends whose Semitic features or Yiddish accents would have betrayed them.

Fredka, posing as a member of the Polish resistance, went to Krakow to meet with a Polish engineer, a friend of her parents, and a member of the Polish Resistance. He discouraged her about the prospects of their cooperation with Jews. He said that the Polish Resistance believed that as long as the Germans “were busy with the Jews”; it gave the Poles breathing time. He also cautioned the Jews against taking overt action. Hostile demonstrations would bring retaliation against the Poles as well as Jews. In any case, he said, the notion that Jews would really fight seemed laughable to the Poles (Mazia 1965)

Early in 1942, a census was ordered in Sosnowiec. Each person needed an identity card for each locale. As a result, Jews received new personal identity cards now marked with a large Star of David and the word JUDE. On the basis of these cards, Jews were totally prohibited from certain areas, and the few Jewish residents still occupying nicer houses were given twenty-four hours to vacate them.

The Jews realized that it was important to obtain forged documents if they were to have any freedom of movement. Lusia clarified the complexity of obtaining “good” forged documents.

*“To have an original paper—not Jewish papers but gentile we had to see how it looked, to forge it, But nobody makes it for nothing—we had to pay enormous sums... We were young—without money—without parents to help us-. For example, in a small village, we asked the head to give us a list of people who died so that we can forge the names. For such a list we gave horrible sums of money—Whenever a German took your papers, he then checks if such and such a person lives there. The person who gave us such papers even for money we would call a ‘good Pole’.*

*We asked for the papers as though we were Poles—Poles in the underground needed papers too. If you looked Jewish there was no way for you to survive in Poland. So we had big discussions about how to help people to escape to Slovakia, to Hungary, or to work in Germany as Poles”.*

They bargained with Poles who could provide blank documents on which they put fictitious seals and signatures. If the documents were suspect, arrangements had to be made for new documents. The youngster developed skills in “washing” documents with peroxide, and then inserting new names on them.

Lusia explained that it was comparatively easy to forge local identity documents since they required only a thumb print and not a photograph.

People supplying the documents took great risks. Black marketers charged a lot of money for a forged identity document or baptismal certificate. Catholic priests and municipal officials sometimes supplied baptismal certificates and other records of people dead or vanished.

The desperation of Jews for documents and Poles needing money resulted in a Polish black market charging exorbitant fees for documents. For people to live on the Aryan side, they had to

have documents acceptable to the Germans showing authorization to live in the Polish quarter. They had to acquire *kennkarte*, German cards certifying Polish nationality, from a Municipal office. To be employed, they needed *arbeitskarte*, work certificates. To acquire these, in addition to residence certificates, they had to have a baptism certificate and a marriage certificate. Church parishes served as Registries. Hence people supplicated Catholic priests to supply certificates of people dead or vanished so their documents could be used. Legalization became a large scale procedure

Jews who dared to escape from the ghettos and to live as Aryans were particularly susceptible to blackmail. They lived in constant fear of betrayal by Poles. The Poles were much better than Germans at ferreting out Jews by their facial features or by their accented Polish.

By 1942, the situation for Jews had become extremely desperate precipitating Rutka's that Hanoar Hatzioni oath. The Judenrat and the SS (special German Security Service) increasingly restricted the movement of Jews. Frightening rumors begin to circulate about what was going on at Auschwitz-Birkenau, the special camp the Germans had built southwest of Sosnowiec in the Reich Protectorate. People supposedly transported to labor camps either were never heard from again or returned ill and emaciated, relating terrible stories about conditions in the camps

None of the survivors could forget the intense, heated debates among the Zionists about whether to resist or to escape, *hagana* or *hazala*. As the deportations continued, the youths' resistance efforts took on new urgency.

In May 1942, subsequent to the Wannsee Conference, the

Judenrat complied with German orders to provide lists of Jews for the Germans, who then ordered those on the list to assemble for deportation. By this time, rumors that people were being sent to Auschwitz rather than deported for forced labor became more and more credible. But that Jews would be exterminated in camps by the millions was not yet believable by most people.

The several Zionist pioneering youth organizations, which had developed simultaneously in many places, became a dominating factor in organizing resistance despite their being almost completely isolated from each other. "The realization that this time it was not just another campaign of anti-Semitic oppression but a scheme for their complete and total extermination suddenly struck the young pioneers, most of them in their early twenties, like lightning. They felt that their pioneering education made them size up the events that other wise and heroic people did not perceive. They manifested unbelievable ingenuity and a burning sense of duty toward Jewish history that few people realize because so little has been written about them. (Hausner)

Rutka wrote about *"May 1942—the first deportation! Cards had been sent to families, ordering them to appear at designated places; they were to be resettled in Theresienstadt, according to officials."*<sup>10</sup> *Most of those who received these notices were the poorest Jewish families probably identified by the Judenrat.*

*"Some showed up — some did not. At 10:00 a.m., the time for the roll call, the Germans rounded up people at random and took them to one of the assembly points.*

*"By 2 p.m. the streets were deserted and the Germans did not have their quota. They warned that they would fill it by taking [Judenrat] officials and their families. Merin therefore assembled his staff and ordered them to accompany the Jewish policemen and the Germans in*

rounding up deportees. He was greeted by deathly silence. Then Juzek and Bolek Kozuch shouted, 'We'll join the transports — but not a raid.' Only three men...joined their protest. (Bolek and Juzek, the two brothers who were leaders in Hanoar Hatzioni protested but in fact were not deported.)

"Within minutes, the Jewish police and the SS surrounded two large apartment houses. By 3 p.m., the quota was filled by the residents of those buildings. This time the surveillance was too strict for our girls who were nurses to make any rescues — all they could do was watch the departure of the first family deportation train from Sosnowiec.

"Now our warfare with the Judenrat was open ... Merin knew that the organized youth would resist him. ... Nonetheless, each list of deportees included more and more of our members. Dodging became harder and harder. By now, rumors circulated that the train's real destination was Auschwitz and that Theresienstadt did not exist. One of our nurses had a patient who told her about the existence of gas chambers just moments before he died. It appeared that everyone would be deported except those working directly for the German military....

"Again in June 1942, orders were mailed to assemble for deportation. This time the Judenrat ordered people to report one night earlier so they could be sure to fill the quota. By now, rumors were rampant — Theresienstadt was a myth — letters from Hanoar Hatzioni members or family never arrived, messengers came back with tales of mass murder and people converted into soap. 'Jokes' like 'Eat well—they'll turn you into toilet soap' and 'Meet you on a drugstore shelf' made the rounds. Again too few people reported, and Jews were rounded up on the streets to fill the transport.

"No let up followed the second deportation. But still there was no mass deportation. Instead the deportees were labeled 'felons' — individuals being sent to Auschwitz for crimes like buying an egg on the black

*market, staying out one minute after curfew, crossing the street improperly, or bartering for bread. To terrorize the population, the Germans staged two public executions. Four people were hanged one time, and then three more. And people were forced to watch."*

Merin still promised that if people worked diligently for the Germans and obeyed the orders of the Judenrat there would be no more deportations. But even minor resistance, he argued, could bring about the total elimination of the Jewish community. People should therefore volunteer for the forced labor camps and disband all groups opposing the regime.

The heightened fear in the wake of the deportations and random killing made it ever more difficult for the Zionist youth to carry on their activities. Parents forbade their children attending meetings. They had to cease their agricultural work.

Then the Germans classified people into three groups—first, those who could not work including the old, disabled, and children, the second, people who were employed, and the third those who worked for the German military. It was obvious that these were German priorities for elimination of Jews. Nonetheless some people still wanted to believe the Judenrat's promises and vehemently opposed the youth's resistance to the Germans.

About forty of the 500 Hanoar Hatzioni members were the most active in Sosnowiec.<sup>11</sup> They were undaunted by the opposition to their activities. They strove to maintain communication among Zionists in different towns traveling as much as possible on forged permits identifying them as Aryans. Given the German zeal in deporting Jews, they determined to find the means to save as many of their own young members as possible.

However, it was very hard to save even one person at a time, and much more difficult to save several people at a time.

With considerable argument and anguish, they established a selection process. Their first priority was saving young people in their organization, and second was their parents. They refused to consider anyone they thought to be collaborating with the Germans. Because it was so dangerous, they chose people they knew well and could trust to maintain secrecy even if they were caught and tortured.

The Hanoar Hatzioni youths' plans for saving people had no doubt been encouraged by the visit of two influential young men who came from Warsaw in the GG in June 1942. Mordecai Anielewicz and Yitzhak Zuckerman of Hashomer Hatsair, a more leftist youth organization than Hanoar Hatzioni, were at risk in Warsaw because they were involved in planning an uprising there.<sup>12</sup> (Members of Hashomer Hatsair and another organization, Dror, were very active in resistance and most perished.)

They stayed in the Sosnowiec area for about three months. They wanted to help reorganize the Zionist youth movements as an armed underground network.

Mordecai Anielewicz and Yitzhak Zuckerman told the Sosnowiec youth that on April 17, 1942, fifty people in their own Warsaw ghetto, including several members of the underground, had been dragged from their homes and shot in the street. Also, the elderly had been sent to Majdanek, a concentration camp (Yahil 1990: 380–82). This news from Warsaw provided additional confirmation about the fate of those deported.

In August 1942, a Czech man who had escaped from Auschwitz injured and starved died a few days after telling some Hanoar Hatzioni members about the death camp. The

Sosnowiec youth also received stories about death camps from members in Krakow and from people who worked on the trains transporting Jews to the camps.

Nonetheless, Moses Merin continued to assure them that people were being resettled in the GG and would be able to send postcards back to Sosnowiec. Rather than resist deportation, he urged that youth members should go to the camps to serve as leaders. For the good of the community they should obey the Germans and thus save others. The Zionist youth could not forgive Merin's duplicity, since he must have known about German plans to begin deportation to death camps as he had been sending children, elderly, and handicapped people first.

The order came from the Judenrat for all Sosnowiec Jews to report on August 12 at 7:00 a.m. to revalidate their ID cards. Rutka wrote:

*“Anyone who did not report or whose card was not revalidated would be shot or deported. The Judenrat posted notices proclaiming that disobeying German orders would destroy families and the community and that the ID cards did not mean the Germans intended to deport people....*

*“Everybody realized something was cooking — not everybody would have his ID card validated and the lists to be deported at the next opportunity would be prepared accordingly. People were afraid to report to their workplaces together with their old parents and children, but they were also afraid to leave them at home.*

*“The Judenrat's fliers and posters claimed that the ID stamps had nothing to do with deportations, that the Germans would not bargain with us point after point, that they would instead have assembled all of us in one place and deported everybody, accompanied by threats that disobeying orders would bring ruin on individuals and the entire commu-*



nity. The Judenrat persuaded people by telling them about neighboring Czelada, where the restamping of cards had taken place and everyone had been allowed to return to their homes.

“But our leaders warned ... of the impending danger, for in the neighboring towns the same orders for revalidation of IDs had been issued. Given the threats about the consequences of not reporting, we could not forbid our members to defy their families. Therefore, our warning was that our members ‘keep their eyes and ears open.’

“On the dreaded day of August 12, nobody dared risk not revalidating their IDs. The sick and the elderly tried to look as well as possible. Men, women, children moved toward the gathering place clutching whatever documentation of their status that they could lay their hands on.

“By 8:00 A. M., the Jewish police surrounded all the gathering places and shoved everyone towards the sports court, packing them onto one half of the field. In the other half were two tables divided into four sections marked 1, 2, 3, and 4. The sun beat down on the crowded and thirsty people. Most realized they had been duped and that deportation was imminent. Some still believed that only ‘felons’ would be taken. Others tried to convince themselves that only young people would be taken, for forced labor.

“Hours passed, with the Jewish and Polish police and the Gestapo [German Secret Police] surrounding us. There was no space to sit down. Children were crying from hunger. The waiting became insufferable. Finally in the afternoon, Merin, two members of the Judenrat, Czarny (a woman, who became a leading member of the Judenrat and known for her cruelty, and a Mr. Birman appeared, accompanied by high-ranking Gestapo men and representatives of the employment authorities. At each of the two tables sat two Germans — Merin stood next to one table and

*Czarny next to the other. The regular police and the Jewish police surrounded the area and pushed people into lines.*

*“The selection began. Each family presented its documents. Sometimes the Germans inspected them, sometimes, they just glanced at them and gave their verdict — 1, 2, 3, or 4 — and the police pushed people into the lines accordingly. Some families were separated, some were not. When a German official approached one of the tables, Merin or Czarny would whisper into the German’s ear.*

*“By 5:00 p.m., people began to catch on to what the numbers meant. Judenrat members were assigned to section 1, young people to section 2, the disabled, young children, and old people went to section 4, while section 3 was a mixture. Accordingly people tried to reposition themselves to get to where those assigned to group 1 were standing. The Jewish and Polish police cooperated with the Germans in trying to keep people assigned to 2, 3, and 4 groups from moving out of their assigned rows.*

*“After sunset, our group became active in trying to protect people. Those assigned to 1 formed groups of three or four and pushed in front. One of the group would snatch a policeman’s cap or armband and try to take his place. There was such a melee that the Germans paid no attention to the section 1’s. And the Jewish police were loath to protest attempts to ‘borrow’ parts of their uniforms. Any boy who seized a police cap would run to the closest section 2 and try to move people to section 1. The girls who were nurses left section 1 as though to administer first aid to unconscious or wounded people, of whom there were plenty. They either moved people to other sections or to shadowed locations from which it would be easier to escape.*

*“I was sent to section 2 and tried twice to escape. I was dressed in a white coat but could only move to section 1 when Fredka Oksenhendler sneaked her first-aid kit to me. Thanks to our friends in*

*the police, my white coat and the first-aid box moved back and forth with different people from section 2 to section 1. Seven girls were saved in this way.*

*“About 1:00 a.m., the triage was over. Those in section 1 could leave. But they first had to pass the tables occupied by two Germans, a Judenrat official, and the Jewish police chief to have their IDs checked against a list of people wanted for skipping labor duty or committing some ‘crime.’ We could have left then but stalled, hoping to save others*

*“The next morning those kept in section 2 were moved to Skladowa Street. They were drenched by a rainstorm and exhausted. Single people and groups were trying to move out of section 4, at least to 3, but the only result was an intermingling of the groups.*

*“Thousands of people were to be deported — a few hundred to labor camps. The scheduled trains did not arrive, however, and people spent a week at the assembly places. Our young people rallied and attempted to get people out in kettles used to bring food to the deportees, or in trash dumpsters, or through chimneys—we even tried digging tunnels”.*

In the course of the deportations, Hanoar Hatzioni had set up secret bunkers and instructed members of their location. One of the boys who had “a good face” was able to prepare food for those who would go to the bunkers. He and others used money and jewelry that their parents had had to leave behind to pay off Germans for “overlooking” people going to the bunkers and sometimes actually accompanying these Jews through the dangerous streets. The youth encouraged a number of people to escape. Many people were so terrified that they were immobilized or they were so anxious not to be separated from their families that they would not even think of escape. Somehow a few people, who dared not report as ordered, were not bothered.

Just a few weeks later, over a thousand more Jews were deported from Sosnowiec. The same vicious acts went on in nearby cities. Even people, who had still believed that Merin could influence the Nazis in a positive way, realized that he was powerless.

The older youth leaders set about procuring weapons and German clothing. Eventually the Hanoar Hatzioni youth had their arsenal, such as it was. It consisted of four guns without ammunition. Hardly enough to revolt! Nor did they know much about firearms, as Jews seldom used them.

The news from other Jewish communities kept getting worse. A Hanoar Hatzioni member fled from Czestochowa, a nearby town in the GG. He told the Sosnowiec youth about Jews being killed at Treblinka and Majdanek in the General Government.

Learning with certainty about the existence of the death camps sent the young people into utter despair—they were doomed. Their only source of relief was the occasional meetings with friends from Hanoar Hatzioni.

In Rutka's words, "*We longed for the opportunity to escape from our families' worries. The conversation at home for those still with their families was about the lack of money, the meager food rations, the death of friends and relatives—total despair. The last source of joy was our troop, Tikva, which held us together. We could forget our troubles. We were jealous of every passing minute until curfew times. And when Bolek, our leader, appeared, we were ecstatic. We had the feeling he too was glad to spend time in our company; we provided him a respite.*"

The youth were desperate to inform the Yishuv, the Palestine Jewish community, about what was happening to them. They believed that somehow aid would come from there

if they knew the situation. Halinka Goldblum, a Sosnowiec Hanoar Hatzioni member, was one of about sixty Jews in Poland at that time who held British citizenship. In December 1942 she went to Palestine as part of a deal to exchange Jews for German prisoners.

Before she left, Hanoar Hatzioni leaders spent hours feeding her information and telling her about their plans. They even dared to hold a farewell party attended by about seventy people. As the leader of Hanoar Hatzioni, Juzek Kozuch delivered an impassioned farewell speech praying that *“the development of Israel would progress faster than the destruction of the Jewish community in Poland.”*<sup>13</sup>

To their dismay, they later learned that Halinka’s account was met with disbelief in Palestine. Each person whom I interviewed recalled Juzek’s speech and Halinka’s disillusion.

So many people had been killed or transported by the end of 1942 that the surviving leaders of Hanoar Hatzioni knew they had to find a way for at least some of their young members to survive — to live and to tell, to bear witness.

But how?

<sup>1</sup> From Rutka’s unpublished memoir. Quotations from memoirs and interviews will appear in italics throughout text.

<sup>2</sup> Kehilla is the singular form of Kehillot

<sup>3</sup> Rumkowski was considered one of the most despotic Judenrat heads.

<sup>4</sup> Netzer, a historian at Tel Aviv University knew Juzek in Sosnowiec

<sup>5</sup> Ringelblum reported that the head of Polish scouts opened the way for the Jews to the Polish clergy which assisted in illegal activities. (in Suhl)

<sup>6</sup> Tikva was the name of a kvutza. A kvutza was like a scout troop. The Hanoar Hatzioni organization, like scout troops, divided youngsters into age groupings of either boys or girls. —with girls of the same age.

<sup>7</sup> In the archives at Yad Vashem (033-735) in Jerusalem there is testimony by sev-

## HOW THEY LIVED TO TELL

eral Hanoar Hatzioni survivors describing Pscheid's friendship with two of the young people (Juzek and Karol), saying that he gave supplies and money to help them.

<sup>8</sup> The Germans hanged Rossner in 1944. In Israel he was honored posthumously as a "Righteous Gentile"

<sup>9</sup> This information comes from a conversation with Avihu Ronen

<sup>10</sup> Theresienstadt was the so-called model ghetto the Nazis once planned for propaganda purposes. It was supposedly a desirable destination.

<sup>11</sup> Of Hanoar Hatzioni's total membership in Sosnowiec of about 500, most perished.

<sup>12</sup> Anielewicz and Zuckerman later became leaders of the Jewish Fighting Organization who led the Warsaw Ghetto uprising in April 1943. Anielewicz was killed in that uprising at the age of 24.

<sup>13</sup> Every Hanoar Hatzioni survivor who was present that day, recalled Juzek's speech.

## Chapter 3





## Many Perished — Few Escaped

1943

*“In the final analysis, the destruction of the Jews was not so much a product of laws and commands as it was a matter of spirit, of shared comprehension, of consonance and synchronizations—the human machine generated its own momentum...Sending millions of people to their death may have come about as the result of no more than a nod from Hitler to one of his henchmen”*

*-Hilberg 1985*

*“Alle Juden raus! All Jews out!”*

The German shouts signaled yet another of the ominous roundups that Germans needed the Jews as workers and hence the. Sosnowiec and Bedzin ghettos had permitted some people to go in and out of that restricted area longer than was the case for most ghettos.

It did not take long for the Germans to decide to eliminate all Jews despite their useful labor. In March 1943 the Sosnowiec and Bedzin ghettos were totally closed off making it almost impossible for Jews to leave. Over the ensuing months of 1943, virtually every Jew would be killed.

What follows here is an account of the Hanoar Hatzioni youth in those last days in Sosnowiec, Poland as they recalled them in conversations with me and in earlier testimonies in Yad Vashem and Kibbutz Tel Izhak archives in Israel. Their varied experiences convey a sense of how miraculous it is that several survived that period of unbelievable confusion and desperation. Hearing *Alle Juden raus*, the young people would run to Hanoar Hatzioni *bunkers*. They hid under floors, in attics, behind cup-

boards or crowded together in the small spaces previously occupied by families in the ghettos.

Aviva, a member of the Tikva troop, told me how they even managed to hide Jews fleeing from other places. She remembered that Chaim, a Hanoar Hatzioni member who had fled from Krakow, crowded into her family's one room. He was sought for participating in an attack on German soldiers in Krakow in December 1942. He immediately cooperated in the survival efforts of the Hanoar Hatzioni youth in Sosnowiec.

Aviva explained that *“Chaim was working in the underground and he met our leaders—I don’t know much about what he did—I know that he had Christian papers and was looking for ways for people to escape...I never knew where Chaim was going and I did not ask.”*

*“Chaim brought us so much love, so much warmth. On my sister’s birthday, March 23, Chaim came with three big hyacinths...In this place, they were something from another world!*

“Chaim was a very positive person. He told us, ‘I will live after Hitler. I will see him dead.’ A few months later the Germans would hang Chaim—passers-by saw his body with a sign saying “Polish traitor”.

Occasionally a Pole would help a Jew. I heard about one young man who was posing as Polish underground member. A devout Catholic woman who knew he was really Jewish and was the janitor of the office of the local Nazi party sheltered him. Not only did she share her illegal vodka, she provided a clean bed. She even gave him money to help his father. The Germans would eliminate any Pole they discovered anyone sheltering Jews.

Aviva reminisced about one especially memorable incident. Upon hearing the dreaded *Alle Juden raus* she and her beloved sister had too little time to get to the designated hiding place. They crouched in the bushes. "*We swore that we would not leave each other. If we were sent to Auschwitz, we vowed to go on the train together.*" Aviva's sister was killed soon after wards.

Karl, one of the leaders of Hanoar Hatzioni, told of an experience in February 1943. A machine for printing anti-Nazi leaflets was discovered in the home of Zvi Dunksi, Karl's neighbor and friend. Zvi was the leader of the Zionist youth organization, Hashomer Hatsair, that had sent leaflets to Germans urging them to give up. He was caught by the Germans and was tortured in jail.

Karl had been assigned to repair plumbing in the jail. He had learned plumbing when the Germans took over his house for a plumbing shop and his father bargained with them to train Karl. Karl passed the Gestapo office in the jail and begged a German policeman to bring Zvi to the jail's bathroom so that he could see him. The policeman obliged. Zvi pleaded with Karl to bring him cyanide. Karl went to Zvi's organization, Hashomer Hatsair, and somehow they supplied the cyanide. 19 year old Zvi killed himself.

In Haifa in 1991, Lusia, Rutka, and Aviva listened as Karl recounted this tragic story. He could barely speak again for several moments, neither could his friends nor I.

In the midst of these horrors, vestiges of normal life persisted. Youngsters fell in love and some married, pledging to stay together even facing death. In the case of one couple, whose parents had been deported and presumably killed, the bride and groom first visited a nearby cemetery to *invite* their dead parents,

at least symbolically, to their wedding. Then under the traditional bridal canopy they recited first the *Kaddish*, the Jewish mourners' prayer, and after that, their wedding vows.

One of those weddings was of Juzek Kozuch, the Hanoar Hatzioni leader, and 20 year old Fredka, the girl who looked like "a Polish princess". Juzek was soon killed. Fredka later wrote "*We married and almost within hours were widows*" (Mazia 1965).

It was evident that not many Jews could possibly survive. But in February 1943, news came from Krakow in the GG through a courier, Jadzia Bayuk. She had been sent by her brother from the GG to Sosnowiec with a scheme that would result in some Hanoar Hatzioni members escaping from Sosnowiec and Bedzin. How had this happened?

The Hanoar Hatzioni group decided to take advantage of rescue possibilities. These happened to be more favorable in the Zaglembe area than in many other areas because of the location and relationships developed with smugglers in Slovakia.

There were arguments in Hanoar Hatzioni about pursuing rescue as opposed to continuing to attempt resistance. With considerable anguish, they determined that survival being virtually impossible some Jews must live to tell. However, members of Dror and Hashomer Hatsair, other Zionist youth organization determined not to attempt to leave, even though they would likely perish.

Jadzia's brother, Zelig Bayuk, always called "Bayuk", a Hanoar Hatzioni member in Krakow in the GG, was already involved in helping Jews to escape. He found out that Polish girls were being sent from the GG to other German occupied countries to replace workers who were in the military. He determined to get documents for Hanoar Hatzioni youth in

Sosnowiec in the Reich area to pass as Polish workers. Bayuk knew the leaders of the Sosnowiec and Bedzin Hanoar Hatzioni from pre-war Hanoar Hatzioni meetings in Poland. They all took seriously their obligation to help each other in various locales. When the Germans started sending Jews to the death camps, Bayuk felt that not looking Jewish entailed an obligation to help those who could be readily identified as Jews by the Germans.

Moshe Beisky, an admirer of Bayuk, took obvious satisfaction from recounting his memories of Bayuk, who had died before I was interviewing survivors. Both Beisky and Bayuk had joined Hanoar Hatzioni in a town near Krakow when they were about 10 years old.<sup>1</sup>

*“Zelig didn’t look like a Jew. From the beginning in 1940 and especially in 1941, Bayuk tried to live immediately on forged papers—after all, until 1942, Jews could live in the ghetto—it was not easy—it was dangerous...He decided from the beginning not to live in the ghetto and he probably foresaw that things would get much worse. He could have taken foreign papers and left but this would not be Bayuk. None of us would, because there was a kind of responsibility to friends in the youth movement. In 1942 and beginning of 1943 when they started sending Jews to death camps, Zelig saw it was important to save who could be saved.*

*“Bayuk was very brave, risking things that many others would not. But yet he was a quiet leader who never tried to elevate himself to a higher position. He did astonishing things to help others”* Beisky recalled.

Bayuk and Rutka met in Hungary in 1944 and subsequently married and lived in Israel where Bayuk later died.<sup>2</sup> Rutka

also told me much about Bayuk who never recorded his own story. She knew that “*he thought of nothing but ‘finding a way’*”

Part of Bayuk’s motivation was to avenge the deaths of his parents and one sister at the hands of the Germans. Soon after the German occupation, despite not looking Jewish, Bayuk had been arrested for refusing to wear the armband with the Yellow Star of David and was sentenced to six months in jail. There he made friends with a Polish jail guard. Bayuk, anticipating that Jews would need places to hide, asked the guard for advice. The guard suggested that when he was released, Bayuk should introduce himself to his friend, Mrs. Sikorowa, in Krakow. She was a simple woman apparently moved to help Jews after hearing her parish priest give a sermon urging Poles to help Jews.

When released from jail, Bayuk explained to Mrs. Sikorowa, who was then about 30 years old, that he was Jewish and needed help. She never revealed the truth about Bayuk to anyone, not even to her husband, a railway worker. At the time, Bayuk’s nineteen-year old Jadzia was still in hiding in Krakow. Bayuk asked Mrs. Sikorowa to help him get documents for Jadzia.

She suggested that Bayuk pose as her cousin visiting from another town. She introduced this “cousin” to her nephew, an official in the Krakow employment office. That office was sending Polish women to work in Germany and in German-occupied countries. Bayuk offered to pay the official if he supplied Polish working papers for Jadzia. He had to have *proper* documents and should not be girls who looked Jewish.

Subsequently, the Pole and Bayuk developed a risky scheme to provide documents for others. When no one was present, Bayuk would be left in the office and could then take the appropriate blank Polish documents. He would also borrow the

official Polish seal required on all identity documents for the GG. However, Bayuk promised to return the seal within a few days. It was a real coup to obtain *blanco documents*, blank official document forms that only had to be filled in and even more remarkable to get the official Polish seal.

Bayuk knew that his friend, Moshe Beisky, had developed skill in forging. In August 1942 Beisky had been sent to the labor camp at Belzec near Krakow. Bayuk waited there until he spotted Beisky who was taken back and forth to work outside of the camp. Bayuk dared to pass him the official Polish seal for Beisky to replicate. Their conversations had to be furtive and rapid.

Beisky never asked Bayuk about what he was up to. "*It was better not to know—torture might cause you to reveal information that would endanger others,*" he said. Beisky took the official government seal that Bayuk had handed him. Using a razor, he cut an exact die on an old piece of black rubber. Beisky used genuine documents to learn to forge the signature of the authorized official who signed such documents. Bayuk stayed out of sight until Beisky signaled him. Then he took the original seal to return to the Krakow office and kept the forged die. He prepared the first forged document for Jadzia. Subsequently he prepared documents for others.

In the course of their furtive encounter, Bayuk tried to persuade Beisky to escape so that he would not become "*just one more dead Jew.*" But Beisky would not risk the inevitable German reprisals against his own brothers in the Belzec camp as well as other Jews.

Though fifty years had passed, Beisky had tears in his eyes as he recalled Bayuk's coming as the only time in months of

captivity that he had seen a friend. Bayuk and Beisky did not see each other again for over three years, when they discovered each other in Palestine.

At the end of 1942, Beisky had been sent to the labor camp at Plashow near Krakow. Beisky worked in the Schindler factory there, where he remained for 20 months, forging documents for Schindler.<sup>3</sup>

In February 1943, Bayuk gave blank documents, with the seal affixed to each, to his sister, Jadzia, and thus they could be prepared for people in Sosnowiec. With the documents issued in the GG she risked crossing the border from the GG to the Reich dressed like a Polish peasant. She took the blank documents to the skeptical Hanoar Hatzioni youth in Srodula, the Sosnowiec ghetto. Then Jadzia then continued her dangerous journey further west to her job in Germany. The Hanoar Hatzioni leaders in Sosnowiec initially thought Bayuk's scheme was *meshuga/crazy* and were not convinced to attempt it. They were somewhat reassured when Jadzia subsequently sent a letter with a picture of herself next to a statue of Hitler.

As for Bayuk, he continued to help in forging and preparing other documents that the Hanoar Hatzioni used for members. In addition to providing papers for the Sosnowiec members of Hanoar Hatzioni, Bayuk helped Jews in the GG cross to nearby Slovakia. He had persuaded smugglers that they could make more money smuggling Jews than goods across the border.

The youth who were still in Sosnowiec continued resisting. Tusia remembered, "*When the Jewish police came to take people to the camps, we used sticks and old pieces of metal to attack them*" even though they knew their weapons were futile.



Some of the boys decided their only recourse was to steal weapons from Poles whom they knew had them. Three of them robbed one house and got two good revolvers with bullets. They then planned to rob a man they knew was a gun collector. They hastily “borrowed” some motorcycles to transport them to the distant house. They rang the bell and pretended to be police officers. They immediately cut the telephone lines, and tied up the lady of the house. The maid screamed and the boys fled but one was caught. He was tortured mercilessly to get information about the others. Despite the entreaties of his mother, he refused to reveal to his captors the names of his two friends and the Germans killed him.

At the time there were some amazing conversions. The despised head of the Jewish police had previously done everything to oppose the youth. In those last days for most Jews in Sosnowiec, he had a dramatic change of heart and redeemed himself by helping over 100 people. He even gave the youngsters his gun, telling them to use it in any way that they could.

Ultimately, even the “great Merin” who enjoyed the favor of the Germans became their victim.

The *Judenrat* made a farewell party for newly identified “South American nationals”. Two couples in Sosnowiec had received false papers from Geneva identifying them as citizens of Paraguay. Four people from the *Judenrat*, including Merin, escorted the emigres to the train. That was the last time these emigres and their *Judenrat* escorts were seen.

The two Jewish couples procured Paraguayan passports as a result of a little known and short-lived strategy for saving Jews. The Germans had set up internment camps for persons identified as nationals of foreign countries to serve as hostages for

eventual exchange of German nationals living overseas. Between 5,000 and 10,000 European Jews, including some from Sosnowiec, survived the war in these camps. The conditions were hardly ideal but at least not as terrible as the situation for Jews in concentration camps.

Thousands of coded requests for passports from desperate Jews arrived at Jewish offices in Geneva. Jewish organizations in Geneva persuaded consuls of some Latin American countries to prepare documents for Jews as though these Jews were citizens of their respective home countries planning to return. A few consuls cooperated for purely humanitarian reasons, others for bribes.

One of the representatives of the Palestine Jewish offices in Geneva was a Zionist originally from Bedzin, and he tried to help Hanoar Hatzioni members in that area. When a few of these valued South American passports arrived in Bedzin and Sosnowiec, the process of selecting recipients created a storm in the youth movements. Eventually the leaders of all Zionist youth groups set up a cooperative plan for selecting people to receive the documents. The youth organizations and their parents got the highest priority. They rejected anyone who had collaborated with the Germans. Certainly Merin would have been rejected.

The hypothesis is that Merin, knowing that the Zionist youth were in contact with the Palestine Jewish office in Geneva, had requested papers for himself but he was refused. In spite, Merin revealed the whole passport scheme to the Germans. The supposition is that he was no longer useful to them and was sent to a concentration camp.

Soon after this, Latin American governments became aware of their consuls' involvement with this "passport charade" and put an end to it.<sup>4</sup> (Ronen)

By May 1943, despite their remaining skepticism, the leaders seeing no alternatives to survive decided to test Bayuk's scheme. Aviva, the oldest of the girls, was eighteen years old and she was supposed to pose as their guardian. They didn't want to leave and had to be ordered to do so. Juzek repeatedly told the girls that they absolutely had to survive or no one would ever know the fate of the Jews in Poland. He thought if Jews or citizens of other countries had known about the atrocities, they would have taken some drastic action.

The girls who were the *guinea pigs* were grief stricken when they had to say good-bye to their families and friends, fearing that they would never see them again.

Aviva described their escape from Poland. *"The Hanoar Hatzioni leaders gave me permission to tell my mother that I'm going on a special mission to survive. I didn't want to leave her. Bolek (Juzek's brother and the leader of Tikva), told me, 'I give you my word — if you go, we will do everything to take out your family.' Young as I was, I was to pose as the guardian. I told only one other person, who was my guardian after my father died. I had permission to tell him but not to tell anyone else..."*

*"People assured me, 'Good luck. You have to have courage. Here are the papers you will need. And you will write to us once you are there.' It was so dramatic. My sister had to control herself, so as to keep my mother from being too emotional."*

*"Two of the girls looked like real Christians but I did not have 'a good face.' Somebody helped me dye my hair and my eyebrows...I wore*

*a red dress and red shoes...all to look eccentric...so they will be distracted and not think I am Jewish!*

*My Polish was very good and that was important. The third girl's Polish was not but she had nerve and would be able to pretend that she came from another Polish area where the dialect was different. They divided us four girls into two pairs, each with an older and younger girl, one of whom looked Jewish and the other looked Aryan.*

*"Leon, Bolek and Karl gave each of us an identity card for the Third Reich...In Krakow in the GG, they have a different identity card and we needed that too because we had to act as though we came from the GG. We used the names of some Polish friends we knew from school. I don't remember whether I had the same name on both identity cards. It was very important that we send back these identity cards for others to use.*

*"We had a shop with gold jewelry and watches. My sister put some gold in the hem of my dress, and a gold ring on my finger like I was engaged. I was taking very few things"*

*"We had some contact address...Each of us was to travel to Krakow as though we were alone and to meet en route to Germany at the Sosnowiec station. We had to time getting to the border to get to Krakow to meet Fredka."*

Leaving the ghetto, the girls pretended not to know each other. Fredka took them to the GG labor office in Krakow. They were identified as Polish volunteers. They deliberately made friends with *real* Polish girls who were forced-labor workers in Germany. All of them were bathed and de-loused and then assigned to work places.

Two of the girls were assigned to two farms near Karlsbad in Germany and were in regular contact with each other. The other two girls were assigned to a factory near Hanover.

In Germany until the end of the war, Aviva dreaded the gradual fading of her dyed red hair knowing that her Jewish features could reveal her true identity.

*“On the farm, the 17- year old son of the farmer was very friendly with the foreign workers but he was a member of the Hitler youth. He said, ‘What do Jews look like? In Poland there are many –I see in newspapers half a man and half a beast.’*

*‘You know,’ I told him, ‘they look exactly like you and me...’”*

*“I had another scary experience. I had an old dress on with a pocket. I rested once, and put my hand in the pocket, where I discovered that I had forgotten to get rid of a Star of David. I was petrified, and buried it in the ground.”*

The farm work was very hard. *“It was winter and we had no proper things to wear, and no boots. I had written to him to one of our leaders, Karl, One day we got a package from Karl sent to the farm, and there were boots for Leah and me, a pair of warm boots, and a pair of boots for summer. Hesaved our lives from the cold. It was a really, really great thing and I remember it ‘til now.*

Aviva felt that she was fortunate compared to others. *“I was never hungry. After the war, yes, but not during the war. I got bread rations and even could share them with Poles who were hungry. I had good conditions on the farm.”* Aviva and the other three girls lived in Germany until the war’s end.

Some Hanoar Hatzioni girls found out that the Germans were seeking young people to clean up the apartments of Jews who were deported. They joined a cleanup squad of about 150 Jewish youngsters, who stayed in a special interim camp. It was indeed a painful assignment to sort the remains of the possessions of deported Jews. They were supervised by a German who tormented everyone in a most devious and cruel way.

As Ruka wrote *"We always referred to him as 'schusser' (shooter). Some evenings he would dress in plain clothes and join a group of Jews talking in the dark. In fluent Yiddish he would report the latest broadcasts of news. He claimed that Hitler's days were numbered and that the schusser would be sent to the front. The Jews would listen, hungry for more and more details. Then he would laugh and shout, 'Schusser spricht!' (The shooter has spoken!) leaving them paralyzed with fear. But he never killed anyone and loved music.*

*At one time, I had hidden two people among bundles of clothes until we could find passes for them. The schusser found them. I saw him beat them mercilessly and hoped for him to fire the shot that would end their suffering. But he would not. Instead he stood on one of the people's belly playing the guitar until the Gestapo took them away to deport them."* Those still remaining in Sosnowiec and Bedzin lived in constant fear of capture.

In 1942 and 1943, a few people had procured forged documents. But there was no assurance that arrangements for forged documents would be possible for many people. It was necessary to have funds for bribery and to negotiate deals to obtain forged documents. Through intermediaries, JDC had arranged earlier to have wealthy Jews in Poland contribute funds with the promise that they would be compensated after the War. The Poles sought out wealthy and desperate Jews to buy their art collections or diamonds for bargain prices. Some were able to conceal their money and to make it available to others in the Jewish community. Other funds came indirectly from the United States American Joint Distribution Committee (JDC).

Jewish organizations in Israel and the United States had agents in Istanbul, in neutral Turkey, then referred to as Constantinople or *Kushta* in Hebrew. Istanbul succeeded

Geneva, in neutral Switzerland, as the center for agents attempting to communicate with Jews in Europe. Subterfuges were used by agents in Istanbul, a hotbed of intrigue.

Ira Hirschman, the representative of the United States War Refugee Board, who was in Turkey, wrote in his 1946 book "A regular courier service with all parts of Europe, even with remote occupied land like Poland was established. None of the agents ever betrayed his trust. Some of them, one a German officer, sacrificed their lives in this work."

"The German officer was a Viennese of the nobility. In June 1943, he carried a letter and a consignment of money to the leader of the resistance movement near Silesia, where there was a large Jewish community at Bedzin." On this risky venture the officer's assistant was a medical orderly of the German Army. The officer had to go from Istanbul to Vienna, to Katowice in Silesia, and then to Bedzin. He could not enter the ghetto, but arranged to have the young woman, who was the leader of the underground, brought to meet him.

He gave her the money and she wrote her receipt in simple language. She expressed gratitude, explaining that, "*...in ten days we will not be alive. Your help is a joy and a symbol of hope in the time of our death.*" This girl was indeed killed and her letter has been preserved as one of the great documents of the Holocaust.<sup>5</sup> (Hirschman)

Few documents relate to the sources and arrangements for funds because of constant fear of records being discovered by the Germans. Hence information about financing is often by inference rather than from records.

Young people found various schemes for getting small amounts of money. Leon who was in his early 20's told me that

he got a hiding place and money for forged documents by providing sexual excitement for a married woman in her 40's, that her husband did not proffer,

It became evident that there would inevitably be delays in acquiring forged documents. But the problem was how to handle this waiting period. Hipek, one of the most daring of the young Hanoar Hatzioni boys, first came up with the idea of hiding people in the nearby mountains where they could stay until they received forged identity documents smuggled by couriers from the GG certifying them as Polish workers qualified to cross the border to Slovakia or to Austria. The plan was to have youngsters remain in those countries only until plans could be contrived for them to go on to Hungary which was not yet occupied by the Germans.

However, not only did Jews need documents forged in the GG to cross the border, they also had to find ways to get forged local identity documents for each village where they stopped en route. With this in mind Hipek went to the Beskidy Mountains, an area of the Carpathians, to establish a scheme for keeping the youth among the villagers in small towns.

On the pretense that they needed documents for Polish partisans, they paid a large sum to a man who provided them with names of people born in the village but no longer living there. This made it possible to acquire birth certificates in the names of those individuals. Acting as though they were villagers, they then went to the Registry office with various stories about why they needed new birth certificates. This is but one illustration of the chutzpa they summoned under fearful conditions.

In June, the situation became even more desperate. A major action against Sosnowiec Jews led to more killings and deporta-



tions. The young people knew that if they could manage to get across the Polish-Slovak border, Zionist youth in Slovakia would help them get people to Hungary. But this entailed getting people out of the ghetto, transporting them to the mountains and then taking them 220 km by train. The longer it took, the greater the risk of their being apprehended.

Hipek, who was staying in the mountains went back to Sosnowiec to get Kuba, another of the young boys, to help him in this venture. Kuba already had forged documents in the name of a Polish friend in Sosnowiec and arranged to go to the mountains pretending that he was on sick leave from factory work because of a broken arm. One of the Hanoar Hatzioni girls working as a nurse provided proof of Kuba's supposed fracture by putting a cast on his arm. Not only that — she also gave him incontestable evidence, X-ray pictures—however, they were of someone else's fracture!

Kuba had earlier vacationed with his family in the Beskidy Mountain area and could even fake the local dialect. He moved from one village to another and made friends with the local people. They had no love for the Germans who were taking their food and supplies. To gain the confidence of the locals, he acted as though he was a religious Catholic, going to church and celebrating holidays with the villagers.

Kuba left the mountain area for periods of two or three days to negotiate escape for boys and girls still in Sosnowiec and Bedzin. One day he heard that the Germans were looking for him, because they suspected that he was a Polish partisan. To make his stories credible, Kuba took a group of the local villagers to the woods to hide for two nights on the pretense that he had information about a general search. Coincidentally, the

Germans searched a neighboring village and 20 people disappeared. From then on, the villagers believed Kuba had secret contacts thus making it easier for him to carry on the smuggling of people to and from that village.<sup>6</sup>

Kuba somehow acquired guns that he gave to ordinary villagers in exchange for their delivering youngsters to the hiding places in the mountains. People came by train in groups of 10 to 15. They had instructions to look around the railway station on their arrival for someone reading a newspaper — their clue that this was the person to lead them to the hiding place.

They developed a well-organized system for paying Poles from the villages to keep youngsters for a few days. They notified these Poles by letter saying “*in a few days you will receive the money from your uncle.*” That was their signal to expect one of the teenagers from Sosnowiec. The refugees would remain only a short time awaiting smuggling arrangements to Slovakia and then hopefully from there to Hungary.

On one occasion, Kuba sent a girl back to Sosnowiec to give instructions to others about how to get to the mountain village. Arriving in the midst of a roundup of Jews there, she was seized and killed. Another time Hipek went back to Sosnowiec from the mountains to get his girlfriend. Both were captured on the street. They resisted but were killed on the spot.

The leaders in Sosnowiec were putting pressure on Kuba to help more people. They met with him for furtive consultations in different railway stations and could not be satisfied with his explaining that they were short of forged documents and that the smugglers taking people across the border were giving him trouble. Despite the increased difficulties, Kuba simply continued doing the best he could.

At one stage Kuba was very anxious to hear from one of the girls who had been smuggled into Slovakia, confirming her safety. Kuba wanted to know how things were working out given that his arrangements were fraught with uncertainty. He never got a reply and found out later that the girl had a love affair with a Slovak man who was afraid of the consequences if she was discovered to have contacted the Sosnowiec group.

The German police became increasingly suspicious that Kuba was a Polish partisan. Luckily, he was fluent in German and so allayed suspicion about himself and others by convincing the police that he was an undercover agent for the German military.

However, after Kuba had been in the mountains for over three months, he decided that to be safe, he should be replaced. He got word to Sosnowiec and they sent another Hanoar Hatzioni member, Somek, to take over from him. Kuba crossed the border with pre-arranged smugglers and reached Zilina in Slovakia.

Somek then sent people from the mountain hideouts in Poland to Slovakia, where Kuba received them. Kuba stayed in Zilina for six weeks. From Zilina, Kuba arranged to get to Hungary. (Kuba testimony)

Only after the war did Kuba find out that the Germans arrested Somek and two others with him. All three were tortured and killed. One of them looked so obviously Jewish that "*he looked like a synagogue,*" according to Lusía.

Somek's death seemed particularly tragic because he had been in France studying chemistry and just happened to be visiting his family in Sosnowiec when the Germans invaded. He helped in resisting, even fabricating primitive Molotov cocktails—no one knew whether they were ever used. Somek's young

wife Lolka, who had gone on important courier missions, was also caught and killed (Mazia 1965).

The survivors' memories of tragic events in those last weeks in Poland illustrate the merciless anti-Semitism and the daring and desperate responses of Jews.

Though some people reached the temporary hideouts in the mountains, others remained in Sosnowiec. There one killing followed another. One survivor reported that a group of 10 Jews from Bedzin tried to join the Polish partisans. The Poles not only rejected them, but for no apparent reason killed all but one. That survivor warned others not to try again because even the underground members, were violently anti-Semitic.

A member of Hanoar Hatzioni whose parents were pharmacists had given her cyanide that she gave to a desperate man who committed suicide. Knowing the dangers, every one who had it carried cyanide or other medication for use if survival seemed impossible. Another Hanoar Hatzioni girl was caught while on a mission to another town. She vehemently denied that she was Jewish. The survivors are convinced from reports they heard that she was literally fed to the dogs!!

During the final days in the ghetto, Juzek was killed. He left a bunker with Natan, another member, to find water for the parched people in the bunker. Hours later, someone saw their bodies on the street. Juzek was 24 years old and recently married to Fredka. Natan, was the boyfriend of Lusia and they had planned to flee together the following day.

Bolek, the leader of the Tikva troop, would also be killed some weeks later. He was apprehended at the train station, just

as he was about to escape to Austria, and hanged publicly with a sign “*Polish partisan*”.

In her written recollection, Rutka recalled that, “I hated the jokes about dying and then meeting as soap bars, as was the rumor about how Germans reduced Jewish bodies. But one time I said to one of the few boys still alive, ‘Isaac, if you don’t find me home, we’ll meet as bars of soap on a drugstore shelf and no doubt we’ll recognize each other.’ At the Kalkzeile corner, he stopped and extended his hand to me in farewell. And then I went on without looking back when I heard a shot.”

Lusia grieved the death of Natan, her boy friend and also feared the fate of her eight-year old sister, Felusia. Her account of those last days in the ghetto was almost more than she could bear to tell.<sup>7</sup>

*“There was a man who worked for the Germans outside the ghetto in a small town. He was just a handyman and he had a hideaway. Someone sent him to our house. When he was there, he spoke to Felusia and said, ‘I want to help you. Come with me.’ He was a very peculiar man. But the little one, hearing this, said, ‘I want to live and I will go!’ It’s unbelievable that little Felusia comprehended our situation. I heard her say, “I will go!!” And this was a man we hardly knew!*

*In normal circumstances, would parents let an eight year old decide whether she wants to go with a stranger? It was like a panic—maybe she will survive, maybe a few days and months will help. Maybe the allies will come.”*

*“We knew these were the last days of the ghetto. We thought we would follow her. All our ways of thinking collapsed. The most salient characteristic of life in the ghetto was the total unpredictability of*

*what's going to happen. Today something you did meant life. Two hours later it meant death...there was no connection between what you did and the consequences.*

The handyman then took Felusia with him, but had to leave her in the nearby mountains. Months later when Lusía had escaped to Hungary and they reunited, Felusia told Lusía what had happened.

Somehow, eight-year old Felusia found her way back to Sosnowiec. One of the Hanoar Hatzioni girls happened to spot her on the street and arranged for the mothers of Rutka and Aviva to take Felusia with them when they escaped via Slovakia to Hungary. There, in Budapest, they placed Felusia in a Jewish orphanage.

In the years since then, Lusía continues to think that not keeping Felusia with her was an unforgivable failure. "This is my cross to bear." That Lusía, who always spoke so vehemently about Polish anti-Semitism, invoked this Catholic image was ironic. Lusía found out about Felusia as soon as she arrived in Hungary several months later.

After the war, Lusía learned that at the time of the liquidation, Lusía's mother begged a Polish woman for shelter for one night. When this woman found out what had happened to the Jews of Sosnowiec, she implored Lusía's mother to remain with her indefinitely.

Lusía's mother pretended that she was a guest from Germany even when a housemaid complained about her to the Gestapo.<sup>8</sup> This was in September 1943, almost two years before the war was over, when hiding a Jew could mean death! In the case of her mother's savior, Lusía feels an eternal debt and has kept in touch with the family of this courageous woman.

Two of the Tikva girls had close calls that could have ended in death.

In the midst of the deportations from Sosnowiec, Danka, who was 16 with pigtails, explained to me that, *“we were told never to go on the transports taking Jews to unknown destinations...to go means to give up—like volunteering to death...”*

*“On the railroad platform, when everyone waited, I said to a German soldier, ‘I am here by mistake.’ ‘Ok, we’ll check you.’ When the train came, all the people went on but he took me to the Gestapo. And they interrogated me. I acted sure and indifferent...and I knew Christian prayers if they asked me.*

*“The soldier tried to persuade them, ‘If she is Jewish, she will not survive anyway.’ They interrogated me for three hours and then let me go.”*

The German soldier took her through all the German posts to the outskirts of the city where he told her to go and admonished her to learn to speak German. Because, he said, if he couldn’t speak and translate Polish during the interrogation, she would have been deported “together with the Jewish people”. Danka is not sure if he assumed she was Jewish and this was his way to save her.

Lesia was another Hanoar Hatzioni girl who by “the skin of her teeth” escaped to Austria with the group of twelve girls who left together. She had been hidden in a bunker in her parents’ house without any documents. On August 2, after a German roundup, she and her father and mother were put on a train destined for the Auschwitz concentration camp. Between Sosnowiec and Bedzin, her father pushed her out of the train and said, *“RUN!”* She heard shots but just kept running, not knowing where to go.<sup>9</sup>

She stopped at a house where a Jewish mother and her child were already hiding. The mother begged Lesia to leave so she would not endanger them. Lesia then hid in a potato field. It was a hot day in August. How could she avoid being suspect when she was dressed in boots, heavy stockings, a leather coat, layers of underwear and carrying a pack? She went to the owner of the nearby factory where she had worked, even though she thought that he was no friend to Jews. However, the man and his wife welcomed Lesia to their home, and fed and clothed her so she would not be conspicuous. There one of the Hanoar Hatzioni leaders found her. He first took her to the home of a Polish woman and from there to the nearby mountains to wait for forged documents that would identify her as one of the Polish workers going to Austria.

On August 3 1943, three young men, Karl, Leon, and Janek were caught leaving a bunker and were to be sent to Auschwitz. The three were detained by the Germans at one of the factories in Sosnowiec. First Leon and Janek tried to escape. Leon succeeded and Janek was killed. After three days Karl also escaped:

*“While the gate was open for a bread wagon delivery, I walked out—and managed to get to the electric train and then got to the bunker [at a factory]...slowly other friends got to the bunker...we had to lie quietly so people who were working during the day would not hear us. At night, we used the chimney to go out for food...Sometimes three or four people left in the dark and met outside.”*

Both Karl and Leon later reached Vienna, Leon by himself and Karl with a group of 20.

Tusia, a Hanoar Hatzioni girl from Bedzin, her mother,



Leon's parents and a few others were among those last survivors to escape to the mountain hideouts.<sup>10</sup> Upon arrival in the mountains, a Hanoar Hatzioni leader met and oriented them. Tusia's mother acted sick to justify their leave from the factory where they were working in Bedzin. They bartered clothing and bedding for food. "*For a sheet, you could live a whole week at a farmer's house,*" Tusia recalled.

No one imagined that any Jews could still be alive at that stage in 1943 and Slovaks suspected them to be Polish partisans. It helped that they were passing as Poles but nonetheless they had to appear repeatedly at the police station for questioning.

All of them were aware that Slovakia had been a German satellite since 1938. By 1942, 60,000 Slovak Jews had been perished among the first Jews sent to Auschwitz. In mid-1942, about 30,000 Jews were still in Slovakia.

What the Polish Jews didn't know was that in 1942 the deportation of Jews from Slovakia ceased for an extended period. The cessation of deportations of Jews is attributed to Slovak Jewish representatives' bargaining and perhaps bribing government officials to halt Jewish deportations. This hiatus in deportations provided an interval of comparative safety for Jews in Slovakia.<sup>11</sup>

A smuggler escorted Tusia and those with her across the border between Poland and Slovakia. They got to a peasant's cottage in Slovakia and then didn't know what to do to reach Hungary, their destination. In Slovakia, they were amazed that Jews were not wearing the yellow Star of David, and Jewish girls were "*playing piano, savoring good cake and discussing Zionism.*"

The Slovaks wanted a tremendous sum before they were willing to help with the border crossing to their destination in Hungary. Tusia told them she would get it from relatives.

Her ploy was boarding a local train and asking the conductor to direct her to a money changer. In fact, she had no money to change but thought that any money changer was likely to be a Jew who would help her.<sup>xii</sup> The conductor gave her the name of a man who turned out not to be Jewish but to be married to a Jew. Not only did this man give Tusia money but from September 1943 to January 1944, in different ways, he aided about 60 other Polish Jews to cross the border whether they paid or not.

Tusia and her mother were reunited with her younger brother Alex. He was 16 at the time, and had escaped to Slovakia with Chaim, the warm and positive young man who had fled to Sosnowiec from Krakow. Alex was remarkable in that he had organized resistance in Bedzin when he was only about 14 years old.<sup>13</sup> Then and later on he took amazing risks.

Alex and Chaim wanted to go back to Sosnowiec to kill the Germans in charge of the ghetto but the Slovak Jews objected that they might cause trouble for others. The compromise was that one person could go so they drew lots—Chaim won. Several weeks later in Sosnowiec, the Germans hanged him with a sign stating that he was a Polish partisan. Alex joined his mother and sister on their continuing journey to Hungary (Ronen & Cochavi s.a ).

Slovak Jews who were Zionist youth members arranged to smuggle Tusia and her comrades across the border to Hungary.

Slovakia had at one time been part of the Hungarian kingdom. That border was relatively permeable and people crossed

frequently prior to the war. Many Slovak Jews had relatives in Hungary and most spoke Hungarian.

Though some Polish Jews had left Poland for Hungary starting in 1941, the larger number left via Slovakia after 1942. Between October 1943 and January 1944, the estimate is that about 1500 Jews went from Slovakia to Hungary. About 200 were Zionist youths, mostly from Slovakia while a few were the survivors in this story from Sosnowiec and Bedzin.

In the midst of the liquidation in August 1943, Rutka, Lusia and 10 other girls fled to a mountain village to await the preparation of their forged documents from the GG. In the village, they moved from one house to another to make sure no one became suspicious. Within two weeks they would get their documents from Fredka and escape to Austria where they awaited word from Hungary about rejoining the other Group members.

Fredka played a crucial role in getting money, procuring documents and helping people get across the border (Mazia 1965).

She helped the 12 young girls waiting in the mountains as well as others who would soon follow. Beisky, who had forged the documents for Bayuk, recalled passing his forged die on to Fredka as well as instructions on how to forge documents for others. To get money for her potential escapees, Fredka contacted Alfred Rossner, the German who owned a prosperous factory in Bedzin manufacturing military uniforms for the Germans.<sup>14</sup> The Hanoar Hatzioni youth knew that by his own words and deeds, Rossner had tried to convince them that not every German was a murderer and that some Germans opposed the Nazi power. Rossner gave Fredka a lot of money. Rossner was killed by the Germans later in 1944.

The Germans surrounded the ghetto and all hope of surviving seemed lost. By that time most of the leaders and members of Hanoar Hatzioni had been killed. Fredka, Leon and two or three others still alive contemplated their desperate situation, no money and few youth left.

They met at Leon's hiding place, the seldom-used cottage of a Polish woman outside of the city. They decided that Fredka should reestablish contact with a Pole in Krakow whom she had met earlier.

Again she left for Krakow passing as a Pole and contacted this man. Because of her good looks, Fredka no doubt captivated this Polish partisan contact, making it easier to convince him that she too was a Pole and just happened to be helping Jews. He in turn contacted a woman who was in charge of a Polish office issuing documents to provide workers for the labor shortage in German occupied countries.

Fredka was sure it was a trap when this woman took her to a party with a group of SS men and she had to laugh at their jokes about Jews. But sure enough, the woman gave her completed papers for twelve girls. Clearly she was a very brave woman playing the role of a friend to the SS in Krakow and also conspiring to provide false documents for Jewish girls.

Since their documents were issued in the GG, Fredka decided that it would be safer if the twelve Sosnowiec girls had train tickets showing that they had departed from the GG area rather than from Sosnowiec in the Reich area. Fredka went to the city of Tarnow in the GG and bought tickets from Tarnow to Katowice in the Reich. She then paid the train conductor to punch all of them as though the 12 girls had boarded the train with her in Tarnow. She got off at Katowice in the Reich and

returned to the ghetto with the papers to be used by the twelve girls going to Austria. The papers were then taken to the girls awaiting them in the mountains.

Arrangements were made for the twelve girls to leave from Katowice for jobs in Austria. Leon's sister, Hanke, was older than the others and was assigned to be their "chaperone". They had the tickets from Fredka showing that they had left from Tarnow and were only changing trains in Katowice. Little did they know that Fredka's clever plan to have their tickets originate in Tarnow would later cause them to be suspect when they got to Austria.

While waiting to go to the train, the girls hid in a church and a cemetery for an hour or two. Then they paid a man to take them to his house for a few hours and then to the train station. He realized that they must be Jewish. While accompanying them, some Poles thought he was Jewish and started shouting at him, "JEW!" (probably because of the appearance of some of the girls). The man exclaimed "Jesus Christ! They think I am a Jew too!" The girls could barely contain their laughter at the irony of a Pole coping with anti-Semitism.

Sofia was unexpectedly one of the 12 girls leaving for Austria. *"I was supposed to stay to bring more people out of the ghetto... I looked Polish and I used to be an amateur actress, so acting probably helped me to feel and act as a Pole. I was supposed to stay in Katowice — which was 10 minutes from our town — to help people change their papers and leave. But one of our girl friends went to pick some flowers at the cemetery and missed the train, so I had to go on her papers so the Germans would not discover someone missing from their list of workers."* They presume that the girl left behind was killed.

The group of twelve girls boarded a German train bound for Vienna. Rutka wrote about their trip in her recollections

when she arrived in Palestine after the war. The train originated in Russia and was filled with German soldiers going on leave. Growing up so close to Germany, the girls knew German but pretended they did not.

*“Well, pretty girls, come in! They emptied space for us and our things. Some of us had bleached hair and didn’t look Jewish. So here were girls from the ghetto now entitled to a train with German soldiers!”*

*“Forward, forward...to escape death, to escape memory. It’s not a dream — Vienna awaits us! The SS men are going home to enjoy leave with their families. SS men, SA men, and us twelve girls are the passengers. They are talking about us. We understand the German. ‘Voluntary workers from Poland, nice working girls. Soon you’ll be going back home — it won’t last long and even if it’s difficult, it’s for the sake of our liberty, our country, and our leader.’*

*“An SS man stuffed me with candy, apples, nuts. He covered me with his SS overcoat — was this the same person maybe who whipped my mother yesterday, who killed hundreds of my brethren, who has been the master of my fate?”*

And so, after this dangerous and weird train ride, the 12 girls arrived in Austria.

Despite the original restriction of working papers for girls only, Fredka managed to arrange papers for a second group that included boys in the same way as she did for the 12 girls.

At the end of September, Karl left Sosnowiec for Austria with a group of 20 men and women. Karl recalled that this group of 20 was incredibly well organized and that nothing was left to chance. Ten of this group were members or parents of other members of Hanoar Hatzioni. It was remarkable that a group of young people would assume responsibility for these parents who included Fredka’s parents and the father of leaders

Juzek and Bolek Kozuch. Juzek had already been killed and Bolek was active in resistance. The other ten were people who wanted the help of Hanoar Hatzioni in escaping from Poland and paid for the tickets for all of them.

Lusia explained their ambivalence about this deal which proved to be a bad one. "We were young — without money and smuggling was very expensive. We took some people because of money. We had to do things that were not so nice. Unfortunately they were not trained to keep secrets like we were and how to behave in those hard conditions. Because of them, we were eventually discovered." This discovery would have drastic consequences, as will be explained.

After the death of Juzek, Leon had assumed the role of guardian of the group. He operated independently in secret efforts to arrange for the Sosnowiec youth. He would later succeed in having most of the youths reunite in Hungary in early 1944.

Leon had escaped from the ghetto two days after the liquidation but was almost apprehended. A Pole was about to turn him over to the Gestapo suspecting he was a Jew. Leon to no avail protested that his papers proved he was not. Leon claimed to be a mineworker, a major occupation of Polish men in that area. A Jew was most unlikely to be a mineworker so this might convince them that he was a Pole. The police examined Leon's hands that looked too tender and uncalledoused to be a mineworker so they checked with the mine supervisor. The supervisor, who knew nothing about him, *confirmed* that Leon was indeed his employee. Leon had no idea what motivated this supervisor to lie. Instead, the man who turned Leon in was arrested.

On October 9 Leon left for Vienna via Katowice. During that time, it was possible for Leon to keep in touch with the group of 12 girls in Austria by mail. In that way, he arranged to meet them in Vienna.

By January 1944, when his smuggling activities seemed too dangerous to continue, Bayuk escaped to Slovakia where he stayed in a town close to the border and then went to Hungary. He helped Jews arriving from Slovakia using funds from the Jewish Rescue Committee in Budapest.

The final deportation to death camps of all except a few Jews every Jew still alive in Sosnowiec and Bedzin occurred by August 1943. By the end of September, all those who are the survivors in this story had escaped from Poland.

During December 1943 and January 1944 the Germans had killed the few Jews remaining in Sosnowiec. Among those were. Juzek, Bolek, Chaim, Hipek, and Somek, all of whom had played leadership roles in Sosnowiec HanoarHatzioni. Tusia wrote *"Their courage and readiness to sacrifice were remarkable. One did not give prizes for excelling but in our hearts, we honor them."*<sup>15</sup>

Herewith is a summary of where the Sosnowiec Hanoar Hatzioni survivors were at the end of 1943. All had forged documents acquired at different times identifying them as Polish workers from the GG. Bayuk later would meet the Sosnowiec young people in Hungary

Aviva with three other girls had gone to Germany in May where they remained until the war was over.

In the Fall of 1943, twelve girls, including Rutka, Lusia, and Sofia and a group of 20, led by Karl, comprised of 10 members of Hanoar Hatzioni accompanied by 10 who were not mem-



bers, arrived in Austria. Kuba, Manus, and Leon reached Austria individually.

In October, Tusia, with the help of smugglers, had gone from Poland to Slovakia and on to Hungary. Leon shortly left Austria for Hungary where he met Tusia.

The understanding was that those who reached Hungary would attempt to arrange for those in Austria to join them there. Leon searched for ways to smuggle those in Austria into Hungary, as he would succeed in doing just weeks before the German occupation of Hungary in March 1944.

This *tiyul*, as they referred to it in Hebrew, from one country to another required great chutzpa and constant deals with people who took bribes to provide forged documents. The Group members from Sosnowiec attribute to Leon's guile, and his dedication, the subsequent arrangements for them to reunite in Hungary.

From 1943 to 1945, these young people who escaped from Poland, despite their forged document, lived like terrified animals constantly fearing detection as Jews.

<sup>1</sup> Much of this information comes from Zelig Bayuk's childhood friend, Moshe Beisky, who also helped him to forge documents at the time.. At the War's end Beisky helped with the illegal immigration of surviving Jews from Italy to Palestine. He himself then became one of these "illegals" and went to Palestine in 1946. He is a retired Justice of the Israel Supreme Court. He also served as Chairman of the Israel Commission of Righteous Gentiles. His familiarity with Bayuk, the Holocaust and his judicial perspectives contributed to his admiration of Bayuk.

<sup>2</sup> Rutka and Bayuk met each other in the course of escaping from Hungary to Romania. She gave testimony about her husband for Yad Vashem (033-1260).

<sup>4</sup> At his home office in Israel, Beisky keeps an unfinished die that was to be for Schindler to prepare documents for Jews. However, the war ended before Beisky could finish it. Beisky remained friendly with Schindler until Schindler's death. In Israel, Beisky spent days meeting with the author Thomas

## HOW THEY LIVED TO TELL

Keneally when he was preparing to write Schindler's List, the basis for the film of the same name.

- <sup>5</sup> This information comes from a conversation with Avihu Ronen.
- <sup>6</sup> The girl leader was Frumka Plotnicka, a charismatic person. She was a member of Dror, another Zionist youth organization, who had been sent from Warsaw to Bedzin in December 1942 when she was 27 years old. Frumka had to help the Bedzin community with resistance activities. She, like Juzek Kozuch, became one of the organizers of the hanhaga, the high committee that included representatives of all of the Zionist youth organizations. She and the head of the Judenrat in Bedzin developed an odd sympathetic relationship and she even moderated his actions. Frumka had participated in the frequent agonized discussions about choosing resistance or escape. She was not one of those people who rejected resistance and her personal decision was resisting to the bitter end. She was eventually killed during the final liquidation. (cf Ronen & Cochavi s.a.)
- <sup>7</sup> This information comes from Kuba's Tel Izhak Massuah testimony.
- <sup>8</sup> Though I had spent days talking with her previously only at a later stage in 1997 did Lusia tell me what happened to Felusia, her little sister.
- <sup>9</sup> Lusia has kept in touch with this wonderful family. They have been designated "Righteous Gentiles" by Israel.
- <sup>10</sup> Massuah testimony on July 31, She was hidden in a bunker without any identifying documents
- <sup>11</sup> Tusia was another Jew with a "good face" who didn't look Jewish. Later on in Hungary she would play a major role as a liaison between Hanoar Hatzioni members and non-Jews. In 1943 she was 22 and had recently been married. She had to separate from her husband and they would not see each other for two years until they found each other again after the war. She was the only member of Hanoar Hatzioni who never got arrested.
- <sup>11</sup> Cohen (1986) has written extensively about the Zionist youth in Hungary, and I have used his book a great deal in this chapter.
- <sup>12</sup> Jews were often money changers.
- <sup>13</sup> From a conversation with Avihu Ronen.
- <sup>14</sup> Alfred Rossner was mentioned in Chapter 1. He was the German in Bedzin who helped many Jews and may have saved more lives than Oskar Schindler.
- <sup>15</sup> Tusia recorded the names of the young members who died and expressed her feelings about them in her 1960 testimony at Yad Vashem and in her essays.

*Chapter 4*



## Austria

1943-44

*Posters bore the Fuhrer's picture and libraries were filled with works by him or extolling him. Stores displayed signs saying 'Aryan shop' or "This Jew is already in Dachau" or "This Jew ought to be in Dachau.*

*-C.L. Sulzberger<sup>1</sup>*

*"We arrived on Friday, August 27, 1943. Could this really be Vienna? None of us could believe who and where we were."*

Despite their well-forged documents identifying them as Poles, they felt constantly in peril. However, their problem in Austria was not that they were discovered as Jews but rather that they were suspected to be Polish spies. Hence much of their time was spent on changing their identities and dispersing from their work places in Vienna to Graz and Salzburg.

There had been about 200,000 Jews in pre-war Austria, most living in Vienna. In contrast to Germany and Poland, where Jews had lived for hundreds of years, most Jews of pre-war Austria had come more recently from Polish Galicia, Bukovina and Czechoslovakia.

About 1/3 of the Jews had lived in abject poverty. Though a comparatively small fraction of Austrian Jews were successful professionals or businessmen, yet prior to the German occupation, they had constituted over 50% of physicians and dentists and 62% of the lawyers in Vienna. The German annexation of Austria occurred in 1938. Soon afterwards, Eichmann arrived from Germany to carry out anti-Jewish policies with zest. The Germans immediately ordered boycotts of Jewish owned busi-

nesses and carried out their confiscation more rapidly than they had in Germany. As was the case later in Poland in 1939, Jewish apartments were appropriated and Jews had to crowd into designated neighborhoods.

About 118,000 Jews emigrated from Austria in 1938; that 'emigration' was forced and tantamount to expulsion. In November 1942, what remained of the Jewish community was essentially dissolved. About 7000 Jews remained were spared because they were married to non-Jews. About 70,000 Austrian Jews perished under Eichmann's direction.

Hence it was fortunate that the twelve girls who arrived from Sosnowiec several months later knew German helping them to pass as non-Jews. They proceeded immediately to the employment office in the Vienna railway station. They were petrified that they might forget the Polish names on their new forged documents. They were treated well though their assignments hardly fit their backgrounds.

Some became maids or waitresses in Vienna, one became a restaurant cook. Others went to work at a local mental hospital, Steinhof. Rutka and three others were assigned to laborious jobs harvesting crops in a village some distance from Vienna.

Shortly afterwards, through devious means, boys as well as girls procured forged papers as Polish workers. Karl and his group of twenty, including boys and girls and three parents of Hanoar Hatzioni members, arrived by train and went to the employment office. The medical examiners came to do routine checks for venereal disease. This was fearsome; the boys' circumcisions could instantly betray that they were Jews. They pulled their pants down and could hardly believe that the health inspector ignored their circumcisions, apparently only con-

cerned about signs of venereal disease. It was an extremely relieved group who began their work assignments on different farms.

Rutka explained her work:

*“I was lucky because three other girls...went to the same village 23 km from Vienna. And the others envied us. We promised to meet the others in Vienna every Sunday.*

*“Our landlord was famed for his violent temper—he had been a Nazi even before Hitler seized Austria. The Austrian farmers disliked him and pitied the poor Polish girls. But we ‘poor Polish girls’ felt lucky—we were alive, what did it matter if we were hungry or had to work very hard?*

*“The work was insufferable. At noon, we returned under the scorching sun, sweating... At night, we returned home late, black with soil, legs bloody, scratched by grain stalks from using the threshing machine.*

*“We slept in a single room with four young men—two primitive/rude Ukrainians, a Slovak man who was deported to a concentration camp and returned a madman, and a Pole... And what did we eat? In the morning, one slice of bread and coffee, another slice a little later, a midday meal of water with two potato dumplings, and for supper, plain potato. The amount for seven of us maybe was enough for two or three.*

*“But the worst misery came in October. The cold began in September. We had to get up at 5 am in the dark and had to walk 3 to 4 km to the fields. On the way, we would see trucks filled with soldiers bundled in fur coats and thick mittens. They seemed amazed to look out at girls walking in the dark, clad only in summer dresses and sandals with no stockings. Those freezing mornings were worse than almost any other suffering—all we could think about was having to get out of bed*

*into the freezing morning cold. Each day was like a week. Though spreading manure was difficult, all we thought about was the cold."*

The first contingent of girls had sent letters to Karl so that he knew how to contact them on his arrival. Of Karl's group of twenty, those ten who had provided the funds enabling the group to escape from Sosnowiec, got work assignments in one village near Vienna. the ten who were members of Hanoar Hatzioni were assigned to work in two other towns. Karl recalled as we talked, "*We were with Poles and Ukrainians who had come earlier. We weren't used to doing agricultural work and the Poles realized that we were not true Poles but luckily didn't give us away.*"

*"The work was especially difficult for the parents with us. Fredka's mother asked me to get a transfer for her. I went to the employment office and told them we had a poor Polish woman—she was only in her 40's—who could not do farm work. They transferred her to a restaurant as a dishwasher."* Some of the youngsters resented her expecting special treatment.

Though dispersed, all of the young people kept in touch by mail and phone. Fortunately Lusia was better off than others because she was employed in Vienna as a maid in the home of a family who treated her well. Though her employer was not pleased to hear the phone ringing at all hours of the night, Lusia used it as a communications center. Lusia never forgot that significant phone number.

Whatever their work assignments, the young people were overworked and exhausted most of the time. Their single pleasure was looking forward to Sundays when, like bona fide Polish workers, they got a day off and could meet with others near the Vienna Opera House.

Hanke, Leon's sister, had been the chaperone of the group



of 12 girls on their train journey from Poland. Her job in the Opera Café provided the opportunity to abscond with food ration coupons. On visiting days on Sunday, Hanke would sit on a nearby park bench with a supply of food ration cards folded into a newspaper. When one of the girls joined her there, she acted as an amicable stranger sharing her folded newspaper; in its folds they would find those valuable ration cards.

*Real* Polish workers also convened near the Vienna Opera House introducing themselves to each other. The Jewish workers acted as though they too were being introduced to each other for the first time so as not to reveal to the Poles that they were a group of Jews.

Rutka describes those relatively happy hours on one Sunday when the 12 girls met with Karl's group:

*"We practically forgot the cold, the hunger and became ourselves when we traveled to the city to meet the other...Then we laughed about...everything else. We imagined that Vienna was a stage set and we were really at Lusia's house in Sosnowiec—12 girls from the first group, 20 boys and girls from the second group that came later.*

*"And all of them were like us and we didn't have to be afraid. That was about the happiest day of all in Vienna."* But such happiness could not last.

One Sunday in October, Rutka realized that something was drastically wrong.

*"We got to the Opera House two minutes before the evening meeting time but nobody was there! Where were they? One girl waited while I ran half-crazy to the Café where we were supposed to have the meeting scheduled for 7 pm. [There was nobody there]...We kept running from one street to another—they couldn't all have disappeared. We finally went to the station to get the train back to our village.*

*“We got back to where we stayed at two in the morning and the next day had to endure the jokes of everyone there as to what we girls had been doing out so late at night.*

*“We could do nothing but wait for something to happen...”*

After waiting for two days, they got a note to meet with a few others the next Sunday who had news about those left behind in Poland.

*“We heard that ‘WANTED’ posters for Bolek and Leon had been posted [in Sosnowiec]. Bolek had been apprehended at the Katowice station. Leon managed to get away and had escaped to Vienna from Sosnowiec the day before. That was October 8, 1943.”* However, Rutka and the others who went to the Opera Café still did not know why the others had not met them for their usual Sunday meeting.

A few days elapsed before they heard that Leon and others had been arrested and how this had occurred.

Leon had discovered that a Mrs. Benedyk in Vienna would help to smuggle Jews into Hungary. This was very secret information. Leon proceeded to her house only to be greeted by the police and arrested. Then the police procured the address of Leon’s sister, Hanke, and the police arrested her and some of the girls who were with her. All those apprehended met in the police station.

Leon’s sister, Hanke, convinced the police that she only had a *fling* with Leon and no other connection with him or the others arrested. She could be convincing because she conversed with the police in fluent German. She was sent to a nearby camp at Magdeburg, and continued to pass as a Pole until liberation by the Americans in April 1945.

The Hanoar Hatzioni youth had been concerned about the

ten people not members of Hanoar Hatzioni who came with Karol. They had not been trained like the Hanoar Hatzioni members about keeping secrets. They too knew about Mrs. Benedyk.

One of the men who was not a Hanoar Hatzioni member communicated with his wife then hiding in Munich to tell her how to get to Vienna and included the information about Mrs. Benedyk. His wife then departed for Vienna, accompanied by the German at whose house she had hidden.

Their communication must have been intercepted and aroused German suspicion. Evidently, the whole Sosnowiec contingent was suspected as being spies who had originated in Tarnow, Poland as their documents stated. They were under police surveillance and discovered at Mrs. Benedyk's house. As for Mrs. Benedyk, they think she was working for British Intelligence. She, too, may have been suspect at that time and Leon believes that she was killed.

Rutka later learned that *“Leon was put in a cell with two Viennese Jews and the three planned to escape that night. And so they did! In the evening, they hid in the bathroom and never went back to the cell...They made a hole in the window bars, climbed down a pipe next to the window and managed to get to a mid-floor dumpster and run away.”*

It was mystifying that only some had been arrested. Every one of them had forged Polish documents indicating the place of origin as Tarnow in the GG. They feared that all would soon be arrested.

Leon determined to cross the border to Hungary and then to arrange for those in Austria to get to Hungary too. Though

Hungary was an ally of Germany, it was not yet occupied by the Germans and Jews seemed relatively safe there.

In the midst of contemplating the looming threat to those not arrested in Austria, Rutka even considered suicide. What restored her will to survive was a letter from Leon in Hungary, reporting he had arrived there and had discovered that Rutka's mother had escaped from Poland and he had met with her in Hungary. *"This good news made me wonder what to do—to risk my life when my mother was safe by trying to get another job from the employment office or to run away from Vienna..."*

It would be some months before Leon could arrange for those in Austria to get to Hungary. In that period, each of them had harrowing experiences and fled from Vienna to Graz and Salzburg until Leon arranged for their getting to Hungary.

Rutka's farm work was exceedingly difficult and she decided to try to find a new job. She went to the employment office in Vienna with one of the other girls in the group. *"We were supposed to pick jobs from a long list and could leave as soon as our choice was filed. When they asked for names, where we were from, we had to say 'Tarnow'. The man questioning us left the room and returned with some files saying, 'You have come from Tarnow?'"*

*"I panicked even though everyone seemed to be going about their business in the room... Suddenly the door opened and a German security policeman appeared and asked, 'Are you Jewish?' I couldn't believe that 'nein' came out of my mouth. I thought I should say, 'ja' since they could force a 'yes' from me by beating. They certainly knew about us because they had caught some of our group.*

*"Come with me.' He told the secretaries that we were the last two members of the notorious gang of Tarnow spies..."* The girls were

taken to the biggest jail in Austria, “probably the one where most of our comrades had been”

*“The preliminary formalities and the body search were quick and we were led to a jail cell. About thirty girls got up from straw mattresses and rained questions at us in different languages. They were happy because most of them were from Poland too. It was too dark for us to see each other and they kindly offered us places to lie down on the mattresses.*

*“By then each of the girls in the jail wanted to tell her story, to complain, to weep. Each tragic story was different. One girl was jailed for an abortion, another for miscegenation, another for demanding alimony, one for killing her baby... Each girl was designated a ‘political crime suspect’, and they had no hope of leniency. We only wished we could tell them our stories. Instead we told them about the unjust treatment by our employer and they envied us because they were sure we would be freed.*

*“The girl next to me told me this prison was like no other... However, recently three men escaped from the cell across the hall... She whispered that this was the first escape in 30 years... Two Viennese and a Pole escaped and nobody knew how, but they did hear screams and knew someone was being tortured. The next day a man who had come to repair window bars told them that another ten Poles, rumored to be Jews, had tried to escape but had been caught and punished.”*

Rutka immediately inferred that the “Pole” who had managed to escape was in fact, a Jew—Leon!

*“We dreaded our cellmates seeing us in the morning light but also wanted to find out if the ten people who we heard were tortured were alive... The day was monotonous; the cell door opened a few times. Once to exchange the straw mattresses and blankets and then to hand us breakfast—50 grams of bread and black coffee, at 11 we got a spoon and*

50 grams of bread and soup. At 5, we got more bread and supposedly soup but it was water, and at 9 at night we got back our mattresses and blankets.”

“Our fun was counting and hunting lice, throwing shoes to tell fortunes, using paper as playing cards. Plenty of time was spent pulling one another off the toilet in the middle of the cell. So the boring days passed.

“Sunday was worse because there were additional prayers and no one even left for interrogation. And we, the newest ones, had less to do but we still had lice and felt more hunger. Monday was the day prisoners were transported to Auschwitz or other concentration camps or for execution. Tuesdays and Wednesdays people were sent to labor camps, Thursdays were release days, and on Fridays people were transferred to penal camps.

“Monday and Tuesday passed. On Wednesday a kitchen girl was sent off in a transport and she had to be replaced. Everyone prayed for kitchen duty to at least eat better. Everyone was praying except one friend and I who hid in the darkest corner of the cell, trying to cosy up to the guard who was to select someone. The meanest of the guards entered the cell and every eye was on her. She looked at me and said, ‘Don’t you want to work? How old are you?’... ‘Take your things and come with me.’ From the cell behind me, I heard shouts of hate and envy.

“The Polish kitchen workers poked at each other and conveyed, ‘What kind of a Pole is she supposed to be?’ Another girl with a bright face and carefully dressed sat next to two Polish girls and she pushed me a stool and gave me a knife, explaining that I was to cut potatoes that were half machine pared and throw them into a pail of water.

“The two Polish girls started to torment me. When I dipped my hands in the huge tub of water, I would encounter sharp knives that made my hands bleed badly. And each time one of them passed me, she

*'accidentally' poured water over me. They then apologized each time and I'd reply, 'it's OK,' not wanting to get them angrier.'*

Rutka was interrogated again.

*"I was taken to an interrogator, a woman who asked questions in Polish.*

*"When were you born? How many grades of school? Where were you baptized? What is your father's occupation? Why did you run away from your employer and what were the working conditions?" I answered and she thanked me politely, telling me I could leave. As I started to do so, she said, 'Are you by any chance Jewish?'*

*"Then!!! She read a list of names ending with the names of my fellow travelers to Vienna! I denied knowing any of them. Seeing that neither threats nor promises got anything out of me, she ended, 'There's no point in wasting time. We're going to meet again but not one to one. You can go, but first let me hear you pray...'*

*"Our Father who art in heaven...Ave Maria, full of mercy..."*

*"You memorized well! Now recite the prayer to St. Anthony, your late father's namesake..." I knew no such prayer.*

*"She laughed loudly...and she ordered me to leave. At least I wasn't beaten or tortured. For the time being nothing had happened but my heart was heavy indeed."*

Then Rutka found out that on the previous Monday, the ten men arrested were sent to Auschwitz. The girls who admitted being Jewish would be sent the following Monday. The authorities, however, were still not absolutely sure who was and who wasn't Jewish, and for the time being they were still left in peace. But they knew that it was less than a week to the following Monday and if they wanted to do something, it had better be quick!

*"We had decided to try to escape on Friday...but on Friday, pota-*

*toes were scarce so we stopped work at noon and the same was true Saturday and Sunday. We expected the death sentence on Monday. Saturday and Sunday, probably the last days of our lives, were exceptionally difficult but only confirmed my resolve to escape since there was nothing to lose."*

*"Monday morning the whole prison was in turmoil. The guards were moving around with thick files. One opened the door for us and said, 'The two of you [Rutka and her friend] are going away today, but in the meantime, hurry to your work!'*

*"When it started to get dark, I asked the kitchen supervisor for the dumpster keys. She was happy not to follow us into the freezing weather and, by now, she trusted me. We went to the courtyard, opened the dumpster, threw away our kitchen aprons and rushed towards the exit thinking about nothing except that we had to move at lightning speed..."*

*"Before [the police] had time to register what was going on, we were outside in the snow. We immediately fell, not being used to it. The black-out was suddenly ended by enormous searchlights... They had discovered our escape. Again we ran like hell..."*

Once out of sight of the police, Rutka rushed to a pay phone and called Lusia, who instructed her to find Sara who was still at her job at the nearby Steinhof Hospital. Rutka was immensely relieved that they were still alive – they had a renewed opportunity to survive. They went to the hospital.

*"We went from building to building and all said, 'Closed after 7 pm.'... Finally we met a German woman who took us to a section where several Polish girls were employed who would be likely to know Sara. We were not happy to encounter real Poles but the German woman opened the door and pointed out a Polish girl standing next to a table.*

*"The girl turned to look at us. It was Lesia! [the Hanoar*



Hatzioni girl whose parents pushed her off the train destined for Auschwitz; she had managed to escape to Austria.]

*"I had heard that Lesia and Sofia [both from the party of the 12 girls] had changed jobs but never suspected they would be at Steinhof. She turned pale as death. 'You must wait outside. I'm not supposed to have visitors but I'll be free in ten minutes.'*

*"We had to wait what seemed an eternity and then saw Sofia running towards us crying with joy. She took us to the room she shared with Lesia and made supper for us. Then she told Sara about our escape and the two of them decided we should spend the night in that room. It was extremely dangerous because the nuns checked to make sure that the nurses from the occupied countries did not invite men to their rooms...And if we were discovered, it could mean death."*

Lusia then came to the Steinhof hospital with a valuable document for Rutka. Lusia had stolen the reference letter that had gone to her Vienna employer from Poland so that Rutka could use it as her identification. They *washed* this document, that is, they changed the name and the city of origin from Tarnow to Radom.

Rutka's "farewell present" from Sara who worked in the hospital was a real bath. *"...We ate lunch and then went with Sara to a bath house. It was like a fairy tale to have a bath with clean towels and a white tub filled with water. But my body, so unused to water, became covered with itchy red spots. I peeled pieces of skin off and the red spots became bloody sores. When I got out of the tub, I put on my dirty dress again and combed my hair. Then I saw the comb white with lice. I glanced in a mirror and my hair moved by itself. I turned off the light and rushed out."*

A few months had passed since Rutka had last seen Karl

who sent her a letter so she would know he had gotten to Salzburg.

Karl told me about his frightening experiences before he had reached Salzburg. Shortly after Leon and others were jailed, Karl too realized that the Gestapo would look for the rest of the suspected '*Tarnow spies*' and that it was too dangerous to go back to his work in a village outside Vienna after a Sunday there.

With nowhere to go, Karl spent the night in a field outside Vienna. The next day he and others convened at the railway station in Vienna not knowing what to do. They arranged to spend the time taking turns riding the street car with the one single ticket. Then they went to the cinema where they showed continuous movies so they could sleep.

After two or three days, Karl knew they had to make other arrangements. He got the address of Dr. Lowenherz, the head of the Judenrat in Vienna.<sup>2</sup> Karl explained that he was part of two small groups of Jews who had escaped from Poland. Lowenherz warned Karl of the danger of coming to see him, saying he could not help but that there was a Dr. Moses in another room who might be able to help.

Dr. Moses gave Karl the address of a Dr. Neuhaus, a "lovely man" married to a Christian woman, who said he would give them food and one room. Karl then took Fredka's father with him for the night and sent some of the young people to an old synagogue to stay there for the night. Subsequently, Fredka's father, Dr. Moses and Dr. Neuhaus were arrested and sent to Auschwitz.

Karl, with others from Sosnowiec, improvised a variety of plans until they could reassemble at the train station in Vienna. Some of the girls who had jobs in Vienna remained there while

others had gone to Steinhof Hospital where Sara continued to be their contact person. They would try to leave Vienna in turn, two at a time, letting each other know their whereabouts. Fortunately mail and phone service was available though risky for them to use.

The first to go were two girls. They got on a train to Salzburg having invented a ruse for procuring new documents. They traveled about one-and-a-half hours on the train and got off at a major station and then intentionally “missed” their train when it left. When a German security policeman stopped them, weeping uncontrollably they told their “woeful story”.

They implored that they were only poor Polish girls traveling with a transport of workers. They got off the train to get a beer and the train left. They had no luggage, no documents, and no jobs. The policeman listened to their plight with tears in his eyes. He even escorted them to the employment office where they got new documents and new jobs in Salzburg. Since their scheme worked, they wrote to Karl to try the same thing.

On the train to Salzburg, when a Gestapo agent asked Karl and the boy with him for identification, they told their version of losing everything, having no papers and their group going on without them. But this was not a local policeman and they were not sweet looking girls. They were escorted to jail.

In their cell, they joined thieves from Germany, Poland, and the Ukraine. Their cellmates quizzed them, evidently to find out if they were Jews. To persuade them that he was indeed Polish, Karl gave his Polish name and said that he came from Krakow. One of the Poles, obviously testing him, asked a lot of questions about Krakow and Poland. Karl had never really been to

Krakow, though it was near Sosnowiec, but he bluffed well enough to be convincing.

After three weeks in jail, the Gestapo assigned Karl to work in a POW camp outside Salzburg that was manufacturing plane parts. The workers were taken back and forth to their jobs under guard. There were about 30 or 40 Poles working with him. Karl and the Hanoar Hatzioni boy with him had to pretend not to know each other. They knew that the Poles suspected them of being Jews, and that they were in a very precarious situation. At an opportune moment, they managed to sneak away and flee to Salzburg. It took three weeks before those in Vienna received word from them. Rutka then left to join Karl in Salzburg.

After Leon and Karl left Vienna, Manus<sup>2</sup>, assumed the role of leader for the surviving Hanoar Hatzioni members still there. Manus bargained to get new forged Austrian documents as did others from Sosnowiec and found various ways to get money for the youngsters.

Manus had a chance meeting in Vienna with Mr. Pscheidt, one of the factory owners in Sosnowiec, who had befriended some of the young people and let them hide in his factory. Pscheidt originally came from Vienna, and had returned there. Pscheidt was appalled to hear about the terrible plight of the Sosnowiec youth in Austria. He gave money to Manus who observed, "*How nice to realize that there were still people who behaved as good human beings.*" These funds would aid Manus in making escape plans for himself and his friends from Sosnowiec.

Some normal life continued in Vienna. The Pole who sold Manus forged documents suggested a night club as recreation for a young man like him. There Manus met a sexy young singer who plied him with drinks, food, and swinging hips. Manus,

with some trepidation, couldn't resist her invitation to follow her upstairs.

In her room she reached into her bosom and pulled out real coffee beans and a tool for smashing them. Manus was scared to death when she started crooning, "*My Yiddishe Mamma.*" Could her good Jewish dialect mean she was tricking him into betraying that he was a Jew?

Instead of making love as Manus anticipated, she began interrogating him. Assuming she was a Gestapo agent trying to entrap him, Manus threatened to strike her with his only weapon, a heavy key, when she shouted, "*I am Jewish!*" Manus queried, "*Where do you come from?*" She replied that she was from Klobutz in Poland and asked Manus whether he knew Juzek Kozuch. To convince Manus that she was Jewish and knew what was going on, she told him that she remembered meeting Juzek in Klobutz when he had been sent there by Merin. She explained that she had studiously acquired a Viennese accent after leaving Poland two years earlier.

If Manus still had any doubts, he was convinced when she went to a cupboard and handed him an envelope containing a considerable sum of money. Manus assumed that she was an agent for one of the Jewish organizations but he could never find out the source of the money nor how she identified him.

Another night in Vienna, Manus invited Mr. Kozuch to a café to persuade him to leave Vienna. He was the father of the Hanoar Hatzioni leaders, Juzek and Bolek, who was one of the parents who had come with the group of twenty. Mr. Kozuch was too heartbroken to consider Manus' plans for escape. His wife and one son, Juzek, had been killed during the liquidation of Sosnowiec. He had recently found out that his other son,

Bolek, had been seen hanging from a tree with a sign identifying him as a Polish partisan.

Manus and Mr. Kozuch fled when the Gestapo raided the cafe. That was the last time Manus saw him. Clearly, Mr. Kozuch had lost his will to survive; he must have been killed as no one ever saw or heard from him again..

Manus contacted a Pole who worked at the employment office placing Polish workers in Austria. The people in the office became suspicious of Manus's tale of why he needed new documents; they were not looking for Jews but for people who had escaped labor assignments.

Manus was promptly jailed, and landed in a cell with Poles. Though he didn't look Jewish, Manus spoke Polish with a Yiddish inflection. To allay the Poles' suspicion, he explained his accent by claiming that he was a German in Poland who had run away. The Poles suspected that he was a Polish traitor.

From the jail, Manus was sent to a camp for foreign workers near Vienna. A nurse noted his circumcision and despite Manus's excuses about previous surgery requiring circumcision, she suspected he was a Jew and he was again imprisoned. Once he tried to escape going through barbed wire and swimming across a canal. He was caught and beaten mercilessly by an SS officer.<sup>3</sup>

One day Allied planes were bombing the area where Manus was working outdoors digging air shelters. In the confusion, he escaped and then hoped to contact the girls who were still working at Steinhof Hospital. He feared that they would be frightened by his dreadful appearance, as a consequence of the beatings he had endured. He succeeded in reaching one of the

girls at the hospital on the phone. She managed to procure documents so that he again could pass as a Polish worker.

Manus decided it was safer to go to Graz rather than to join those in Salzburg. Austria was divided into districts and Graz belonged to a different police district and hence the police in Graz would not be likely to find out that Manus escaped from a camp for foreign workers near Vienna. He also knew that one of the Hanoar Hatzioni girls was working in a hospital in Graz. To minimize the chances that he could be traced, he bought tickets from one small rail station to another rather than going directly to Graz.

When he finally found the hospital in Graz where the Hanoar Hatzioni girl was working, he applied for a job. He claimed that he had studied medicine for two years in Krakow. They agreed to hire him but only after he had acquired local documents in addition to his Polish identity documents.

The local official, at the proper office that Manus locate, scrutinized the Polish identity document Manus showed him and looked very skeptical. He told Manus that he was the tenth Pole with the identical name to appear within the past few days. Manus pleaded with him, *"I did not kill or steal...I did not wrong anyone...So what do you care?"* He got the necessary papers.

Here was 22-year-old Manus pretending now to be Dr. Janofsky, performing autopsies. Then he confronted his first cadaver, a 100-year-old woman with one eye opened and one hand up in the air. Manus's incompetence did not enhance the reputation of Polish medical education. He had to admit that this work was new to him and confessed that he was not really trained to be a doctor. By pretending to be a Polish partisan who needed help, he got a sympathetic doctor to collude with him.

He then “became” that doctor’s convalescing patient rather than a practicing pathologist.

While at this hospital in Graz, Manus wrote to the girls at the Steinhof Hospital in Vienna, and to Lusia who was still working as a housemaid. Manus traveled from Graz to Vienna twice—an eight-hour ride—to convince Lusia that it was too dangerous for her to stay in Vienna any longer since the Gestapo knew about all the others whose papers stated, as did hers, their place of origin as Tarnow.

On one of Manus’s trips to Vienna, Lusia spent so much time with him that her concerned employer reported her absence to the police. Finally she was willing to heed Manus’ warnings that she too was in danger. One night in January, acting as though everything was normal, Lusia sneaked out and left for Graz with Manus.

En route to Graz, they conversed quietly in Polish and then realized how foolish they had been when a soldier sitting next to them said good-bye in Polish. He must have understood everything they said.

Lusia had to present her new forged documents to a local official in Graz. While Lusia watched in dread, the official held her papers up to the light. Surely recognizing that they were fake, his only comment was, “*Interessant...*” He nonetheless permitted Lusia to get a job at a hospital where she worked for about six weeks.

Every now and then, such a seemingly deliberate act of omission or commission on the part of a bureaucrat saved one of the young people.

Many years later, Lusia visited her employer who told her



that the Gestapo had been searching for her after she disappeared from Vienna.

Now I return to Rutka and her experiences in Salzburg. Rutka left for Salzburg with the *new* forged Polish document that Lusía had prepared for her.

As soon as Rutka and her friend arrived in Salzburg, a German security policeman asked for their documents for that locale. They regaled him with the standard story of losing their documents, their companions, and so forth. But he did not understand their Polish entreaties. Instead of the sympathy that they hoped for, he did a body search. When he found tickets for the Vienna streetcars in one of their pockets, he started screaming at them. Shortly a police car arrived and took them to a jail. After two days, they were turned over to the Gestapo.

In the interim, the girls did further battle with the lice that assailed their bodies. Rutka remembers, *“You kill 10 lice and 100 come back. I took off my kerchief to show my head filled with abscesses. Carefully, my friend pulled out clumps of lice stuck together with pus and blood.*

*“Isn’t it better to end this torment? They’re going to kill us anyway.”*

They realized as each meal was served and they were overlooked, that they were sentenced to a fast. It became a three-day fast. Then a detective whom they had witnessed beating a Ukrainian prisoner took them for questioning. After that, they were sentenced to another three-day fast. Fortunately their fellow prisoners shared some food with them. Rutka continues,

*“So we lived from day to day. The lice gave us no peace—they were eating us alive. I scratched my entire ulcerated body until I ached. I was scratching the skin on my abdomen; my legs were bloody. I had no*

*underwear, so the crocheted woolen dress was directly on my aching body. Scores of body lice feasted on me. Our nights full of pain and thoughts led to madness.*

*“Lord, Lord if anyone of my friends could see me, would they recognize me at all? To whom can I turn, to God? Where is God? If He existed, would he allow this to happen? Would there be wars, Hitler, transports, the destruction of thousands of people? For the millions of people who believe in him, they believe he will help them and yet they lost everything and only their belief sustained them and allowed them to endure the things that happened to them. But then they were all killed.*

*Before my eyes, I saw my family, my friends, people close to me—they were marching, one by one, in my delirium. I saw them as though they were passing by and vanishing—how did they feel, what did they think?*

*“Let this horrible night end. Let the lice give us a rest! When day came, we wanted it to be night so we could remove our comic masks and become ourselves. When night finally came, we prayed for daylight so we could not think”.*

It was almost Christmas. Although Rutka remained at the disposition of the Gestapo until the verification of her papers came from Poland, she was basically free to get work. Rutka was certain this was a mistake and became ever more certain when for three days nothing happened. One day when Rutka was working in the kitchen, an SS man, Vortmüller, spoke to her .

*“Listen, young lady, I am sure you want to go as a servant. I’ll give you to my good friend who has a bakery. You’ll at least have enough bread. And don’t try to tell me that they sent you from Poland with no clothes. I’m going to visit you twice a week and see how you’re making out.”*

*“I was confused about what he was up to but I followed him obediently. (Then he spoke to her employer.)*

*“This girl doesn’t know German, but she’s intelligent and will learn the language quickly; in the meantime you can help each other with a dictionary”, Vortmüller explained to my new employer, watching for my reaction. I pretended I didn’t understand a word.*

*“He and my new employer, who had been without help for half a year, warmly shook hands. She explained to me a little in gestures, and a little in German, my responsibilities. Cleaning a three-room apartment with a long hallway including the bathroom, helping in the kitchen, cleaning the shoes and clothing for her and her husband and three sons, cleaning the bakery and store, in the morning delivering the bread to town.*

*“You will sleep in the little room on a street near the bakery one block away. Each morning, you will have to bring coal for the house. You won’t lack food. Now—get dressed and for God’s sake put on some stockings—it’s Christmas time, and not May!” Then she gave me a detailed schedule for the day.*

*“It was so hard to get used to the back breaking work from 6 am to 10 pm, to the constant scolding, the frigid temperature, the loneliness. I still couldn’t find out where others were. I became convinced that everyone else had perished and that things were hopeless.*

*“All day long I kept my hair covered with a kerchief, afraid my employer would find out about my lice. I couldn’t buy any treatment so I’d smear kerosene on my head and then worry that the smell would give me away.*

*“According to my employer, Vortmüller was my friend who paid an obligatory official visit twice a week. When he was there, she treated me like an angel but told him all about my craziness. Vortmüller had left me some silk underwear but according to her, I was supposed to wear it on*

*Sunday only. Otherwise I always wore the same dress on a naked body, torn shoes on bare feet. It was already the middle of January in 1944, such severe cold that there wasn't a person who didn't advise me on my wardrobe, 'Poor girl, she is completely crazy!'*

*"Despite everything, I was in good humor because the mail still worked and I got a letter from my aunt in Poland saying that my mother was alive and a free person. I also got a letter from Sofia and Lesia [who were still working and planned to leave for Hungary where Leon and my mother already were].*

*"By then eight fingers on my hands had been septic for two weeks but I had to keep working without even a rag to cover it. My fingers were swollen and seeping pus and blood but my employer paid no attention... Finally, my employer asked what was the matter and when she saw my hands, she exclaimed, 'Good God! You need to see a doctor—how have you managed to keep working?' A moment later, though, she was ordering me around, getting angry when I was too slow.*

*"The doctor immediately sent me to the hospital where a surgeon lanced my finger, told me to rest for two weeks and come again for another examination in a week. The nurse who assisted the doctor said, 'Why were you so foolish to refuse narcotics for the surgery?' I could not tell her that I was afraid that if I had anesthesia I might betray something... I didn't even have money for the bus and had to run back like crazy so I wouldn't be late..."*

Often Rutka mused about her situation, "One year—so many happenings, so many changes in my life." Instead of becoming a concert pianist as she had dreamed, she felt she had been cast as an actress in a tragic drama.

One day when Rutka was alone, she dared to play the piano. Her employer arrived home and hearing Rutka play Chopin, she immediately called Vortmüller to question how it

was possible that “Rutka played the piano better than she washed the floors”.

Vortmüller immediately came to the house and talked to Rutka’s employer. *“I told you this was an intelligent girl...Soon we’ll know who she really is...in a week or two, I’ll have a response from Poland and then we’ll learn the whole truth.”*

Then he spoke to Rutka, giving her a subtle, warning,

*“The investigation of your case is in progress. If in a week you could get me your papers—your birth certificate from Radom or something of that sort, you will save yourself and me inquiries about you.”* Rutka realized that Vortmüller knew she could not procure such evidence given that her documents were forged.

The salvation might be that Rutka received a letter telling her that Leon met Tusia in Hungary and the others from Graz who had subsequently arrived there. They intended to rescue those remaining friends still in Austria. There were eight remaining Hanoar Hatzioni members in Salzburg and Leon would soon have arrangements for getting them to Hungary too. So they waited.

In the meantime, the war of the lice raged on.

*“After I destroyed the head lice, the body lice avenged the blood of their sisters. I couldn’t take my dress off because I only had the one.*

*“Then my employer found lice on herself and realized the source. She finally gave me some old pants and a blouse and sent my dress to the laundry. The next day my dress came back with a card saying that they couldn’t wash it because it was lousy. She went berserk, ‘Tomorrow all Salzburg will know that we have lice. I will teach you a lesson you will remember—I will beat you to a pulp. They will know it was your fault.’ I was spared because just then the air-raid sirens wailed.*

*“Her three-year-old son cried out and ran to me, something he*

*always did sensing that I was glad when there were air raids. And he thought it was fun when we ran to the shelter. Suddenly in the shelter he began to scratch himself and cry, 'Mamma, it's biting me.' She said innocently, 'What's biting you, dear child?' 'Lice,' he answered. The shelter resounded with laughter. 'Where did you get the lice from?' 'From her...'*

*"Everybody moved away from me—I never had it so good in the shelter, no one was leaning against me or talking to me. The radio was describing the approaching planes and the Germans forgot lousy me."*

Then one day Vortmüller came unexpectedly and told her that he had at last received an official letter from Poland, but had not yet opened it. That was frightening, because Vortmüller obviously knew that the letter would reveal that there was no "Rutka from Radom".

*"I know as well as you what the letter contains, but it is still lying in a sealed envelope in my desk drawer. I won't open it today because I've already finished work; tomorrow I'll be away from Salzburg, but I'll open it on Wednesday morning in the presence of my commanding officer. You are probably pleased that this response has finally arrived. To be certain is better than uncertainty. I believe you understand me well and will also inform your [other friends]. So then, goodbye—God bless you.' And he left.*

*"God, he has known all along about our meetings and is tracking us as one group..."*

It is quite astounding that Vortmüller not only was deliberately protecting Rutka, but must have intended to protect all of them. He, a Gestapo agent, could certainly have been killed for such action. Having been warned, Rutka left before the Wednesday when Vortmüller would open the letter.

She wrote to Karl. to let him know that she had to leave

Vienna and would go to Salzburg. As soon as Rutka reached Salzburg, she went to the meeting place that Karl suggested.

*“Barely four months had passed since we’d seen each other. Karl couldn’t recognize me, so changed I was with my kerchief on my head, with my hand in that sling, with abscesses on my face...Half an hour later two other friends joined us and were walking with us.*

*“...Going around all winter without underpants meant that my friend and I had developed bladder problems. First she, then I, would say, ‘excuse me,’ and go into the bushes, leaving the two others speaking loudly so that the one in the bushes could overhear and know whether anyone was approaching.*

*“I told the others about Vortmüller’s warning and we composed a letter to our friends in Graz asking for ‘new’ birth certificates. Before we knew it, evening approached and we had to stop until the next Sunday.*

*“Karl bought me some clothes. But regretfully he said that he could buy shoes and some clothes but not girl’s underpants on the black market. Several days later we were overjoyed when Karl brought us a pair of wooden shoes and one warm glove. My friend got the wooden shoes—her old ones had completely fallen apart—and we decided to share the glove from week to week. The glove was a man’s and big; I crammed both my hands into it and warmed my hands—and my heart.” ly got to Budapest...He was the one behind the messenger who took us to the Border.”*

Lusia described their journey from Graz to Hungary. *“Oh, what a terrible crossing – walking in the winter time. It was quite a group – eight people – all girls. Bad shoes and the snow was very deep. Our escorts were a man and two women, from the border of Hungary. They got money from our friends in Hungary.*

The group reached Sopron, a town in Hungary close to the border. There, *“I still remember our first meeting with a Jewish fami-*

ly. They took us to a Jewish house where the man had a beard. We hadn't seen a Jew with a beard for four years.

"Leon came and from there we went to Budapest. Leon divided among us certificates of people who were dead or who had left Hungary for passage to Palestine. We didn't know how he got them.<sup>4</sup> By January, there were about twenty or thirty of us in Budapest." Lusia was referring to other members of Hanoar Hatzioni from Bedzin and Sosnowiec or nearby towns, who had fled from Poland and reached Hungary separately from those in this story.

Under the leadership of Leon, several weeks later, they helped those in Salzburg escape from Austria as well. A strange woman approached Rutka and handed her a note from Leon, "You should follow whoever bears this message...the aliya awaits you."

This woman helped to smuggle them out of Austria. On March 4, 1944, at 5 am, they crossed the Austrian-Hungarian border. When they reached Sopron close to the border, the smuggler accompanying them announced, "You're free—tomorrow you get a train to Budapest."

On March 19, 1944 two weeks after Rutka's arrival, the Germans occupied Hungary.

To sum up: Thirty-two people had come to Austria from Sosnowiec. Fourteen were caught and killed in Austria. These included the parents of Fredka Oksenhendler and Mr. Kozuch, the father of Juzek and Bolek, one boy and the ten who had supplied funds but were not members of Hanoar Hatzioni. Two of the people who had come from Sosnowiec were imprisoned in Austria as Poles and survived the war. Leon escaped to Hungary. He then arranged for the twelve girls be smuggled into Hungary some via Graz in January, and the rest from Salzburg in March—a safe haven at last, or so they thought.



## Chapter 5

- <sup>1</sup> Dateline Vienna in the Spring of 1938, March 1988, International Herald Tribune (on the 50th anniversary of the Anschluss)
- <sup>2</sup> Imet Manus in Tel Aviv. He spoke in Hebrew and not in English. A Canadian bilingual student in Israel translated for us.
- <sup>3</sup> After the war, Manus would identify the SS man who had beaten him. For this and other crimes, the man was sentenced to 25 years in prison (from Manus's Massuah testimony).
- <sup>4</sup> Fredka had left Budapest with legal documents in February 1944.



## Surviving in Hungary

1944

*“The persecution of Jews in Hungary is probably the greatest and most horrible crime ever committed in the whole history of the world...”*

*-Winston Churchill, 1944<sup>1</sup>*

Tusia and her mother arrived in Hungary from Slovakia in October 1943, the first of the Hanoar Hatzioni youth from Bedzin or Sosnowiec to reach Hungary.

A Slovak Zionist had told Tusia how to find Brand, a leader in the Jewish Rescue Committee in Hungary. *“Our first smile came from Joel Brand when we had no money, no common language, no documents...the first smile in Budapest...”*

For four years, Tusia had been oblivious of Jewish holidays. Brand told her that it was Yom Kippur, the Holy Day of Atonement and escorted her and her mother to a large synagogue. In 1943, that Budapest synagogue was crowded, the congregants were dressed up, the Rabbi chanted the Yom Kippur services, and most amazing, city police respectfully directed traffic in front of the synagogue. Tusia could not understand how it was possible that the situation in Hungary was so different from that in Poland.

Most Hungarian Jews regarded themselves as Magyars, loyal Hungarians. They constituted about, 5% of the Hungarian population, approximately 450,000. As was the case for Jews in Europe, they tended to live in cities and towns. Over 40% of

them lived in Budapest where they were about 23% of the city's population. The rest were dispersed in comparatively small numbers in provincial towns.

In contrast with Jews in Poland, about half the Jews were middle class—from lower to upper. Though their numbers were small, they made up a large percentage of people in trade and in the professions. In the 30's they constituted more than 50% of doctors, over 30% of editors and journalist, as well as of engineers and chemists, and roughly 30% of musicians. Over 60% of large commercial firms and over 45% of large industries were in Jewish hands. (Polonsky unpublished notes)

The circumstances started to change for Hungarian Jews in 1938. Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria became German satellites. The Hungarian government then passed its first law restricting Jews to 20% of the liberal professions. In May 1939, a law forbade Jews to be judges, lawyers, teachers, or members of Parliament. (Gilbert, Atlas)

In 1938 and 1940, to make Hungary amenable to serving his interests, Hitler had returned to Hungary areas that had been taken from them after World War I, part of Slovakia and southern Carpathian Ruthenia. Then, in 1940, by orders of the Reich, Romania ceded much of Transylvania to Hungary. The Jews in these annexed areas increased the number of Jews in Hungary from nearly 450,000 in the 30's to about 725,000 in 1941. In July 1941, the government deported thousand of Jews, most of whom had emigrated from Poland and other nearby countries and were not Hungarian Jews. (Library of Congress Country Studies, 1989)

The Hungarian regime could be described as “ambivalent”, simultaneously combining official anti- Semitism with tolerance

for Jews. Restrictions on Jews increased in the late 30's and early 40's, influenced by German pressure and probably the growing acceptance of Nazi racism. However, there was continuing concern about the negative impact of anti-Jewish measures on the economy.

The Jewish response to the increasing restrictions was to emphasize their Magyar patriotism but also to object to the designation of Jews as different from other Hungarians. However, assimilationist Jewish leaders stated that they must tolerate their 'homeland's decisions. In 1938-39, over 14,000 Jews converted to Christianity exempting them from some restrictions. In contrast, many other Jews became identified with a sense of Jewish nationalism. Zionism, which had interested few Jews in Hungary, then became increasingly favored by them.

Hungary became more closely associated with Germany in military matters and in June 1941 joined Germany in Operation Barbarossa, the war on the Soviet Union. Soviet troops killed or wounded over 100,000 Hungarian troops in that venture increasing anti-Axis hostility in Hungary and leaving only a remnant of the military for aiding the Axis powers. (op. cit.)

In 1942, there was some governmental interest in breaking with Hitler but the fear was that the Germans would then occupy Hungary.

By 1943, the Allies were completing the conquest of North Africa and advancing in Southern Europe. The satellite states were reassessing their relationship with Germany and reconsidering relationships with the Allies. By April, the Romanians were putting out feelers to the Allies and joined them in August in the war against Germany. The Germans feared that the Hungarians, too, might even try to join the Allies.

Hitler summoned Miklos Horthy, the Hungarian regent, to Germany and pressed him to fulfill German demands for strong measures against Jews. Hitler contended that Jews and those few married to Hungarian aristocracy were responsible for Hungarian gestures to the Allies. Horthy conceded that the Jews were a “problem” in Europe but objected to having Jews wear the yellow badge and protested that Hungary did not have the means for deportation of the Jews. Nevertheless the pressure from Germany and from the radical right within Hungary made Horthy accede further to German demands. Yet, the educated and sophisticated Budapest Jews still could not believe that they would become German victims.

The author and holocaust survivor, Elie Wiesel, learned about the arrival of the Jews from Bedzin<sup>2</sup> in October 1943. Wiesel wrote that he was “...appalled by the lack of information and attention in Hungary when so much was known. Apparently, many people in Budapest were informed. In 1943, for instance, refugees from Bedzin reached Budapest. These young refugees...told the story of Bedzin and Sosnovic (sic). And they told the story of Polish Jewry. They told the story, period! And the story of Auschwitz!”

“We had a strange sense of security there, and as we know, Budapest was still a very quiet, peaceful city until 1944. I remember I was there to see a doctor in the Jewish hospital in 1943. The war was going on. The Jews in Budapest lived as in a strange hallucination...The cafes were full...yet the people from Bedzin had told the story.” (Wiesel, in Braham & Vago 1985).

Hitler summoned Horthy to Germany on March 15, 1944 when Horthy capitulated to more of Hitler’s demands. What Horthy did not know was that the train taking him back to

Hungary also brought German officials who were to set up the new government under their administration. By the time the train arrived on March 19, 1944 the Germans were taking over Hungary without firing a shot. Hungarians, Jews and non-Jews, did not anticipate that German occupation of Hungary.

Eichmann was sent to Budapest on March 21, 1944 to organize the deportation of Hungarian Jews. Eichmann knew that it was important to have the local people carry out his operations. On April 7 at a secret meeting in the Ministry of Interior in Budapest, orders were sent to all provincial governors, mayors, the gendarmerie and the police stating that Jews were to be purged irrespective of sex or age and sent to concentration camps.

Between May and July 1944, the Hungarians delivered Jews from the provinces, but not from Budapest, to concentration camps at the fastest rate of any country occupied by the Germans. Eichmann had to manage with fewer trains than he requested because of the need for transport by the retreating German military. Hence he crowded 80 to 100 Jews in railway cars, much exceeding their capacity, and many perished en route.

As Barbara Tuchman described, "Nazi efficiency reached a climax in 1944 when Germany was on the defensive and the demands on manpower and resources might have been considered more exigent than the Final Solution. Yet rather than slackening, the program was speeded up as if to kill every last Jew while there was still time. In Hungary, under the threat of the advancing Soviet Army, deportations at Eichmann's personal direction were pressed with such urgency that at time five trains loaded with 14,000 people were arriving at Auschwitz daily,

more than the camp's crematoria comprising 46 ovens with a total capacity of 500 bodies an hour, could handle. By July 11, 1944 (almost) all of Hungary's Jews (including Transylvania) outside the capital, a total of 437,402 had been deported." (Hausner 1966)

The number of Nazi victims in the areas annexed to Hungary exceeded 250,000 in a period of eight weeks. Between March and July 1944, a total of over 400,000 Hungarian Jews had been deported.<sup>3</sup> Because of protests by leaders in the Catholic Church and others, Eichmann agreed to spare priests who were Jewish converts, families of soldiers, foreign Jews and those who intermarried. (Gilbert)

Since Eichmann knew foreign diplomats from neutral countries were in Budapest, he limited his anti-Jewish actions to minimize the chances of their arousing the Western world to the fate of the Jews in Hungary.

The Hungarian and Polish nations had a history of friendship that manifested itself even after Poland was occupied and Hungary became an ally of Germany. Polish Jews who came to Hungary after 1939 benefited from the fact that the Polish Government in exile located in London had set up a committee in Hungary that supplied funds for Polish refugees, many of whom had been in the military and fled in 1939 at the time of the German invasion. Subsequently Jews from Poland, who had Polish identity documents, received aid from the Polish Committee that had offices in various locations in Hungary.<sup>4</sup>

In November 1943, the estimate was that about 20,000 Jewish refugees from German occupied countries had arrived in Hungary, from the time of the German occupation of Poland,



mostly from Poland and Slovakia. Among these were about 100 Zionist youth members of various organizations. About 60 members of Hashomer Hatzair had arrived in 1942. The Hanoar Hatzioni youth from Sosnowiec arrived in late 1943 and early 1944. Though there was some communication among them, members of each youth organization associated themselves primarily with members of their respective organizations in Budapest.

Zionism having a comparatively minor role in Hungary, the total membership of Zionist youth in Hungary was only about 200. Youth activities went on without much attention by authorities but were officially permitted after December 1943. However, Zionist youth in Hungary were readier to believe the threat to Jews than were others.

In late 1943, the Hungarian Hanoar Hatzioni youth organized a meeting at Lake Balaton. Tusia and her 17 years old brother who had arrived in Hungary shortly after Tusia, played major roles in instructing their new youthful Hungarian Zionist friends in the use of weapons, creating an illegal organization, ways to hide and to resist. This orientation by the Poles in 1943 enabled the Hungarian Zionist youth to react quickly and efficiently when the Germans did in fact occupy Hungary in March 1944.<sup>5</sup> (Ronen 1994).

The Hungarian Jewish Rescue Committee, consisting mainly of Zionists, had been established earlier to aid victimized Jews in other countries, never imagining that Hungarian Jews would also be victims.

After the German occupation of Hungary, the Committee played a central role on behalf of the endangered Hungarian

Jews. That Committee had established contact with representatives of the Yishuv, the Jewish community in Palestine, who were in Istanbul, a center for agents of various organizations seeking to aid Jews. After the German occupation, Joel Brand of the Committee was responsible for the *tiyul*, the smuggling of people from Hungary to Romania for transport to Palestine. (Cohen)

The Sosnowiec youth joined with a few Hanoar Hatzioni youth from towns near Sosnowiec, who had individually managed to reach Hungary. Together, they became identified as *The Group*, comprising about 40 young people. It was with the arrival of the Polish Hanoar Hatzioni youth, though considered by other Jews to be ‘troublemakers’, that the Hungarian Zionist youth underground really began in earnest. *The Group’s* work with the Budapest Hanoar Hatzioni organization became known for its influence on Jewish resistance activities in Hungary. (Cohen)

Thanks to its international contacts, the Halutz (Zionist youth) resistance possessed foreign currency, large food supplies and some arms. They received aid from the Swiss Legation and the International Red Cross. The American Joint Distribution Committee was indirectly providing funds throughout this period. (Cohen)

Those from *The Group* already in Hungary worried about their friends who were still in Austria and how to get them to Hungary as well. In late 1943, Leon, with his accustomed audacity, twice crossed the border between Hungary and Austria. Leon’s activities resulted in *The Group* sometimes being referred to as “Leon’s Group”.

In January 1944, Leon succeeded in locating smugglers to bring those in Austria to Hungary. He found out from the Hungarian Hanoar Hatzioni about the comparatively safe border crossing from Austria into Sopron where there was an Orthodox rabbi who might help him. Leon did not speak Hungarian, so he conversed with the Rabbi in his seldom used Yiddish. He also donned a *yarmulke*/skull cap so the Rabbi would regard him as a religious Jew. He conveyed the impression that the smugglers would be rescuing young male Orthodox boys rather than a bevy of secular Zionist girls. With money provided by Leon, the Rabbi agreed to hire smugglers to escort Hanoar Hatzioni members from Austria.

In early February 1944 Leon's efforts resulted in eight girls, Lusía among them, escaping to Hungary. They left from Graz and had a tortuous journey on foot to Sopron in Hungary. Leon met them in Sopron to take them to Budapest. On the train, they were hardly surprised but depressed to learn from Leon about deaths of more Hanoar Hatzioni youth, who had remained in Sosnowiec.

Lusia was appalled to find out that Felusia, her younger sister, had not been cared for as Lusía imagined when she left Poland. But at least Felusia was safe in a Budapest orphanage where Lusía went immediately after her arrival. The Jews in Budapest had made special efforts to create orphanages for Jewish children.

Like Tusía the new arrivals thought the situation surreal. Lusía remembered, "*When we came to Budapest and we saw shops with food that we hadn't seen for years—cakes, fruit, I said to my friend, 'Hold my hands because I will steal'... We were treated as though we*

were crazy...Jews in Hungary still thought what happened to Jews in Poland could not happen in Hungary." This was only weeks before the German occupation of Hungary.

A few weeks after the German occupation, it seemed wise for the Sosnowiec youth to disperse. Some went south to Mohac. In April 1944, Tusia contrived to spend some time there. She was close to the border of Serbia and hoped to join with Tito's partisans. "*They made arrangements for peasants to cross us over the border to meet a Tito partisan...I hid my Jewishness...She said 'If there are Jews among you, don't send them.'*"...That terminated Tusia's discussion and she soon returned to Budapest.

Manus had traveled from Austria dressed like a peasant with a scarf bundled around his neck so he looked like he was suffering from a bad toothache. This was his disguise so he would not have to talk and immediately be suspect for not speaking Hungarian. He knew that Leon was desperately trying to save everyone and to procure some funds from the Hungarian Zionist Committee. He found out that Fredka and a few others from Sosnowiec had legal papers for emigration from Hungary which permitted them to leave for Palestine in February 1944.

In March, only days before the German occupation a Hungarian woman smuggled *The Group* members in Salzburg, into Hungary. Leon used his contacts with the Palestine Jewish representatives who had been sent to Istanbul in 1943 to procure some funds.

As Rutka related in her memoir, the smugglers quarreled about the distribution of the payment for their job and one betrayed the group to the police. Immediately they were arrested for illegally crossing the border. The police beat the men, searched them for money and then sent all of them to a police

station. At the police station they were startled to be greeted by an assembly of Poles. The new arrivals learned that these Poles were refugees in Hungary who were required to report once a month to the police.

*“Welcome, welcome,” they shouted and grasped our hands. There were about 300 of them and everyone had to greet the new “Poles”. We were amazed.*

*“Are they blind? Up to now we were more scared of any Pole than of the Germans. Poles smelled Jews a mile away—could we really fool them? I didn’t have to wait long for the answer. An older man inquired: ‘How did you people get out of the ghetto?’ he whispered.*

*“What are you talking about, what ghetto?” By then most of the Polish Poles had dispersed and only the official Polish Committee stayed. [Luckily it seemed as if we did convince them that we were not Jews.]*

*“Look here, countrymen,” the Polish Chairman said, ‘We’ll do everything in our power to get you out of here. We won’t spare any efforts, any money. Your plight gets complicated because they think you are Jews—here, too, by law, Jews are treated differently. We...will vouch that you are Aryans, if you wish. And we...believe we can win your case. I believe you are already toughened up enough in this struggle, so that you’ll emerge triumphant.’”*

The police suspected their newly arrived captives were really Jews and asked questions to test them – questions that a good Christian should have been able to answer. Though they had rehearsed the proper answers, one girl overwhelmed by fear confessed being Jewish and then others did so.

Rutka expressed her feelings after the confessions, *“Constantly we feared just such a turn of events. So why did I sudden-*

ly feel relief—a strange sweetness, a weight lifting, my ugly mask discarded...I am myself...

“Now the attitude of the policeman changed. He claimed that now that we had told the truth, we would lack nothing. We had to be penalized for unlawfully crossing the border, but then we’d be free to go. And then they asked about our experiences, how we fled Poland, what we experienced, if the horrible tales about the Germans were true. The chairman of the Polish administration was still waiting for us in the other room.” He told them they would be better off admitting they were Jews, not Poles, because then the Jewish Committee in Sopron would help them. The Poles who were jailed with them, also warned them that if they didn’t do that, they could be sent back to Austria.

They were allowed to remain in Hungary but received a two-week sentence for illegally crossing the border. While in jail, the Jewish community sent them food and was most solicitous as was the Polish Committee. To their relief, they could at last safely acknowledge that they were Jewish. But their relief was short lived.

On March 19, 1944, the jailers were obviously perturbed. The Germans had occupied Hungary! According to Rutka’s memoir a rabbi visited to assure them, “Don’t be afraid—the Germans are only going to Romania.” apparently sharing the disbelief of the Budapest Jews about their fate.

Karl described how, “At the end of March, after the German invaded Hungary, we were taken to a larger prison in Budapest from which Jews were shipped to Auschwitz. We boys were taken to one part of the prison and girls to another. Now we claimed that each of us had one Christian parent, and that was why we had survived until now.”

Rutka too remembers her encounters in the enormous prison of Tolonshaz in Budapest. *“The girls were taken to a large overcrowded hall and though it was night, no one was asleep. It was a horrifying sight—younger and older women were sitting everywhere, on the floor or on benches. They were either prostitutes or women who were on the streets when Budapest was occupied. They looked awful and the stench was unbearable. Screams came from one cell corner that had apparently been reserved for a woman with seizures.*

*“Our coming seemed to make them stop quarreling over a piece of floor. Since we looked different they seemed curious and questioned us non-stop but we could not speak Hungarian so could not answer. What a relief to be moved to another cell the next day. There the inmates were in two distinct groups. One consisted of younger prostitutes, the other of Jewish women [mostly Hungarian] who had been in cafes or theaters when the Germans came into Budapest. These women were upper class and looked clean and well-dressed.*

*“But to them we looked awful—Polish Jews, with our tattered dresses, red calloused hands, hair with conspicuous lice. They were repelled by two of us who looked particularly bad. Others looked slightly more civilized and were fairly well dressed because after all they used to work in a hospital.*

*“Just two women of the entire Jewish group approached us. They were Slovak Jews who had suffered a lot and could sympathize with our situation and we talked together in German for hours.*

*“The strange procedure in that prison was that inmates were given virtually no food but could have it brought from outside the prison. So our Jewish Hungarian cellmates were well supplied by their families in town. And the prostitutes with the agreement of the prison guards earned their food by ‘services’ to the police at night.*

*“Not all the prostitutes went out at night and those who did had modest ‘incomes’. They shared their pickings with each other and with us too. They realized we got nothing from the outside.*

*“The Hungarian Jewish women got three meals a day from their relatives but did not offer to share any. Two of us... would squat in front of them and stare at their mouths. What really irritated them, however, was that I said nothing...my friend’s words were unintelligible to them but they could guess the meaning. But they couldn’t avoid my staring. I loved to watch them eating!...Did they even know we were in prison? Perhaps they did but were too scared to contact us.*

*We had been in the prison about a week and one day we were standing close to the window when we heard the Hanoar Hatzioni whistle that was our Sosnowiec signal from back when. Looking out we saw a Catholic cemetery and four people with flowers who seemed to be praying in front of a memorial statue. It was my mother and three members of our group!”* Rutka had doubted that she would ever see her mother again. It gave her a new spurt of hope and energy.

An immediate decision was to affirm that they were Jews, if only for the express purpose of receiving the Passover meal that the Hungarian Jewish community would be supplying for Jewish prisoners.

They were transferred to another prison, Rombac. It had been an interment camp for illegal refugees. It permitted food to be brought in and had rather lax rules despite vigilant police in large numbers.

Karl, who was also imprisoned there, explained in an interview, *“The Gestapo took out Jews and political prisoners for deportation... so we wanted to escape as fast as possible... We were in contact [with others in The Group who were in Budapest] all the time by sending them notes in the food packages we return to them after we had*



eaten—in jam jars, or butter, or sausage. So they looked for the notes and hid answers in pots...to fix the time, place, and manner of escape.

“...It had to occur during the evening promenade... in the courtyard... near a way to the street. One building was very old and served as the WC. In this building we spent three or four days making a hole in the wall to ‘our court’. We had to get rope to go down one at a time. The building was about two stories high.”

Karl had a penknife hidden in his boots. He worked non-stop for 12 hours to make the hole big enough for a person.

“In the evening, Karl told us he had finished his task. Both of Karl’s hands were wounded and bleeding. The hole was covered to prevent its being spotted from outside. We knotted bed sheets into ropes and hid them. The house was not that tall...but on the other side of the wall there was a hole being dug for the foundation of another house—and this seemed an abyss!

“At 6 pm all inmates and the guards were together at the long tables eating and drinking. We had received plenty of food from outside, enough to last several days. Knowing that either our escape would succeed or we would be finished, we didn’t need the food and we decided to serve a feast for others in the camp. “We sang the songs of our youth organization as if we were back home. Then we sang the Yiddish song *Gebirtig, ‘es brennt, bruderlekh, es brennt’* (‘It’s aflame, brothers, it’s aflame’)<sup>5</sup>, hoping to encourage others to escape, to make them understand that they were doing nothing while the city was burning. We saw from some people’s expressions that they got our message so we kept singing.<sup>6</sup>

Then we served the dinner.

“For ourselves, we couldn’t know our fate—whether or not the first person might be caught or the second, or if the bed sheets would hold or someone might be killed... Two boys were to serve as the anchors to hold

*the roped sheets. Karl was to be the last to climb down by tying the rope to a pillar to anchor himself. The escape time was to be soon after dark and by roll call at 10 pm, we were supposed to be far away.*

*“While we continued to sing and to urge on others, we were supposed to disappear one by one from the common tables. At the last minute one of the girls panicked about going first. I traded lots with her and went up first. Karl pointed to the escape hole and as we looked out, we were dumb struck to see several male shadows and to hear whispering. Had we been discovered?”*

*“Then someone whistled our Hanoar Hatzioni signal and said, ‘Throw away the rags [the bed sheets]—we’ll get proper ropes up for you.’”*

Learning their friends’ escape plan from messages back and forth concealed in food packages, four of those earlier arrivals in Budapest were there to lend their assistance from the ground. Lusía recalled that dramatic rescue.

*“There were only two boys; the others were girls. They were afraid someone would fall so Karl tied his end of the rope to something [in the top story] made of wood with a sailor’s knot. Four of us went to the rendezvous...Manus, Leon, Tusía and I...[we wanted] to take them to a safe place. We each had a weapon and we brought a rope like you use in a gym class. In addition to us, there were some others nearby with weapons and First Aid. We saw the hole and the bricks started falling almost on our heads...we saw that the people inside already had worried about this and had prepared all sorts of rags as they were not sure we would have a rope...they lowered their rope of rage. We tied our real rope to theirs.*

*“Each person put the rope around the middle of his body and lowered himself. It took about 20 minutes to work this out. I thought it would take 10 or 12 minutes—all eight made it. The last was Karl and*

*he was impatient and glided quickly...the palms of his hands were raw and he needed medical treatment for a long time. Then we scattered."*

Another hair's breadth escape—one day later, they learned that those still in the internment camp were delivered to Auschwitz! This exploit gave them the reputation of miracle workers among the other refugees in Budapest.

Rutka writes about the aftermath of the escape, *"While the authorities pursued us, we entered a period of rest and relaxation. We were living in a villa that belonged to a Hungarian army officer...who was friendly with a Pole who introduced himself as Count Peter Rastawiecki. And he was an extraordinary person! Handsome, brilliant, and impressed anyone who met him. He claimed to be an Aryan Polish nobleman, then would laugh and pretend to be a janitor's son. Sometimes he would tell us he was an illegitimate child of a rabbi's daughter and was a street sweeper. He was amused by our curiosity at his never-ending stories of his origins.*

*"But it hardly mattered who he really was; he had contacts in different circles all over Hungary. Leon had the highest regard for Peter. To us, it didn't matter whether he was doing because of a genuine desire to save us or only to get paid.*

*"The villa was at our disposal. At first, we all slept in one ground floor room. When that began to seem dangerous, we moved to the basement where we installed wooden cots. There we were comfortable and undisturbed. The 'legal' members of our group would come to visit us one at a time. When the streets of Budapest became dangerous for Poles, they moved in with us. Sometimes Leon would go downtown with one of the girls to meet friends. We didn't want too many people coming and going on a quiet street because that would arouse suspicion.*

*"I was the first one to go downtown with Leon who took me to meet my mother. We spent several hours with my mother at the board-*

*ing house where she was staying. Though Leon promised we would have frequent visits, that to was our last meeting for a long time. Having spent a wonderful day with my mother, I returned to our safe haven."*

Peter sheltered 15 or 16 of them. Lusia remembered how amused they were at Peter's reaction to them. Having been told the young people were Christian resistance fighters, Peter queried, "if these people are fighters, how come there are so many women—and if they are a harem, why are the women so ugly?" Peter's dog's Hungarian name was "Dirty Jew"—whether this expressed his sentiments or was a cover for his activities, they were never sure.

The Polish youth worked closely with the Hungarian youth though the lack of a common language did hinder them. One Hungarian youth group member was a printer who worked nights to generate forms that could provide Aryanzation papers not only for their members in Budapest but also for those in provincial towns. As a precaution, they replaced papers frequently to minimize chances of detection.

What had been in effect a simple cottage industry was converted to mass production. Together, they developed virtually a forging factory, much better than they had in Poland. Among the most successful methods used to reproduce the official stamp was the one used by Beisky in Poland, cutting a die in hard black rubber with a razor.

The talented Zionist forgers discovered that supplying forged documents could elicit helpful attitudes from non-Jews who needed forged documents for other reasons. The youth could use the forged documents as bribes to give to non-Jews in exchange for hiding Jewish activists. The Jewish forgers sometimes supplied Hungarian underground members with docu-

ments as well. Thousands of forged documents circulated among resistance groups.

In her essays Tusia describes the Hungarian forging operation,

*“The orders for ‘the documents for life’ were given to a few Hungarian artists. One of the Hungarian girls had a special gift for forging signatures. The war threw her into this. The war connected her with a group of young lonely people who became a family—the streets their home, the room above a basilica was their school of forgery. She and one of the boys worked terribly hard and quickly, knowing the need for immediate help so as not to endanger lives of people without identity cards.”*

To forge documents, they had to be able to acquire officials’ signatures to copy. Tusia recounts one of the fortunate but perplexing deeds of an official named Farkas whose signature they had been forging and whom they considered a dangerous man.

*“I went to the girl who was such a good forger...to give her certificates for people who lived in her area—the certificates were from the underground for Jews from Poland who were in hiding. This time I met her near the house...her looks warned me. There was a Hungarian detective who asked me to show my identity card. I took it out—there were also identity cards for others in my briefcase.*

*“He took us to Farkas who suspected we were Jews—Farkas the Terrible. We all had his forged signatures. I tried to explain in German that we were Christian but [the forger’s] German was mixed with Yiddish and Farkas must have known we were Jews. He said, ‘Speak Polish and I’ll understand because I speak Slovakish.’ He was more interested in linguistics than in the prisoners.*

*“He was writing his real signature next to the forged one! You could see the big difference. I was petrified.*

*“Then we were free to go. We left and rushed to the boy who was also a forger with the find—the true signature of Farkas! The forgers hastily made two Christian birth certificates for girls who were in prison and two for villagers with signatures of different priests. One drew and the other one signed and then they crumpled the paper to make it look used. The two in jail managed to be released a few weeks later as ‘Christians’.”*

Was this carelessness on his part or could it be possible that Farkas intended to help them by letting them see his real signature? They would never know.

Tusia described how dangerous it was to distribute documents. *“One of the people who helped was a man called Scherski. He was a tall fellow with a dark moustache who pretended to be a Hungarian businessman with a briefcase...he was a mature man with a wife and child whom he endangered... Scherski received requests from people for forged documents; he also delivered these documents Scherski usually paraded up and down the street in front of the church. People would sneak him requests in little notes. Then he would go into a house and a small room and empty his pockets of the requests for Christian documents and residence permits.*

*“Someone would take the finished documents and drop them from the windows of the tiny room above the gilded basilica to Scherski in the street...”*

*“Suddenly one day three policemen approached him and asked for his identity card, trying to grab his case. Scherski fled and the police pursued him to the roof of a house as he clutched the briefcase with documents...The police caught up with him and questioned him. Despite torture, he revealed nothing and they killed him. Then the people whose ‘orders’ he was carrying were in grave danger and we had to forge new documents for them.”*

Despite a comparative respite from danger, they knew that the Russians were moving west and German defeat looked imminent. As the Germans became more desperate, the Budapest situation worsened considerably. By now, even members of the Polish Committee, all Gentiles, were being sought and detained by the police. Until the German occupation, Hungarians had spoken of Poles as ‘brethren’ and now they were referred to as ‘Polish spies’. Police regularly raided cafes, parks—anywhere Poles might be.

Though Hungarians used to treat all refugees from Poland as Poles, now the situation for Jews became highly dangerous since Eichmann was deporting Jews at an unprecedented rate. Group members held agonizing discussions about the seeming hopelessness of their situation. They knew they were on police lists as dangerous foreigners. Their desperation led them to contemplate killing a Gestapo officer and even Eichmann; however, only suicide seemed a real option.

Rutka describes how they handled the situation in Budapest. *“Our comrades were divided in two parts. During the day, they would roam all over the city; at night one group would hide in the villa, the other (including some parents, among them my mother and Leon’s parents) had found a place to live in a third rate hotel in one of the Budapest suburbs, owned by Peter’s girl friend. And that turned out to be our downfall. One night the police raided the hotel and our parents were handed over to the Gestapo. We had no idea how they had been discovered and suspected the police would follow the same clues to discover us next...*

*“On May 19, we left our villa and dispersed all over the city, with no ID cards, no place to sleep, no address where we might be found. We were supposed to meet each other three times a day in three different*

*places all over the city to check on each other. It was impossible to survive like that any longer...*"

The members of *The Group* were aware at the time of special attempts to save Jews. They learned about the possibility of going to Romania. From Constanta on the Black Sea, Jews were being transported to Istanbul and then over land to Palestine. In the course of the next few months, about 15,000 Jews joined the *tiyul*, the tortuous journey from Hungary to Romania but many were caught and sent to Auschwitz. (Ronen)

*The Group* members were aware of efforts of the Jews to bargain with the Nazis for exchange of Jewish lives for goods. Such efforts were handled by the Rescue Committee which aided them. The Rescue Committee pursued these efforts knowing that the Allies did not favor such negotiations and that they required payment of considerable sums of money to the Germans in exchange for saving Jewish lives. Their negotiations with the Nazis aroused controversy at the time and in retrospect have remained controversial.

The first notable effort to bargain with Eichmann was exchanging Jews for trucks in May 1944. Joel Brand (the person who introduced Tusia to Hungarian Zionists) went to Turkey to try to influence the Allies to provide supplies for the Germans, supposedly in exchange for saving thousands of Jewish lives. However, the Allies viewed this as some kind of plot.<sup>6</sup>

This apparently became a disappointment of a lifetime for Joel Brand. Hirschmann of the United States War Refugee Board met with Joel Brand in Istanbul and judged him to be honorable and credible. The hope was that the allies would embark upon negotiations to provide trucks as a tactic to delay German destruction of Jews.



The second negotiation with Eichmann resulted in about 18,000 Hungarian Jews being sent to Austria as workers who lived in at least tolerable conditions.

Reszo Kasztner, secretary of the Relief and Rescue Committee, played a major role in all of these negotiations with the Germans. In the summer of 1944, he negotiated with the Nazis for a train to take Jews to Switzerland. Himmler saw these negotiations with Jews as a way to get needed materiel. Also, the Germans seemed to attribute to Jews great influence on the Allied governments that might gain them favor after their defeat.

Six members of *The Group* offered places on that train did not accept. They didn't want to leave other members of *The Group*; besides, they had no confidence that a train presumably carrying Jews to safety would not end up at a concentration camp. However, about 1700 Jews on that train, reached safety in Switzerland after some frightening delays en route. (Bauer 1994).

Up to the middle of 1944, there was little action on behalf of persecuted Jews by foreign governments. American efforts were dedicated to winning the war. Not until 1944, did Roosevelt agree to a special effort to save Jews. He then created the War Refugee Board (WRB) to deal with the problems of Jews. Ira Hirschmann was sent as the WRB representative in Turkey and the Middle East. He had special permission to abrogate some of the restrictions imposed upon ambassadors or other American envoys when dealing with an enemy.

Jewish representatives in Istanbul sent funds and information to the Hungarian Jewish organizations using funds supplied covertly by the American Joint Distribution Committee.

Rescue efforts depended upon negotiating with the Germans and making large sums of money available to them. The efforts of Hirschmann and others necessitated making deals with all kinds of people some of whom were 'unsavory types' who for a price would take great risks. All of these efforts demanded great secrecy. (Hirschmann 1946).

In mid-1944, with Allied victory in sight, Pope Pius XII, President Roosevelt, and Sweden's King Gustav warned Horthy to halt deportations of Jews.<sup>7</sup> He did so on July 7, 1944, much to the surprise of Eichman, who tried to reinstate the deportations.

Through the War Refugee Board, arrangements were made for Raoul Wallenberg to come from Sweden. arriving in July after most Jews had been deported. He has become one of the best known of the rescuers of Jews in Hungary certainly for his heroic actions in providing safety for many Jews but also because he mysteriously disappeared in the course of his efforts.

Charles Lutz, representative of Switzerland in Budapest, provided shelter for thousands of Jews in what came to be known as the Glass House because it had been the headquarters of a glass company. The Spanish government, the Catholic Church, and the International Red Cross also provided some resources for Jews.

Some neutral countries provided protective passports (*Schutzpasse*) to Jews to their deportation to Auschwitz. By the end of summer , over 17,000 such documents had been issued, Switzerland,-7800, Sweden-4500, the Vatican-2500, San Salvador-1600 , Spain and Portugal—a few hundred. Members of *The Group* told of occasional encounters with various foreign rescuers. They were aware that a number of Jews were saved

from deportation because of identity documents and shelter provided by these emissaries. However, by the time these foreign representatives were in Hungary, *The Group* members were primarily focusing on getting to Romania and from there to Palestine.

President Horthy wanted to appease the West and to cease the persecution of the Jews as one measure to win Allied favor. For a brief period, the situation of the Jews improved. However, in October, a radical right wing opposition staged a coup and Horthy had to resign. The leader of the neo-Nazi Arrow Cross became prime minister and lasted until the Red army came into Hungary in the winter of 1945.

In the midst of these crises, *The Group* members in Budapest found out that three of *The Group* in Mohac, two boys and one girl had been found guilty of murder and were awaiting a death sentence. Despite their usual candor in talking with me, no member of *The Group* had told me about this. I found out about it from Avihu Ronen, an Israeli historian. Subsequently, I found the details of the murder in testimonies at Tel Izhak, one of the Hanoar Hatzioni kibbutzim where is there is now a museum (*Massuah*). Also, Cohen refers to this in his work on the Zionists in Hungary. (Cohen 1986).

I have intentionally omitted the names of those involved because memory of this event has been so painful for one of the women involved. Though I met with her, she did not tell me about the murder saying she had recorded her memories for Israeli archives and did not discuss that period of time even with her own family.

What follows is the story of the murder:

To their great consternation, soon after arriving in Mohac,

the young people encountered a Polish Jew named Victor whom they knew in Poland. They had reason to believe that he had revealed to the Germans the plans for smuggling Jews out of Krakow. Now in Hungary, he knew about the activities of their Group. They lived in dread of his betraying them also. They knew too many tales of betrayals by people bargaining for their own lives.

As Jews passing as Poles in Hungary, they felt in no position to get any help and had no alternative but to rely upon the Hungarian Zionists. They asked the Hungarian Zionists to 'deal' with Victor but they refused. The two boys, not yet 20 years old, determined it was their obligation to make sure Victor could do no harm. Finally, they decided their only option was to kill him. They felt confident that they could then cover their tracks and escape.

First the boys made plans to protect others of *The Group* in Mohac so that they would not also be suspect. They arranged that the parents and the other young people who were with them should leave Mohac in two separate groups. They planned to reunite in Budapest after the murder.

The boys knew of Victor's habit of strolling by the Danube River and trailed him there. They asked one of the young girls to serve as a decoy to distract Victor. She remembered Victor from Poland as a broad, swarthy man – someone who seemed unduly self-satisfied. Her job was to allay Victor's suspicions until the boys signaled they were ready to kill him.

Their female co-conspirator, seeming to be a young and innocent girl walking at dark, readily engaged Victor in conver-

sation. Suddenly the boys pounced on Victor and killed him. The girl quickly walked out of sight but witnessed what happened. The three then ran away.

They went to a nearby hotel for the night and the next morning left to get a train to Budapest. However, traces of their footsteps and the body floating in the water were discovered and the three were caught at the train station trying to leave Mohac.

There was no limit to the investigation and torture. Besides being blamed for murder, the three of them were suspected to be members of a special anti-German squad. They were beaten severely and then held as Polish Christians but were suspected to be Jews. A Polish doctor who examined them was trying to help by saying that he could not be sure that the boys were circumcised and therefore Jews.

The three accused tried to drag out the investigation to make sure that their friends had had enough time to leave Mohac safely. Though subjected to sadistic torture to elicit addresses of others, they did not succumb to repeated threats. In his testimony in the archives, one of them described a Hungarian priest who came to his cell and acted as though he were administering last rites, *"The rope was around my neck, and an officer said I could still be spared if I gave information about our conspiracy. I fainted."* This mock execution was the final effort to break their spirits.

The woman who was involved, though she never told me why she was in jail, explained that the jailers took a special interest because she was so young and suspected of being a Polish partisan. *"In the jailers' eyes I looked heroic. Since I was not yet 18, I*

*was kept in a cell with youngsters...I was something different, 'political', so I had discussions with them...I told them I was a Polish patriot...against the Germans... As I was in prison with two boys it looked very romantic...*

*"And we were sentenced to die! By then, I had died so many times, I don't know when I was really scared."*

Tusia, who knew all of them, describes in her memoir how she visited them. *"I went to the jail as a pretended representative of the Red Cross though in fact my name and description were on the Police "Wanted" list... I supposedly came to defend the three people.*

*"I checked my forged documents, straightened my clothes, smiled, and went to the office of prison supervisor [who] was a Serb. First, he brought the girl prisoner to see me. My young friend thought I, too, was a prisoner and she asked in Polish if they had tortured me...the supervisor didn't understand her and my official voice deceived him.*

*"She listened to me. 'Are you short of food? We can provide you with more.' She didn't need more but thought the young men might. I gave her sweets—under the sweets I had put money and a written plan for escape..."*

*"The next prisoner who came in was one of the boys [who] looked electrified to see me but only our eyes talked. 'Are you a prisoner or a visitor?' his eyes asked. In an official voice, I asked him if he was short of food. He said, 'I don't miss anything but the other boy certainly misses cigarettes.'"*

The Red Army was advancing in Hungary. On November 29, 1944, moments before the three were to be executed in Mohac, the Russians encircled the jail. Frantically shouting to the Russian soldiers, they were freed. Since then the three of

them have celebrated their *rebirth* together every year on November 29.

I quote from the testimony of one of them. “*After the prison, we joined the Russian army—we were considered civil volunteers—our task was to translate from German to Russian. I knew German and I could understand Russian because it is close to Slavic Polish,*” one of the boys said in his testimony. The Russians did not display any anti- Semitism.

During this time, those in Budapest knew that the Russians were steadily advancing and were by now close to Romania. Leon took charge of arranging payoffs to people who would help them reach Romania. The *tiyul*/trip to Romania was frightening because they had no common language and no direct contact with Zionist groups there. Between May and June 1944, those trying to reach Romania had innumerable encounters with the police as they made their attempts to cross to the border and were arrested. They managed to return to Budapest but not without some time in jail. (Cohen 1986).

The Hungarian Hanoar Hatzioni organization sent some members to Nagyvarad (now Oradea<sup>8</sup> in Romania) annexed to Hungary and close to the Romanian border to set up shelter for ‘illegals’ from any of the Zionist youth organizations who were trying to reach Romania. One of those setting up the shelters was Zelig Bayuk, who had helped *The Group* members get their forged documents in Poland.

Eventually Bayuk was identified by the Germans as a Jew and put on a transport from Hungary to Auschwitz. When the train was passing through Slovakia, Bayuk led an uprising on the

train and 99 people jumped off. Only one woman was killed in the process. Bayuk was arrested, escaped again and joined the Slovak partisans.

To venture to Romania, a few Hanoar Hatzioni members became part of groups that included other hopefuls from various organizations. A hired smuggler led them. On their first attempt at escaping to Romania, their smuggler had them jump off a train before the border. When they saw many others who also jumped, they realized that this was a scheme well practiced by smugglers. As luck would have it, they were caught by police who beat them and jailed them in Bejus.

They found out that Jews in Bejus bribed the police to free Jews. However, their entreaties on behalf of *The Group* were to no avail. Instead police escorted the youth on a nightmare trek. They walked for several days from town to town spending each night at a different town jail. Their only food or water was what some compassionate peasant might offer when they passed.

When some of the young people panicked, one policeman seemed sympathetic and offered to free Rutka and another girl. To his amazement, these idealistic young prisoners told him they didn't want to be separated from one another and would live or die together! "*Never have I met anyone who would refuse to be saved.*" He let all of them disappear into the woods on the Hungarian side.

They set off again on foot hoping to get railway tickets to Arad in Romania, where they knew that the Zionist organization was aiding refugees. But instead they were again caught by the police and informed that according to a new law cross-



ing the border illegally could mean a death sentence. The police knew that they had previously attempted to cross the border at the end of May. It was then June 3 and the law was effective as of June 1. This time, as Rutka elaborates, the police were merciless.

*“The boys were summoned separately, ordered to lie down on a table, and lashed 25 times on their backsides. To those who didn’t cry, a few more lashes were administered. One avoided a few strokes because he cried in advance. They finished with the boys and then called a girl. Seeing her lying on the table, another girl started to cry and when the officer raised his whip, the victim said, ‘Beat me but I’m not going to cry.’ He was enraged, ‘Would I strike a woman?’*

*“He left for the next room and then ordered us one at a time for a ‘body search’. Two policemen had already strip-searched us. But he didn’t trust them. He searched the boys quickly but spent a long time searching each girl all over her body.*

*“Then we were told to go back to the other room. To our surprise, there were a variety of tasty appetizers. We whispered about this being our ‘Last Supper’ and ate while the officer gave his ‘farewell’ speech. He said he pitied us so he was not going to abide by the new law and shoot us. Instead he was returning us to the Hungarian border. Since he had heard about the cruelty of the guards, he would delay letting them know we were coming. We begged him to let us free promising eventual payment but he refused, saying he would be risking his own life. The whippings, the body search, the food, his shift from cruelty to kindness—he was clearly not all there.*

*“At night, he sent us back to the border with an escort... The soldiers left the boys almost naked taking all their clothes and then leaving*

*us. About 15 minutes later, we heard the shots to alert the Hungarians. We gave the boys our coats to cover their underwear and were left with just our dresses.*

*“Again we started arguing about what to do next. There were fifteen of us together and we had no time to waste... Half of this group decided not to go with us and we never knew what happened to them.*

*“We walked all night without knowing whether we were in Hungary or Romania. In the early morning, we hid in some grain fields trying not to move so the shepherds in the area would not hear us [and]... found out that we were in Hungary far from Nagyvarad (now Oradea)<sup>9</sup>... We had to start immediately to get there by dark... We planned to arrive in Nagyvarad about 10 pm, dress at our halfway house and catch the night train back to Budapest. That halfway house was where Bayuk was in charge of hiring smugglers and organizing border crossings to Romania.*

Rutka arrived with the small group with her at the halfway house to be greeted by six armed policemen. It was evident from the mess in the apartment that it had been searched thoroughly. There was no convincing the police that they were innocents who thought Poles lived there and that they could spend a night with them. They searched the boys but not as thoroughly as the girls. One of Ruka's awful memories is that, *“While the boys tried not to look, each girl lay on a table, knees up, legs spread while they searched for “arms” using a large flashlight... The boys were beaten for lying but we insisted our story about coming from Budapest was true.”* All were taken to a detention center bewildered about why they were caught.

Once at the detention center, a girl who explained how she and others had been caught at the halfway house. There had been an air raid and one of the legitimate occupants of the

apartment was assigned to leading people to an air raid shelter. For some reason, he never arrived at the shelter so the police went to search for him and saw abandoned suitcases in the apartment. They were the suitcases of refugees who had taken shelter there but got scared and ran away. Just then Rutka and the others arrived and of course they too were then caught and jailed. Unknown to them, Bayuk and some others were hiding in the adjoining apartment and hearing the noise next door, they managed to get away. However, by then the police thought they were a bunch of Polish spies and kept watch on all the apartments Poles lived in and captured Bayuk too.

Bayuk was not about to be kept for long. Like Leon, Manus and Tusia, Bayuk demonstrated a gift for cleverness and chutzpa. Here is Rutka's recollection of Bayuk's handling of his situation as Bayuk had later recounted it to her.

*"...When Bayuk was detained, the police found on him a Hungarian document that identified him as Henryk Stawiarske plus a German-issued Polish ID with the name of Laganowski, as well as a blank ID card. Besides that he had several different photos of different men including one of himself dressed as a gentleman in a leather coat. And, of course, the police wanted to know how come he had all those IDs with different names and his picture. Then Bayuk broke down and confessed 'the truth'.*

*"He claimed his real name was Laganowski like on his Polish identity document. As a member of the Polish underground, he sought asylum in Hungary because the Germans were looking for him. (He never said this exactly but that's the impression the police got). In Hungary, the Polish Committee gave him the document with the name Henryk Stawiarski. The interrogator was experienced and verified the fingerprints on the document; decided they were genuine and that Bayuk*

*was telling the truth. It never crossed the policeman's mind that even though the fingerprints were authentic...the ID cards were forged!"*

Subsequently they released Bayuk. However, Rutka, Manus and the others were in jail where they were harassed but not tortured. Three weeks later, on June 26, they heard that the prison was overcrowded and was to be emptied. One of the guards now warned that being "Jewish cows", they would be taken to the ghetto in Nagyvarod.

Strangely enough, before they left the prison, the police handed back Manus's gold watch that they had confiscated earlier. They were then taken to the ghetto—Rutka and three other girls and two boys with an escort of ten policemen.

Rutka recalls, *"We saw immediately that there wasn't the slightest chance of escape. The ghetto was enclosed by a high wall and surrounded by police posted five meters apart. Besides the police on the outside, there were also police mulling about inside the ghetto.*

*"We were ordered to sew the yellow patch marked "Jude" on our clothes but we protested, 'We'd rather die as Christians than live as Jews...we're not Jews and you cannot force us to be.' The Hungarians yelled and threatened us, saying what difference did it make since we were going to die any way.*

*"Again we were strip searched. Luckily Manus concealed his watch in his rectum leaving a small part of the chain outside. We saw his face turn pale—the watch had slipped deeper and caused unbearable pain. But by the time he got to the courtyard, he had the watch in his hands again.*

*"...All of us went for a 'walk' in the large courtyard...hoping to find a hiding place in case of an action. We also tried to bribe one of the policeman promising unimaginable treasures if he helped us escape. One policeman was ready to ignore us in exchange for Manus's watch but it*

*was pointless because so many policemen were every five meters on the other side of the wall...we had two or three days until the liquidation since no trains were ready yet.*

*“At night we managed to find some room on the floor of a house to get a few hours sleep. But we were awakened by loudspeakers ordering Jews to appear with their luggage ready to leave for deportation to a concentration camp. We looked frantically for a hole to hide in... We saw Manus coming with a strange civilian who spoke Slovak while Manus tried to explain something to him in Polish. They approached us and the stranger asked, ‘Are those the ones?’ Yes,’ Manus replied, ‘that’s our Gentile group.’*

*“‘Recite your prayers,’ the man said. And, in unison, we intoned, ‘Hail Mary, full of grace...’ ‘They really are Christians,’ he said. ‘Thank God, we avoided a disaster—Christians could have been sent away with Jews!’ And he took us to a small house and asked another policeman to make sure we weren’t taken on the transport before he could clear up the ‘misunderstanding’.*

*“We could hear yells and screams and saw people with kids, clothes, pots, pans, bedding, even chamber pots... Why were they making such a scene when there was not a chance to succeed? Maybe it was the force of habit to stay alive a few moments more.”*

Once again they tried to escape to Romania. Through contacts of one of their friends, they had arranged for a Slovak to guide them to the border. The Slovak was not reticent about expressing his hatred of Jews as well as of Germans. He was looking forward to welcoming the Russian conquerors. He was proud that he didn’t need to fear any consequences when the Russians came for he had harmed *only* Jews. But they persuaded him as they had others that they were Christian members of the

Polish underground and had been blacklisted in Hungary so their only recourse was fleeing to Romania.

The Slovak then brought in six Gestapo officials and two new Hungarian policemen to demonstrate to them that he was harboring Christians, not Jews. They assumed that their Jewish faces meant that only one or two of them could have been taken for Aryans. As for the rest, their swarthy complexions, dark hair were giveaways.

Manus could answer their questions in German and explained his different German accent as due to being *volksdeutsch* (a German in Poland). Manus had documents from Graz and reminisced about the town with one of the officers who came from there. That served to enhance Manus's credibility. Then the officer asked how Manus got involved with this bunch of Jews. Of course, Manus protested saying he would have known if they were Jews. Perhaps sensing that Rutka's Jewish looks could betray them, he claimed her as his fiancée.

When they continued questioning the girls, Manus distracted the questioner with more reminiscences. But now they wanted Manus to check to see if one of the boys was circumcised. Manus went through the act of inspecting him and assured them that he was not circumcised.

Manus made their case; nevertheless they were taken to the prison in Nagyvarad again.

Back in prison, Rutka wondered, "... *What next? After three days..., I was lying on a cot when I felt a push and saw the cap with the skull and bones. Gestapo! Those of us who had [previously] been taken to the ghetto [in Nagyvarad] were now taken for questioning by the same officers who had questioned us there. And the same series of questions... When my turn came, I was struck dumb—I could not*

*remember anything [not my new name, nothing]. Had I remembered my real name, I'd have revealed that. I couldn't utter a word.*

*"Thinking my silence was because I did not understand this simple German, the officer switched to Polish. There was not a peep from anyone else when the officer asked my name in Polish. Suddenly one of my friends shouted my new name, 'Pietrasek, Helena. Why don't you answer?' A burden was lifted and at last I automatically answered all the questions. What if my friend had not intervened?"*

*"They handcuffed us in pairs. We were closely guarded on the long ride from Nagyvarod to Budapest. The blackout at night meant that we could at least try to squeeze out of the handcuffs.*

*"Halfway to Budapest, there was an air raid and the train halted and all passengers were ordered to leave...So we dispersed all over the grain fields..."*

However, all of them were caught again as illegal immigrants and this time imprisoned in Budapest.

*"The Budapest prison was overcrowded...A few days after our arrival, all Poles had been jailed in one cell, registered and prepared to be sent to an unknown destination,"* remembers Rutka in her memoir.

Identified as Poles, they were taken with the others by train toward the Slovak border and placed in a transit camp to Auschwitz. There were about 120 inmates. All the young people could think about was how to escape. They knew they needed money for escape since they didn't know anyone who would hide them. Besides that, their IDs had been taken and they would need documents.

What really made a difference was that they told a guard who befriended them how to contact Tusia in Budapest. Tusia arranged to send them some blank documents for them to com-

plete identification plus one document for Rutka with a brand new name for her, "Stephania Gwara".

To pass as Aryans, the boys used glue sent by Tusia to conceal their circumcisions before they had to appear for medical checks. The official in charge risked freeing some of them in exchange for the sum of money that Tusia had supplied. Bayuk who was caught with them was among those to be transported to Auschwitz.

The official arranged for them to have a place to sleep and for the purchase of tickets back to Budapest. At the railway station, soldiers were looking for fugitives. They boarded the train without difficulty but feared that their disappearance would arouse a search.

Those who returned to Budapest after their jail experiences, suffered pangs of guilt as they observed the fate of other Jews and thought of their own efforts not to be identified as Jews but rather as Polish workers.

When they met Tusia, she told them about the worrisome fate of others. Some of the parents had found temporary shelter in a brothel and were caught during a police raid looking for prostitutes. These parents were jailed in the central Gestapo prison in Budapest, Fo-utca, from whence they were sent to Auschwitz. Leon, who had been the inveterate rescuer had not been jailed but was caught en route to Romania and sent to Auschwitz in August, where he survived to the end of the war.

Lusia and her younger sister, Felusia, and three others were captured crossing the border to Romania. They were imprisoned at Fo-utca. Tusia interceded on behalf of Lusia and Felusia and managed to get them freed. Despite passing as a Pole, Tusia



maintained contact with the Jewish Rescue Committee who supplied funds that she used for expenses including bribery when members of *The Group* were in difficulty.

Lusia recalled in an interview that while they were at Foutca, she heard a girl singing a Hebrew song and once making a little doll out of scraps for Felusia. Later Lusia found out that 14 young people from Palestine had been parachuted into Hungary to help in the rescue of Jews, and she realized many years later that this was Hannah Senesh, one of the young people from Palestine parachuted into Hungary to help in rescuing Jews. Hannah perished in Hungary but is celebrated as a heroine of the holocaust.

Members of *The Group* thought that it was a mistake for the young Palestinians to have been sacrificed because it was so unrealistic at that time to expect that they could be effective.

The only good news was that the few who were not sent back to Hungary from Romania sent letters saying that they expected to leave soon from Constanta en route to Palestine.

During yet another attempt to reach Romania, Rutka and those with her were once more jailed as spies and kept at Foutca. Their interrogation took place at the Budapest Gestapo Headquarters. It was a nightmare and often involved torture. Although Rutka was not physically tortured, she was truly alarmed when the interrogator produced one picture after another of members of *The Group*. She denied knowing each of them. The Gestapo officers screamed to elicit her confession. Finally she confessed to knowing one person. Nevertheless, a senior officer let her go. She went back to her cell to endure depression and nightmares.

The bombing of Budapest by the Allies was constant. A coup was attempted but was crushed by the Hungarian Arrow Cross, the Fascist neo-Nazi organization.

The prisoners thought that their worst problem was the jail commander named Lemke, whose reputation for cruelty was well known. He came to chat each night telling them that he was relaxing after a day of dealing with those “dirty Jews”. The only people in all of Europe he respected, Lemke said, were Poles, who “had personal and national dignity.”

When a guard told Lemke the girls were attempting to escape, Lemke ridiculed such a possibility. Then they realized that he was actually trying to help them. Once he found them telling fortunes with playing cards made out of toilet paper. The next day he brought them “treasures”: playing cards, copybooks and pencils.

Fighting was getting closer. The rumor was that Russians were near; their artillery was pounding the city. From then on, the prison was in turmoil. Lemke told Rutka that she was sentenced to death at Oranienburg. With other prisoners she was herded on one of the trucks going to Auschwitz. Anticipating deportation and death, she had a truly remarkable reprieve that was totally bewildering.

Suddenly there was a shout, “Stephania Gwara!”, Rutka’s new forged name. As soon as he spotted her, one of the officers exclaimed, “...So young? So tiny?—You are free!” Rutka was totally bewildered by this sudden turn of events.

She had to spend one more night in the jail until the release procedure was complete. The next morning as she was about to leave the jail, she could not understand why a man with the yellow Star of David on his clothing thanked her for his release.

Both of them got into a car with a Nazi officer who was very solicitous. The Nazi officer questioned Rutka about her relationship with a man named Offenbach, whom she had never heard of. She and the Jewish man were told to get out at an unfamiliar house. Their escort handed the two of them to a clerk saying, *“Here is your Stephania Gwara—I’ve added this Jewish man as a gift.”*

Rutka saw many Jews there and did not realize that she was in the Swiss “Glass House”, a building under Swiss consular protection. She lay down on the crowded floor with the other Jews over-crowded into that safe house. All Rutka could imagine was that this was another jail and she had to escape. This escape was easy—she just walked out on to the street not knowing what else to do. At last, she saw a familiar face and it turned out to be someone from Hanoar Hatzioni who was one of several people trying to find her. He assured her that she was free and could enjoy a reunion with her friends from Poland.

*“Then I learned how I came to be released,”* Rutka writes in her memoir. *“When I was left in the prison, my friends searched for every possible way for me to escape. Tusia worked constantly for my sake and approached the Jewish Rescue Committee in Budapest... She got in touch with Hansi Brand, an official in the Rescue Committee. She was the wife of Joel Brand who was then in Istanbul on his failed mission to exchange Jews for funds for German.”*

*“Tusia told Hansi all about my ‘past’ and Hansi took up my case with total dedication, checking every possibility including the intervention of ‘machers’ [wheeler-dealers] who maintained illicit contacts and for money could sometimes intervene with the powers that be. But every approach ended with their being warned not to get involved in this. Tusia, however, kept pressuring the Committee.”*

*“By that time Budapest had already been surrounded by the Russians but the Gestapo Headquarters was still in the besieged city and when they made up their mind to withdraw, they needed 2000 liters of gasoline/money for supplies...”*

Tusia’s pressuring of the Committee paid off and a deal was struck. *“The ‘deal’ was that in return for equipment or gasoline/money, they would release me, Stephania Gwara. Hansi Brand and the treasurer of the Rescue Committee, Offenbach, promised to arrange it... That’s why I had been ordered out of the truck to a cell... until the gasoline supplies were provided. Finally I understood why the Germans were amazed, ‘For this little one, it was worth so much?’”*

In my meeting with Tusia she told me her version of the negotiation for Rutka’s release.

She went to the Jewish Rescue Committee where she had frequent contact with Hansi Brand. Tusia pleaded with Hansi. *“You will go down in the history books if you save Rutka, who has already been in 26 jails!”* Hansi in turn persuaded Offenbach, one of the senior officers of the Committee, to make a deal with the Germans. The Germans got their payment. At the time, Rutka was told they got gasoline but Tusia says that only Hansi knew the quid pro quo for Rutka’s release.

However, Rutka learned the danger had hardly passed. Miklós Horthy had cancelled deportations of Jews on August 25 1944. In October Horthy was succeeded by the Hungarian Nazis. (Yahil 1990).

Rutka recalls, *“... the search began for the valuable little bird—me. The Germans no longer needed gasoline and therefore no more reason to give me up. But we didn’t know about the search for me so I walked freely all over the city... All foreigners, Jews particularly, were still in danger from the Nylos people who were rounding up pedestrians*

*from the streets. Few survived their detention. They believed that any possible suspect, especially one who might be Jewish, should be killed first and facts checked later.*

*“We were more afraid of the Nyls than of the Germans.*

*“I went back to the small room I had when I lived in Budapest earlier. I felt safer there and at last, I slept, ate, drank like a human being and reunited with Lusia and other members of our group, both the veterans and the newer ones. All day long we would exchange tales of each other’s ‘miraculous salvation.’*

*“However, when I heard approaching planes, I became as frightened as when passing a Nyls troopers’ post, or other perils that still abounded in Budapest in November 1944—street roundups at home, in restaurants, or theaters, artillery barrages from [different] directions, food shortages. You could find food in restaurants but it was dangerous for us as Jews, even more than for Poles, to enter them. During the day, it was best to pretend we went to work. Since hanging around the streets was crazy, we went to movie theaters. We’d enter when the lights went off and leave before the end.*

*“One afternoon Lusia and I were in the movie theater. It so happened we sat near Lemke who surely spotted us... We knew that my leave had been revoked when the Gestapo had no more need for funds for gas and the Russians had withdrawn for 48 hours... When the intermission was over, I saw Lemke leave and we were scared of what he would do, but nothing happened to us. Maybe his Polish sentiments were even stronger than I thought.”*

The situation in Budapest was frightening. By November 1944, Budapest Jews were in a ghetto, an unexpected fate for them. The Russians were keeping Budapest under artillery and air bombardment but were not able to advance into the city. Despite all of this, Group members kept in regular contact with

the leadership of the Hungarian Jewish organizations, especially the youth organizations which were cooperating with each other. Partly because of *The Group's* influence, the youth groups had acquired Nylos uniforms and thus managed to get some arms. All of them were surviving on meager food, mainly rutabaga, an edible root, and even that was not always available.

Rutka's housing was destroyed by bombs. After that, she and another girl lived in a rented room and to avoid being captured by the Nylos, they left the apartment each day as though they were going to work. Their landlady was very sympathetic to the "poor Polish girls" who had to go to work in the freezing weather. When there were night air raids, they went to the shelter with everyone. Had they gone to a shelter during the day, their not working would arouse suspicion.

Sure enough, they soon learned that the Nylos had been looking for them and wanted to check their identification. They wasted no time trying to leave Budapest, even daring to be on the streets when bombs were falling around them. They headed for the place Lusía was living with seven other members of *The Group*. But that too seemed dangerous. The Russians targeted this street because there was German anti-aircraft equipment located there. One house after another was hit.

Bodies of people and horses were everywhere. They had to go to the air shelter near the frontline. It was in a cellar and at least was heated and if you had anything to cook, you had a pot and an oven available.

After a week, five Germans, two officers and three soldiers, caused panic when they came into the shelter. But instead of being menacing, they were begging for shelter and liquid. Then

another German came in and ordered the soldiers to leave the cellar.

*“One of the soldiers stayed,” Rutka writes, “he was about 22 years old and as though it was a joke, said, ‘I’ve no wish to leave—here it’s warm, outside it’s freezing.’ A Nazi soldier begging for permission to stay with us?”*

*“But the other soldiers called him to come out also. He stalled, hoping we would ask him to stay. Finally he left and we could hear him going up the steps. Then we heard shots and saw through a glass door that he was laying face down, groaning. One of the boys said, ‘I’m going out to him—he’s now not a Nazi any more but a wounded man begging for help.’ We forced the boy back into the cellar saying, ‘You’re crazy risking your life to help a German soldier.’”*

*“We heard more shots and saw Russians firing from the roof across the street. And we knew we would soon be free.”*

*“But our victory over the Nazis was really monumental if over those years of barbarity and humiliation, we had saved not only our lives but some human sensibility. However, the bequest of those who did not live was for us to avenge their suffering and never to forget.”*

On December 25, 1944, the Russians completely encircled Budapest and liberated it a few weeks later. Jews had been about 5% of the Hungarian population. Over 400,000 of them perished within a few months at German hands. Budapest Jews were the largest fraction of those relatively few Hungarian Jews who survived.

Now the Sosnowiec youth were even more –determined to reach Romania to go from there to Palestine.

## HOW THEY LIVED TO TELL

- <sup>1</sup> Asher Cohen book
- <sup>2</sup> I believe Wiesel referred to the arrival of Tusia
- <sup>3</sup> The figures cited in some references regarding Jewish deaths in Hungary and Romania. Transylvania was transferred by the Germans from Romania to Hungary and most Jews who were killed were in the area of Transylvania
- <sup>4</sup> Henry Slawik, president of the Polish Civic Committee took care of Polish refugees in Hungary. The Polish Government in Exile in London authorized his cooperation with the Committee of Polish Jews in Budapest. Slawik received help from influential Hungarian Authorities and consequently provided Aryan passports for Polish Jews in Hungary. The estimate is that 2000-5000 Jewish refugees in Hungary were thus saved. Slawik perished in Mauthausen in 1944. (Press Review, Internet Magazine, Forum, May 24, 2002 from book in Polish by Henryk Zvi Zimmerman, Henry Slawik—A Polish Wallenberg, 1997.
- <sup>5</sup> Gebirtig was one of the most popular Yiddish poets in Poland and was killed by the Nazis in June 1942. His most famous song *Our Town is Burning* became a virtual hymn during the Shoah.
- <sup>6</sup> Several authors (Braham and Vago, Cohen, and Bauer have written about Kastzner. Yahil includes a summary.
- <sup>7</sup> Hirschmann attributes this dispensation to the young head of the WRB, John Pehle in Washington, D.C. Pehle recognized that it would be important to free the representatives from some of the traditional constraints if they were to be able to save Jews at that time.
- <sup>8</sup> Nagyvarad at that time was in Hungary and subsequently was returned to Romania and is now named Oradea.



*Chapter 1*



Eastern front.

## *Romania en route to Palestine*

1944-1945

*Survival was not a romance...*

—Avihu Ronen<sup>1</sup>, *The Dilemma of Rescue*

In the summer of 1944, Group members had made futile attempts to cross the border from Hungary to Romania hoping to board boats there en route to Palestine. By August, major political upheavals in Hungary and Romania helped to make the border crossing possible.

Germany and Russia signed the German-Soviet non-aggression pact in 1939, each desirous of Romania's Ploesti oil fields and its mineral resources. In June 1940, Germany forced Romania to cede territory to the Soviet Union, and to Bulgaria. A year later, the German Einsatzgruppen deported or killed over 300,000 Jews in those territories.<sup>2</sup> Romania had a long history of animosity towards Hungary and wanted to curry Hitler's favor in order to regain Transylvania from Hungary. Indeed, towards the end of 1940, the Germans forced King Carol, who had tried to maintain neutrality, to surrender Transylvania to Hungary.

Subsequently, Ion Antonescu became Prime Minister. He entered into an alliance with Germany. By November 1940, Romania joined the Axis powers.

In June 1941, the Romanians joined the German armies in attacking the Soviet Union, supplying more troops than all other German allies combined. All this time, Germany exploited

Romania's oil, grain, and industrial products and often refused to pay. Romanian officials increasingly resented Germany and anticipated that Germany would be defeated.<sup>3</sup>

In February 1943, the Russian Army decimated German and Romanian forces at Stalingrad. After the defeat at Stalingrad, German and Romanian forces retreated westward. The Russian assault on Romania began in mid-May. Romania began putting out feelers and finally surrendered to the Allies in August 1944. The Germans then bombed Bucharest and the Romanians declared war on Germany. In September, Romania and the USSR signed an armistice which required ceding territories to the Soviets while Romania regained Northern Transylvania, which they had been forced to cede.

Romania was known to be a major anti-Semitic country as compared for example to Hungary. The Jewish population of Romania prior to the holocaust was about 750,000, over 4 percent of the population. Combined with Gypsies and immigrants from nearby countries, these minorities comprised about 25% of the Romanian population.

About half of Jewish men were in commerce and banking, many were petty traders, and some 25% worked in industry and crafts. The rest were clerical workers with some in the professions. Most of the Romanian population was agrarian. The economic depression of the 30's made those who were farm workers resent Jews who were often their creditors. The press denounced Jews as parasites, communists, and enemies of Romania and the church. In 1939, one third of the Jewish population had civil rights revoked. Though all minorities were persecuted, the Jews were especially violated.

As for the situation of Romanian Jews in the 30's and 40's, it was ambiguous and hard to comprehend. Antonescu persecuted Jews on the one hand; on the other hand, he modified restrictions imposed on Jews. Members of Romanian Jewish organizations worked hard to maintain their connections with heads of the regime, church circles, and representatives of foreign countries. Jews were able to set up autonomous committees for health and welfare which even managed to circumvent German administration of ghettos. "Jewish means of self-protection...bribery intercession, evasions and mutual aid proved relatively effective" as was not the case in other countries. (Yahil)

Antonescu refused to comply with German pressure to deport Jews en masse. He seemed not to want to arouse the ire of a few Jews who had significant roles in the Romanian economy. Antonescu also seems to have been influenced by the pleading of Wilhelm Filderman, a Jewish leader, who had earlier been his classmate. (Yahil)

Throughout this period of German dominance, a Palestine office continued to operate openly, directing emigration to Palestine until the spring of 1942, at which time it was forced underground. The Zionist youth movements, which had been strictly forbidden because of their leftist outlook, also continued to exist underground.

By the middle of 1944, Eichmann had deported and/or killed most Jews in Hungary including over 200,000 Jews in the former Romanian territory of Transylvania. (Yahil)

The confusion and the changing political situation in late 1944 in Hungary and Romania enabled the Hanoar Hatzioni

youth from Sosnowiec to be among about 15,000 Jews who crossed into Romania then. Most were Hungarian Jews fleeing Eichmann's destruction but among them were Polish Jews including some members of the Group.

Jews in Romania had established secret contact with the Jewish Agency in Palestine and with its representatives in Istanbul. They cooperated in planning to resume the transport of Jewish refugees from Constanta in Romania to Istanbul. From Istanbul, the refugees went over land to Palestine.

The wartime rescue of refugees known as *Aliya Bet* is much less known than is the post-war rescue of a much larger number of Jews referred to as *Bricha*. Both the wartime and the post-war rescue defied British restrictions on immigration to Palestine and were fraught with perils.

Dalia Ofer describes *Aliya Bet* as "...one of the most fascinating chapters in the history of Zionism...a unique episode, a saga of national and personal resistance in the face of unprecedented adversity." Boats had transported refugees from Constanta between 1939 and 1942 defying the British restriction on immigration to Palestine. Between 1939 and 1944, 13,000 Jews boarded boats at Constanta going on the Black Sea to Istanbul. (Ofer 1990)

In 1942, a particularly tragic event had contributed to a two year cessation of the refugee ships from Constanta. One boat, the *Struma*, crowded with almost 800 refugees who did not have legal immigration papers to Palestine, left from Constanta in late 1941 en route to Istanbul. From there they hoped to proceed over land to Palestine. But Turkey refused to allow passengers of the *Struma* to disembark apparently fearing to endanger its neutral status.

The Struma remained in the Istanbul harbor for ten weeks without sufficient food, water or fuel. Finally, in February 1942, the Turks towed the Struma outside their territorial waters. Shortly after, the Struma with all its passengers, sank! It is not certain whether the Struma was sunk by a torpedo from a German or Russian submarine on the Black Sea or because of an internal explosion on the ship. This terminated transports of refugees from Constanta until they resumed in 1944.

Representatives of various Palestine Jewish organizations, Romanian Jewish organizations, United States Jewish organizations, representatives of the United War Refugee Board as well as British Intelligence<sup>4</sup> were all involved in the rescue of Jewish refugee. There was an understanding with Turkey that the Jews who reached Istanbul would be allowed to proceed to Palestine.<sup>5</sup>

Istanbul became a hub for *wheelers and dealers* communicating with Jews in Eastern Europe. The JDC had to be ingenious to circumvent United States policy that restricted funds going to German-occupied countries.

Ira Hirschmann, the United States War Refugee Board Director, had a broad mandate from President Roosevelt to do whatever was necessary to rescue Jews. This gave greater impetus to efforts to organize the departure and emigration of Jews from the Balkan countries. Hirschmann recognized that “had there been no Palestine, the remnants of a people would have had nowhere to go”. (Hirschmann 1946).

The Jewish Agency contracted for small boats to transport refugees from Constanta to Istanbul with hired crews from Turkey. Most of these boats were barely seaworthy and carried many more passengers than they were designed for. They had to travel on the Black Sea where German or Russian submarines

still mined some areas. With the resumption of this perilous boat travel, between March and December 1944, about 5000 refugees left from Constanta on 11 ramshackle boats. Most of them were Jews from Romania. About 300 were refugees from Poland.

The Sosnowiec survivors left from Constanta at three different times, some in August 1944, others in October without legal immigration documents. In 1945, post-war, several left from Constanta after obtaining legal immigration document. From 1944-47, 31 ships left from Constanta with 24,000 refugees, most traveling without proper documents to Palestine, part of the *Bricha*, the post-war illegal emigration. (Ofer)

Some of the Group members spoke to me about their memories of those frightening journeys from Constanta to Istanbul and then to Palestine.

#### *Sofia*

Sofia was one of the Group who tried to get from Hungary to Romania. She escaped from the train returning Group members and others to the border of Hungary. Sofia was permitted to use the toilet and then jumped from a window when the train slowed down. She injured her leg, but managed to hide and evade capture.

All alone and unable to understand Romanian, she then pretended to be deaf and mute and managed to reach Arad near the Hungarian border, where she knew that Hanoar Hatzioni members were getting help. They arranged for her to go to Bucharest with forged papers identifying her as Romanian.

The situation in Romania was frightening before Romania joined the Allies. "...*there was constant bombing...the Americans at night and the British during the day or vice versa...*"



In a camp set up for Zionist youth, she waited for a boat to Istanbul and boarded the *Kazdek* in August 1944.

*“We found out that there were boats leaving Romania from Constanta...small boats, fisherman boats. One day I was told that I would go as a 12 year old—I was 19—then I was told I would go as the mother of a 10-year old boy. Three such boats left—not ships, but boats. On each boat were about 400 people...they had to stay close to the Bulgarian shore. Two German battleships on the Black Sea shelled us. The first boat went through but the second one was shelled and sank. Ten people survived, one a woman eight months pregnant, and one Romanian Jew who used to be a Captain in the British Merchant Marine...they came to our ship...The Germans were waiting and started to shell our ship. Turkish ships came and the Germans disappeared.*

*“We were close to the Bosphorus and a terrible storm broke out. The hired Turkish crew went below and started to pray. The man from the Merchant Marine helped to navigate keeping about five kilometers from the Bulgarian border where we knew the Germans were.*

*“The Turkish army received us at a small port on the Black Sea and we walked from there to Istanbul for about a week. We walked during the night and slept during the day because they didn’t want us to see this area of Turkish fortification. Then we boarded a freight train in Istanbul and went to Syria and Lebanon. One of the very dramatic moments was when we arrived in Beirut late at night and we met soldiers of the Jewish Brigade—our first encounter with the Land of Israel...for them it was the first encounter with survivors...*

*“Then we came to Haifa and were taken to the British intelligence office...two of us went...they knew we were the only ones who had been in Poland, Austria, Hungary, and Romania during the war. They want-*

*ed to know where ammunition factories were and anti-aircraft artillery, and what was the morale. We knew...*"

*Karl*

Karl described his unsuccessful experiences trying to reach Romania. After declining Kasztner's offer to leave Hungary on a train to rescue Jews, Karl volunteered to try again to find the way to the border. It was dangerous not only because it was illegal but also because Allied planes were still bombing Romania.

In August 1944, Leon had hired a smuggler to escort Karl with six or seven others to Romania, a few from the Group and a few from another youth organization. Fortunately one of the girls spoke Romanian. They managed to cross the border and to get help and some money from a branch of Hashomer Hatsair, one of the other Zionist organizations. Leon, caught in Hungary and sent to Auschwitz, ended his role in saving Group members.

Once in Romania, Karl bargained for those with him to be allowed to board a freight train. The train conductor refused to take Karl's money but allowed them to get off at Dava in Romania where he told them they would find some Jews.

They went to a synagogue in Dava where the suspicious Rabbi could not believe that any Polish Jews could have survived to come to Romania. He insisted they prove they were Jews. "If you can recite the Kaddish, I'll believe you"

The Kaddish is the traditional mourners' prayer in Hebrew well known to most Jews. Karl and the others together respectfully intoned that sacred prayer for the dead. This must have been the first time in five years they had been able to memorialize those many members of their families who had been killed. Needless to say, this convinced the Rabbi who now assured

them “Fear not—with money you can buy the King!” Romanian Jews had learned that lesson well over those past five years.

Following the Rabbi’s instructions, Karl and the others set off on a train to try to reach Bucharest. On the train, Romanian soldiers spoke to them. Their responses in German made them suspect. It was no surprise that police detained them. A Romanian boy who had joined with them talked to the police revealing the whole story of the Rabbi at Dava.

Karl bemoaned the fact that the boy had not been trained how to respond, as Group members were, and the police beat him severely. On Karl, they found documents from Hungary, Austria, and Romania—surely they had caught a spy! Luckily, they did not find the stamp Karl used to falsify documents.

They pleaded with the police who agreed to take them to Arad where they knew the Romanian Hanoar Hatzioni organization would help them. The organization had good contacts with the police who got paid off by Jewish agents making arrangements for refugees.<sup>6</sup> In Arad the police allowed them to stop at the home of a Jew named Feik who told them, “You must go to jail but I promise you will be free in a few days.” Karl, suspected to be a spy, was taken to a different prison than the others and interrogated for about two weeks.

After denying he was Jewish for years, Karl now had to prove that he *was* a Jew rather than a Polish spy. The police didn’t believe him and decided to send him back to Hungary. In desperation, Karl jumped out of the third floor of the prison fracturing both his legs and one hand.

The police then took him to a military hospital. He passed out and when he regained consciousness, two women were at

his bedside weeping. They were Zionists from the Jewish community who had been told of this “attempted suicide”. Had these young women not interceded, the doctors might well have amputated Karl’s legs.

Karl stayed in the hospital a month or so and then was sent to a camp for political prisoners at Tirgujiu, until the Russians liberated the camp. One of the Romanian women, Sara, who was allowed to visit captives, later became his wife and went with him to Constanta.

In October 1944, they boarded a fishing boat called the *Salah-a-Din* overcrowded with almost 1000 refugees bound for Istanbul, “...like sardines we were.” They had very little food and water—the engine periodically broke down and for two weeks the boat drifted on the Black Sea. Finally the boat was in view of Istanbul but it took three more days for them to get there.

In Istanbul a representative of the Palestine Jewish Agency escorted them to the train that took them as far as the Turkish border with Syria. By November 1, 1944 they reached Palestine.

Some of the leaders in Palestine were there to question these early refugees from Europe. They asked how the Russian occupation was affecting the Bucharest Jews and the situation in Austria. Karl believes that they transmitted information he gave them to the British Intelligence who apparently used this in their attack plans in Austria. (Karl told me he had documents relating to this.)<sup>7</sup>

The last illegal boat to depart from the East before the end of the War was the Taurus, carrying 1000 refugees who arrived in Palestine on December 22, 1944.

Lusia

After their aborted attempts to get to Romania, Lusia and some of the others remained in Hungary until January of 1945 after Hungary had surrendered to the Russians. Now with her younger sister, she went to Romania and from there back to Sosnowiec to look for her mother. There she found her at the home of the Polish woman who had protected her mother for two years.<sup>8</sup>

The three of them then went together to Romania. They waited there for three months until they received legal immigration papers from England permitting their entry to Palestine within the British quota.

In this disorganized post-war period, people were searching everywhere for relatives and friends. Anka, one of the Tikva girls, whom I did not meet, had been caught in Austria and sent to a camp at Lanzendorf. When the camp was liberated, she went to Vienna, when she despaired having been told that all of the girls had been killed.

She did not know that Rutka had been writing letters to many people hoping to locate her. By chance, someone who received one of Rutka's letters knew Anka. Anka almost fainted when she found out others from Sosnowiec had in fact survived. She then joined them in Romania.

On October 29, 1945, Rutka, Anka, Lusia, Felusia, their mother, Kuba and his wife, boarded the first legal boat, the *Transylvania*. Anka was one of several people who had not procured legal papers. The *legals* arranged to have Anka board the boat, hastily pushing an empty baby carriage, as though she were

a mother with a baby entitled to be there. On the boat, the cook could hardly deal with their lust for food...such abundance they had not seen for years.

Lusia recalls that upon their arrival in Palestine, the disarray made it possible for the *legals* to throw documents to those behind them without proper papers and thus all passed through British immigration.

In summary, of the Group members from Sosnowiec, who were my primary sources for this book, Tusia, Danka, Aviva and Manus remained in Europe. Leon was in Auschwitz. Also remaining in Europe were Moshe Beisky and Zelig Bayuk.

Sofia, Karl, Rutka, Lusia, and Kuba, accompanied by others from the Group had departed from Constanta in late 1944 and 1945. They had achieved their long term desire for *aliya*. After those years of horror, they contemplated an enthusiastic welcome to their new home land in Palestine.

<sup>1</sup> From Ronen book, Dilemma of Rescue (quotation translated from Hebrew)

<sup>2</sup> These territories included about four million people, including hundreds of thousands of Jews. Statistics on deaths in Hungary and Romania vary greatly. This is primarily due to whether Jewish deaths in the area of Transylvania are counted in Hungarian or Romanian statistics. During the war, Transylvania, always disputed, had been annexed to Hungary and subsequently returned to Romania.

<sup>3</sup> Notes on Romania from Library of Congress, Federal Research Division, 1989

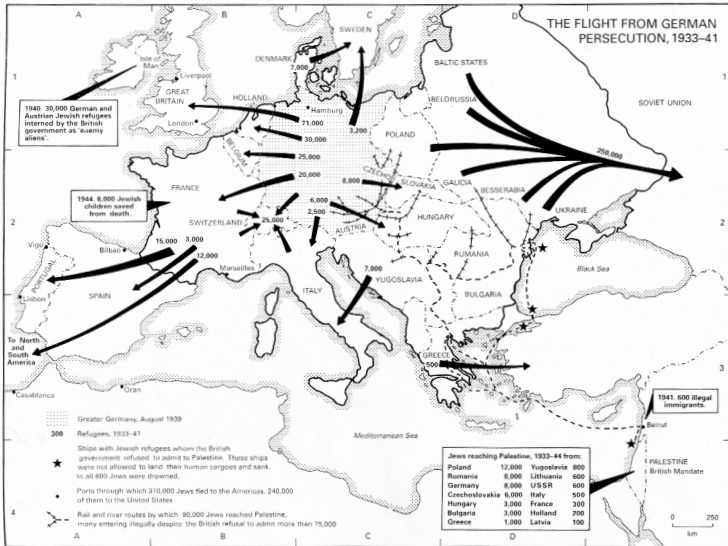
<sup>4</sup> Several references and discussion with a friend who had been in American Intelligence Service refer to British Intelligence using information from Jewish sources about what was happening in various countries.

<sup>5</sup> Turkey was prohibited by the Montreux Convention from preventing passage through the Bosphorus

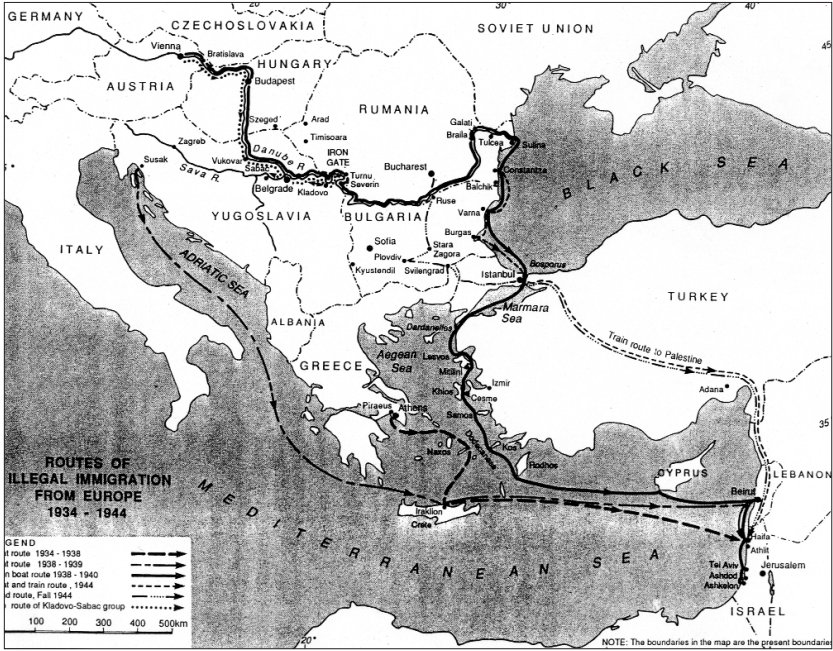
<sup>6</sup> Sara Bergman, Massuah testimony. Arie Rosenberg is mentioned as the person who helped them.

<sup>7</sup> Karl is now infirm and I doubt that this could be pursued with him but members of his family might know about such documents.

<sup>8</sup> See chapter 2



Flight from persecution.  
Source: Atlas of Jewish History, 1994.



Routes of illegal immigration.



## *They Lived to Tell*

*For these survivors, remembering is a duty. They do not want to forget, and above all they do not want the world to forget.*

*—Reawakening, Primo Levi*

The war was over. Some of the Sosnowiec Hanoar Hatzioni members had already achieved their goal of *aliya*, leaving from Romania for Palestine. However, some 300,000 depressed and bewildered Jewish refugees wandered from place to place in Europe

Jews who survived the Shoah were a small fraction of displaced persons after the war. The thousands of displaced persons were from countries that had been occupied by the Germans. Most of them would return to those countries.

However, few Jews would choose to return to countries where Jews had been virtually eliminated and where they felt that the end of the war did not mean the end of anti-Semitism. They could not choose their destinations because no country welcomed Jewish immigration. They were essentially destitute. Palestine seemed the only alternative, whether or not they were Zionists.

Initially, Jews were assigned to camps with other displaced persons with no recognition of their special situation. Eventually, at the urging of Jewish organizations, some DP camps were designated for Jewish survivors. They lived there for a few years awaiting the possibility of emigrating. Despite the limitations of the DP camps and their uncertain future, many

survivors affirmed their lust for life by marrying and producing babies. The activities of the US Joint Distribution Committee and of Palestine organizations aided these DPs, including arranging for them to get to Palestine, legally or not, resulting in about 250,000 going to Palestine between 1944 and 1948.<sup>1</sup>

Though some might have preferred immigrating to the United States or other countries, they had no choice. Only 13,000 were admitted to the United States under a special order of President Truman. Other countries admitted a very limited number. Some of The Group members from Sosnowiec and Bedzin who are the sources of this story remained in Europe. These included Leon, Manus, Danka, Tusia and Aviva, Bayuk and Beisky also remained. All of them eventually came to Palestine, some as part of the post-war *Bricha*.

They were young adults filled with sadness about their loss of family members and friends. They would no longer be members of the Group, together striving to live; now they would be separated and have to make their own decisions.

Reflecting on their experiences, the Sosnowiec and Bedzin Group members concurred that Leon's daring had been a major reason for their survival. The survivors in this story, whether they liked Leon personally or not, regard him as a tragic hero. His post-war life seems to have been less satisfying than that of most of the other survivors

Lusia, who made it possible for me to meet most of the survivors in this account, had discouraged my meeting Leon. Later, wanting this story to be complete and realizing the importance of Leon's role, she urged him to meet with me and he eventually consented. When I met Leon in Tel Aviv, I could understand Lusia's reluctance; he made it clear that he was not happy about

meeting with me. He wanted to talk more about his disagreements with current Israeli politics and his opposition to settlements than about his memories of the Shoah.

Leon thought it ironic that he, who seemed virtually a master at escape, was caught by the Germans in July 1944 at the height of the deportation of Jews from Hungary. *“The rest went to Palestine. I went to Auschwitz!”* Leon endured six months in Auschwitz at a time when the war was almost over.

On January 19, 1945 Auschwitz was liberated by the Russians who were taking survivors west into Germany. But Leon was determined first to go back to Katowice, his hometown in Poland, then to nearby Sosnowiec to find out what had happened there after 1943.

In true Leon style, he simply left the Russian contingent. *“At high noon —12 o’clock, I walked away taking two people with me to Katowice, a short distance—12 km. I had a Polish contact there—but that’s another story...”* Leon made it clear that he would not tell all that he remembered about his deeds

He grudgingly told me that at one time someone from the United States had interviewed him but he had no idea where that record might be. Later, I discovered that Leon had submitted to a video interview for the Fortunoff archives at Yale University. I watched that video of Leon speaking in Hebrew. An excellent translator summarized Leon’s remarks for me. If one knew Leon only from his presentation of himself on these tapes, he would seem a hostile braggart. Had I not known more about him from others, I would have judged him that way. Perhaps the interviewer had insufficient knowledge of the context to elicit a more rounded picture of Leon; perhaps Leon defied any interviewer.

Leon went to Palestine; discontent there, after a few years in Israel, he left to live in Germany. “*We could have predicted almost anything about Leon—but not this!*” was the reaction of others. In Germany, he became the proprietor of a bar. In the late 70’s Leon returned to Israel to live there.<sup>2</sup>

When I talked with Manus in Tel Aviv immediately after my meeting with Leon, I was struck by how different he was from Leon. He spoke softly in Hebrew and slowly so that my translator could interpret. He mainly wanted to talk about his post-war experiences having completed a book about them. His book, *Mission Eichmann*, was published in Germany in 1995.

After the war, Manus stayed in Europe as one of a controversial group of *avengers*, who sought to punish known Nazis. (Incidentally, Leon was one of those who opposed Jews becoming avengers.)

Manus contrived to procure a photograph of Eichmann that subsequently aided in his capture. Manus also identified an SS man who had mercilessly beaten him in Austria. He believes that man was indeed sent to prison for 25 years.<sup>3</sup>

Rutka had met Bayuk first in Hungary for just a few minutes after she was released from Rombach Prison. As Rutka pointed out, Bayuk always took the lead in finding ways to save people. One illustration was his urging their leaving Hungary. “*What’s the point of sitting around Hungary—we should keep running away to Romania.*” Then he was delegated to go to Nagyvarad<sup>4</sup> where he made arrangements for others to get to Romania. Rutka’s next meeting with Bayuk was in prison in Hungary where she and Bayuk had been sent for attempting to cross into Romania illegally. From there, they were sent to prison in

Budapest. Subsequently Bayuk had been caught and no one knew what had happened to him.

The members who finally reached Romania heard that Bayuk had been killed. They cabled Kibbutz Tel Izhak in Palestine to name a new settlement for him.

In May 1945, Lusia, en route from Romania to Sosnowiec to find her mother, encountered Bayuk in Krakow. "*For me he was a ghost!*" After his capture in Hungary, Bayuk became a German POW and was liberated by the Russians. Rutka, who was still in Romania at the time, learned from Lusia about Bayuk.

Rutka and Bayuk rejoined each other in Bratislava, Slovakia. Together they went back to Krakow, a center for arranging *Bricha*. It was that chaotic time of homeless refugees seeking survivors. Bayuk became involved in a post-war program in Poland to train orphaned children for *aliya* to Palestine. He persuaded Rutka to take five "children" to Budapest en route from Romania to Palestine in 1945; in fact some were older than Rutka.

In May 1946, Bayuk arrived in Tel Izhak accompanying forty orphaned children. Rutka and Zelig Bayuk soon married. Rutka wrote her recollections as a surprise gift for Bayuk on his birthday in March 1947. They stayed at the kibbutz for a year.

Life in the kibbutz did not fulfill Bayuk's idealistic vision of life in Israel. Subsequently Rutka and Bayuk lived in Haifa. When Israel became an independent country, Bayuk represented the Progressive Party in Histadrut, the national labor federation.

In 1972, Rutka talked about Bayuk, to an interviewer for the archives at Yad Vashem. Although Bayuk had played a significant role in their escape from Poland, he never told his own story for the archives. At the Eichmann trial, Beisky recounted Bayuk's rescue efforts and at the time was so overcome with emotion that he could barely speak.

Bayuk died on April 19, 1971, on a symbolic date, the anniversary of the 1943 Warsaw Uprising, as Rutka noted. He was 54 and Rutka was 46.

Rutka's mother arrived in Israel in the spring of 1947. She had been sent to Auschwitz and after liberation went to Sweden and from there to Palestine. She lived with Bayuk and Rutka in Haifa leading an active life to the age of 99.

Danka was in southern Hungary when the Russian army was moving towards Germany. She and some other Jews knew enough Russian to be hired as translators. *"The Russians knew we were Jews but we did not feel anti-Semitism."* They stayed with the Russians moving west until the end of the war on May 9, 1945.

Danka explained that she could have left with others from Romania for Palestine but did not want to go then. *"I went back to an uncle in Poland whom I wanted to bring to Israel. First I went to Germany and was with displaced persons and studied nursing. Then I did go back to Poland to meet my uncle and sell my property. Then I waited in Poland until I got papers for Israel in 1948."*

Danka was fourteen years old in 1943 when she fled Poland. She is a poignant example of those five desperate years of transition from youth to adulthood of the survivors in this story.

In August 1944, Lusía had made her attempt to get to Romania from Hungary, as already described. She and other Jews were caught by the Gestapo. A Catholic priest was caught

with them. *“When he told the Gestapo he was a priest they were infuriated “It’s enough that you are a Jew! But to pretend to be a priest!”*

*They beat him to death. Three of our people escaped from this Gestapo place... they went after them and two were caught and hanged...I saw it...water was poured on them and they had to roll in the water...then they attacked them again..this was the end of August 1944...the Gestapo wanted money and food.”*

Tusia, still passing as a Gentile, negotiated with a Gestapo agent to have Lusia freed from jail—I was taken out by our people. Lusia then went from Romania to Poland where she found her mother. Lusia returned to Romania. Those with Lusia included her sister, Felusia and their mother, Rutka, Kuba and his wife and Anka, another of the Tikva girls.<sup>5</sup> They waited for three months to receive legal immigration documents and then left from Constanta for Palestine.

Lusia stayed at Kibbutz Tel Izhak for two years serving as a nurse. After leaving the Kibbutz, she became a registered nurse and pursued that career until retirement age. She married Yuzek Klopman, a dedicated Zionist from his youth, who had come from Poland to Palestine in the late 1920’s.

My husband and I visited Tusia and her husband at their home in a suburb of Tel Aviv. Tusia generously shared her memories with me. She was surprised at how much I had already learned from others and was able to confirm and to clarify aspects of the survival of the group.

Tusia had departed from Budapest in August 1945 and went to Germany to search for her husband. She became one of those survivors wandering from place to place searching for relatives. Someone told her that her husband was in Munich looking for her. At the same time, someone told her husband that Tusia was

in Budapest. Finally, they succeeded in reuniting in Switzerland. Then her husband did everything possible to aid in identifying Nazis for prosecution and also aided in making arrangements for the transport of Jewish DPs to Palestine. He and Tusia, though determined to settle in Palestine, actually remained in Europe until 1951. They then went to Israel where Tusia's husband set up a successful business there. He died in 2004.

The parents of Kuba and Leon, and the mothers of Aviva, Rutka, and Hipek who left Poland and made it to Hungary were caught and sent to Auschwitz in 1944 and subsequently liberated. They came to Palestine a few years later.

Aviva, and the three other girls, who were the first to test the possibility of leaving Sosnowiec identified as Polish workers survived in Germany.

On May 7, 1945, the war ended. Aviva told a nun at the hospital where she worked that she was a Jew and was going to leave. It was heartbreaking for Aviva that the nun, her good friend, was not sympathetic but only angry when Aviva revealed that she would be leaving.

Aviva with Leah, another of the four who were in Germany, became DP's wandering from one place to another. Aviva recalled, *"Every day that I woke up in the morning, I felt like I have a big stone—it was physical...I was not myself. Every moment I wanted to know, who was I?"*

Aviva and Leah decided their only choice was to walk back to Poland. *"We wanted to go to Palestine because Bolek told us that Kibbutz Itzhak was to be our place for reunion—here in Israel. We walked to Komitau with two Russian officers. We told one of their Polish friends our story and he told us we had better go to the Americans rather than the Poles for help."*



*It was a journey of 101 Nights. We were hungry! On foot, we walked 60 km to Karlsbad. Russians, Americans, and the British were there. But there was some kind of epidemic and we could not go to any authorities.*

*So we went another 60 km on foot to Eger—now Hept in Czechoslovakia. We went to a British officer and told him, ‘We are Jewish—we want to go to Palestine.’ We were so naïve—we didn’t know no Jews were left. There was no transport because of bombing damage and he wanted to arrest us because we had no proper documents.”*

Then they chanced upon an American officer with a Polish secretary and told him their whole story still with trepidation about revealing they were Jewish. As Aviva explained, *“He told us that the one possibility we had was to go to an open Polish camp for refugees. There we could sleep and eat but should not tell them we were Jews. Refugees were wandering everywhere...Italians, Greeks and German military wounded, without proper clothes. Leah wanted to go to Switzerland but we had no communications with anyone—we didn’t know what to do.*

*“So we went to the camp authorities and I got a nursing job. Leah got very sick with an allergic reaction. A girl came to the camp and to my amazement spoke to me in Yiddish. She said she thought we were Jewish because of Leah’s sad eyes. She too had a fantastic story of how she survived.”*

Aviva with Leah decided they might find others from their group in Sosnowiec so they left the camp. They ventured as far as Dresden without food. They walked for almost three weeks. The Americans gave them some coupons that allowed them to purchase a little food. They were with some Poles who did not know they were Jewish. In the course of their journey, a Russian Jewish officer seemingly befriended Aviva. Aviva told him her

saga only to be shocked by his response. *In the camps, all I saw was sick girls—you are so nice and healthy...the first healthy Jewish girl I've seen in a long time...*

That Aviva's first encounter in two years with a young Jewish man who was being propositioned was truly disillusioning. One way or another they finally managed to reach Sosnowiec.

*"We went to a Polish woman in Sosnowiec, who had helped us before. But she now refused to let us in. 'I know nothing about your mother,' she said and she shut her door. I had a breakdown...the Poles were very rude...Some others from Hanoar Hatzioni came back—they had been liberated earlier and the organization was working again taking young people and helping them to find food and shelter... they were taking people to Italy for illegal immigration to Palestine."*

Aviva recalled that when they left Sosnowiec in 1943, "We were told we had to survive to go to Palestine because nobody would be left to tell the story. That was our mission. But I knew that our friends were already in Israel and they told our story. We decided it was important to help others get to Palestine." Then Aviva and Leah decided to set out on a tortuous journey to Italy where they assisted in preparing refugees for the *aliya* to Palestine.

Aviva stayed in Italy helping with *Bricha* until June 1946. Aviva felt that this "...was the nicest time I had because after the war we were so broken, we thought about suicide...the sudden emptiness—more than during the war. It was secret work... We gathered weapons—it made up for the emptiness."

Then she too became a passenger to Palestine. "We went to Italy passing as Greeks. Because I could pass for Greek, I now became one of those with a 'good face'. At last her sharp nose and dark skin would not endanger her.

Each person recalled with dismay their reception in Palestine, Lusia said *“We thought we had to build the country but soon enough we realized it was not so important—we were not so welcome.”* People in Palestine discouraged them from telling about their experiences and instead challenged them to explain why they had not resisted. Was this their reward for living to tell?

As for the *kibbutzniks*, the Jews in Palestine communes, their lack of enthusiasm about the refugees derived from their feeling that they had been building Palestine as well as joining the British in fighting the Germans. Why shouldn't the European Jews have done the same? There was no way for the newcomers to explain so they learned all too soon to be silent about their holocaust suffering.

I talked with Moshe Beisky about the indifferent and sometimes hostile reaction of the Jews in Palestine. His indignation was all too evident as he said:

*“This is a mine field! I came in 1945. At the beginning, people asked, ‘Why didn’t you revolt? All of you?’*

*“How could people ask this question? After the war!! A stupid question—as I said in the Eichmann Trial.<sup>6</sup> After all, survivors could ask, ‘What have the Jews of Palestine done?’...I don’t say that the half a million who are here (in Palestine) could save people, but they could cry, they could shout! It was not done.*

*“Nor by the Jewish leadership in the United States! A couple million with some influence! Have they done what could have been done? I don’t say they would save many more, but at least they could arouse public opinion. Didn’t the Jews in 1942 know exactly how many trains went to Belzec? To Auschwitz?”*

*“But I am not asking the Jews of the United States now, ‘What have you done?’”*

Manus, like Moshe Beisky, deplored how oblivious the world had been to the tragedy of the Jews, *“The Jewish leaders didn’t do enough, the Pope kept his mouth shut, the Red Cross wasn’t working properly, the White House sent Jews away. The Star of David (Palestine) didn’t do enough—we thought New York Jews were sitting on the floor crying. But no, not in New York, not in Palestine did anyone do anything!”*

The consensus among the survivors is that Jewish settlers in Palestine were unsympathetic to them. I have had informal discussions with Israelis about this period and the disillusion of the survivors. One person who had been in the Palestine Defense Force remembered his own resentment at the end of the War that the Jews in Europe had failed to resist. Those in Israel simply did not comprehend the obstacles to resisting nor did they know of the futile and desperate attempts that Jews had made to resist

One might think that the seeming indifference of the Jews in Palestine would have soured these survivors about their lives in Israel. However, though they vary in their views about Israeli politics, almost all of them expressed to me the belief that Israel is the only country in the world where Jews do not have to fear anti-Semitism. My expressed appreciation of life for Jews in the United States and Canada was met with skepticism; they think anti-Semitism is latent everywhere and would be evidenced in times of economic or political difficulties.

The survivors have never stopped grieving for relatives and those young friends in Hanoar Hatzioni who perished in Poland as well as for those parents who accompanied them from Poland

to Austria—the parents of Fredka and the father of the Kozuch brothers—who did not survive.

Kibbutz Tel Izhak, founded in 1935 became the residence of Polish Jews who were members of Hanoar Hatzioni. The Kibbutz is now a center of Holocaust education. Some members of the Group have taken active roles in developing the Kibbutz as a *Massuah*, a museum and archives that serve as a memorial to the activities of Hanoar Hatzioni during the Shoah.

Kibbutz Tel Izhak, founded in 1935 became the residence of Polish Jews who were members of Hanoar Hatzioni. The Kibbutz is now a center of Holocaust education. Some members of the Group have taken active roles in developing the Kibbutz as a *Massuah*, a museum and archives that serve as a memorial to the activities of Hanoar Hatzioni during the Shoah.

In Israel, the Group members dispersed to Haifa and Tel Aviv. Lusia, Rutka and Bayuk, Aviva, and Karl settled in Haifa. They continue to have a special relationship with each other derived from their common traumatic history. Karl lived in an apartment adjoining Rutka's for most of their adult lives. In recent years, various illnesses of old age have modified their contacts.

Leon, Tusia, Manus, Kuba, Sofia, and Beisky settled in the Tel Aviv area. Sofia became a Professor of psychology at Tel Aviv University. Her friends were proud of her achievements. She died in 1981 shortly after I met her. Leon died in 2004.

Members of the Group cited instances when they had been saved by the actions of a non-Jew. Most important for Bayuk was expressing his gratitude to Mrs. Sikowrowa who had contrived to help him get Polish forged documents despite the dangers this posed for her. Bayuk returned to Krakow in 1945 and sought

out Mrs. Sikorowa to tell her about the Jewish lives she had saved. Mrs. Sikorowa seemed doubtful about whether she should have helped Bayuk and reluctant even to speak with him — what a disillusioning and heartbreaking encounter for Bayuk!

Polish anti-Semitism was manifested in several major attacks on Jews after the war. Even Poles who might have helped Jews during the Shoah, seemed to fear disapproval of their neighbors if such good deeds were known. (Steinlauf 1997).

So the Group members lived to tell! But there were few listeners.

<sup>1</sup> Displaced Persons Conference 1999, Washington, D.C. sponsored by Holocaust Museum

<sup>2</sup> Leon died in 2004 without any recognition in the Israeli press.

<sup>3</sup> Manus's Massuah testimony (in Polish).

<sup>4</sup> Nagyvarad was then in territory annexed to Hungary and now is Oradea in Romania.

<sup>5</sup> Anka, Josef, Emil, Hans Fogal, Antek, Dudek and Hela, Clara Kveller,

<sup>6</sup> Beisky testified at the Eichmann Trial when he was so overcome with emotion that he asked if he could sit down rather than continue his testimony.

*Chapter 8*





## Author's Reflections

2004

*When your own life is threatened, your sense of empathy is blunted by a terrible selfish hunger for survival.*

—Yann Martell, *Life of Pi*

*The Group* members had lived to tell. But when they arrived in Palestine, rather than finding listeners, they confronted hostile questions about their failure to resist and what they had done to favor themselves or their families or friends in order to survive. They became silent for many years.

I have attempted to tell their story as I learned it from several members of *The Group* without the intrusion of my views. But I could not remain unaffected by what I have learned. Here I want to reflect upon some of the critical questions that confronted survivors and how they dealt with them.

Tomes have been and will continue to be written by scholars about the profound moral dimensions of the Shoah. Surviving involved painful ambivalence about virtually every step people took over a period of years. I found myself questioning whether it is even appropriate to raise issues of moral standards for individuals whose lives were constantly at risk.

The Eichmann trial in Jerusalem in 1961 finally helped Israelis and others to understand the dilemmas of survival. That trial aroused profound discussion of moral issues. Eichmann was sentenced to death. No one doubted his culpability in the destruction of Jews. However, at the time, some Jewish critics opposed the death sentence on the grounds that it would create the illusion that a single individual could be primarily responsi-

ble for the destruction of millions. In effect, it would absolve countless individuals and nations who were perpetrators or bystanders and who might have minimized the tragic destruction of so many Jews.

The concatenation of historical events, the breakdown of societal norms of decency in Germany and in other countries, economic problems, a long history of anti-Semitism all played a role. What was called for was “a different education of men and nations, a new human awareness...(only) these will prevent...catastrophes of this kind in the future.” (Gershon Sholem in Gottlieb, ed.)

I have commented about the Eichmann Trial and reactions to it because I wanted to make clear that no matter what Jews did, whether in positions such as the *Judenrat* or individually, made little or no differences in their chances of surviving. The determination and the power of the Nazis and their allies in anti-Semitism was what caused the elimination of millions of Jews. Though I shall be commenting on the behavior of Jews, I am not suggesting that anything they did or could have done would have changed the horrifying statistics.

I remember how I and my friends in our high school days would playfully discuss choosing whom to save if one of us were a parent in a sinking boat. Would we choose our mother or child if only one could be saved? For us, even having to make such a choice was really unimaginable. Under the Nazi regime, Jews confronted innumerable implicit and explicit problems of selection for survival as *The Group* story illustrates.

Why didn't they resist was a repeated query. I discussed this with Dr. Shmuel Krakowski, Emeritus Director of the Yad Vashem Archives and one of those few Polish Jews who sur-

vived. He became an esteemed historian of the Shoah. I quote from his comments regarding challenges to the survivors about not resisting.

“...All the resistance taken together was close to nothing.

In the Warsaw ghetto, after the deportations of 1942, Ringelblum wrote, ‘Why didn’t we resist? Why didn’t we throw stones, hot water?’

Why did he think this way? Because this was the way the people resisted the Czar’s Cossacks during the Revolution? They were on horses and you could pour hot water. This was not so with the Germans...for them it was no problem to shoot 100,000 people...Every German who went into the action had ammunition—hundreds of bullets. So he [the resister] had a pistol with three or five bullets...there were no conditions for survival ‘hazala’ or resistance, ‘hagana’...[Sometimes] special geographic conditions enabled a greater number of Jews to be in the forest, to create a guerrilla unit, and some survived. But in other regions, the Jews did the same. It did work— maybe for half an hour, one hour...

To die with pride and to shoot the first German—what would be the result? 100 would be shot and you would be 101. Or if you survived, you would be blamed for the murders.”

Dalia Ofer states that subsequent to the Eichmann Trial, “A new definition of resistance was formulated after the survivors gave their accounts. There was resistance everywhere. The Jewish woman who spat in the face of a Nazi in the streets of Lwow was a resistance fighter. So were the prisoners of the ghettos and camps who, in the face of prohibitions backed by immediate death penalties in case of discovery, were clandestinely celebrating the Sabbath, lighting candles on Hanukkah, gathering for

prayers on holidays, organizing schools and activities, even holding debates on national issues. All these were national resistance heroes.”(Ofer 1966)

A most painful subject relates to the ways in which the *Judenrate* implicitly or explicitly “selected” Jews for survival. Almost immediately after the German occupation in 1939, the Germans created the *Judenrate*. They diabolically appointed and then assigned to these councils of Jews the responsibility to carry out their orders in Jewish communities.

In Sosnowiec and Bedzin, the Germans appointed Moses Merin, a person of questionable reputation, to be head of the *Judenrat* there and subsequently of several other communities in the same region. For the first three years of the German occupation of Poland, the *Judenrat* employed many Jews to maintain municipal services and provided some order in the traumatized communities.

The critical test came in 1942 and 1943 when the *Judenrat* had orders to select people for deportation to concentration camps. That Merin complied with German orders and selected the German victims seemed unconscionable at the time. For example, those who were well off financially could pay bribes for food and for forged documents and sometimes they paid for poorer people to substitute for them in deportations. At other times, the old and the sick were sacrificed in favor of those who could provide labor for the Germans. Merin’s rationalization at the time was that his goal was to save as many people as possible and hence he had to choose those who could provide labor for the Germans.

As the years have passed, even those Jews who hated Merin and his compliance with German orders have modified their

views. Moshe Beisky expressed to me a sense of this changed attitude about the *Judenrat*. “The attitude thirty years ago and today concerning *Judenrate* has changed...it should have....At the beginning, everybody tried to convict them but most [of the *Judenrate*] tried to gain time to find a *modus vivendi* —to live, to provide food, to resolve problems of housing, illness, to make life possible under German restrictions. Even people like myself, who lived during this time, find it is not easy to judge.”

Isaiah Trunk has done the most respected scholarly study of the *Judenrate*. His aim was “to give an objective history of the Councils, based on unbiased documentation...not...to pronounce judgment”

Trunk writes of the problems posed by the composition of the *Judenrate*. The respected leaders of the pre-war Jewish communities “with high moral standards and with long, unblemished careers in Jewish public life were incapable of making themselves deal with the corrupt officials of the German occupation”. Once people became *Judenrat* members, they were subject to severe sanctions by the Germans for non-compliance or for any attempts to resign.

Most *Judenrate* attempted to minimize their response to German orders. However, some suffered “the negative moral and social evolution of Jewish representatives under Nazi rule”. Trunk cites Moses Merin of Sosnowiec as one of those who became despotic. In contrast, Adam Czerniakow, head of the Warsaw *Judenrat* committed suicide after stating “when I was asked to give a list people [for deportation] I could give only a list of four—I, my wife and my two children.”<sup>1</sup>

The *Judenrate* promoted the notion of “rescue through work” and assumed responsibility for selecting the most able

workers as one mode for preserving lives. Should they have submitted to locating a Jewish work force for the German war effort and hence saved some? Should individuals in the community have complied and worked to produce German goods? Working for the Germans ultimately did not save Jews but it did postpone their elimination.

Given what is known, Trunk confronts the extent to which the *Judenrate* had a positive or negative effect on the final outcome of the Holocaust. Trunk points out that some two million Jews in Poland were destroyed by the Germans without any *Judenrat* involvement. The Germans eventually did not hesitate to kill *Judenrate* members just as they did millions of other Jews.

Trunk concludes, "It would appear, then, that when all factors are considered, Jewish participation or nonparticipation in the deportations had no substantial influence...one way or the other...on the final outcome of the Holocaust in Eastern Europe." (Trunk 1972).

There were arguments among the members of Hanoar Hatzioni about whether to continue to attempt resistance or to attempt to survive. Youth in other organizations accused Group members of concealing information, and of selecting their own members for survival at the cost of others.

One source of resentment in Sosnowiec was that some Hanoar Hatzioni members were saved because they received documents from a former Sosnowiec Hanoar Hatzioni member who served as an official of a Jewish aid organization in Geneva. Hundreds of Jews attempted to procure documents stating that they were "foreign nationals". This designation made it possible for them to be protected. The Geneva official could help only a

few despite the hundreds of pitiful and justifiable pleas he received.

Organizations like Hanoar Hatzioni carefully selected people from their organization whom they knew they could trust to receive such documents and it could be very few who would benefit. Knowing the terrible consequences of their plans being discovered, the youngsters coveted every piece of information. The people in this story in so many ways conveyed the pain associated with their choices “*We did things that were not so nice.*”

Regarding this, Moshe Beisky commented, “You have to see this in context...First of all we wanted to save our lives and our family’s lives and we could not manage. We tried to help our small circle of youngsters in our youth movement...Because the poor people decide to send one member who then could get money from a wealthy person to buy bread for a family...I am not going to be a judge...Years ago, they wanted me to get an award for the Jewish underground but I did not want to get it because we were really not in the underground—even the Hanoar Hatzioni group tried to save our circle—Are people angry at you for this?...”

Having money and connections often provided at least temporary advantage. The Jewish tragedy was confounded because they had to negotiate with Poles or Germans to get supplies or forged documents. Jews were placed in the position of perishing or “bargaining with the devil”.

In writing about Hungary, I referred to some major contentious events when some Jewish leaders in Budapest negotiated with the Nazis in Hungary in attempts to save Jews.

In early May 1944, when the Germans were rapidly pursuing the transport of Jews to Auschwitz, some Jews led by Joel Brand, met with a deputy of Eichmann. Eichmann had apparently inferred that he would save many Jews if within two weeks the Jews could supply war materials. Brand left to negotiate with Palestine agents and representatives of the Allies in Istanbul. They would not believe his story.

However, Ira Hirschmann, the United States representative of the War Refugee Board met Brand in Istanbul wrote about him as follows, "himself a Jew, he was here negotiating as a Nazi agent. It would have been difficult to cast a man in a more tragically anomalous role. I found Brandt (sic) sympathetic and credible...he had been an active Zionist and was sent by the Jewish leaders to alleviate persecution...what had been done in Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland in years has been done in Hungary in a few weeks' time."

Winston Churchill and other national leader, though distressed by the rapid elimination of the Hungarian Jews, believed that there should be no negotiations of any kind. The view prevailed that the Brand deal was a ruse to create dissension among the Allies. (Hirschmann).

A few weeks later Kasztner, one of the leaders of the Rescue Committee in Budapest negotiated with the Germans for a train taking Jews to safety. This was at the height of Eichmann's elimination of Jews in Hungary. The number who could get on the trains was limited and led to devastating skepticism about Kasztner's selection procedures.

Some members of *The Group* were offered places on this train but declined. They were reluctant to part from other members of *The Group*. Besides that, they knew of too many purport-



ed ‘rescues’ which had transported Jews to Auschwitz. The train departed from Hungary with 1684 Jews selected by a committee chaired by Kasztner. After a circuitous trip to Switzerland, all of them were ultimately saved.

Kasztner settled in Israel after the war. He became a government official. Kasztner was later accused of collaborating with Eichmann to save his relatives and some Jewish dignitaries. The rescue train became a controversial ‘cause celebre’. Kasztner sued the accuser in a 1956 court case in Israel. The court acquitted Kasztner’s accuser and strongly condemned Kasztner as a collaborator. In 1957, Kasztner was assassinated in Tel Aviv. The case was later appealed to the Supreme Court and posthumously Kasztner was legally vindicated. However, popular opinion has remained hostile to him and to those who defended him.

In regard to the questions that have been raised over and over regarding Kasztner and Brand in Hungary, the Sosnowiec Hanoar Hatzioni members who knew them well have defended them. Leon was one of those who testified at the Eichmann Trial in defense of Kasztner’s negotiations with the Germans for the train. The hostility to Kasztner and those who defend him remains a subject of continuing controversy in Israel. Members of *The Group* were sometimes vilified for defending him.

Beisky’s comments are relevant to the Kasztner train selection. Specifically regarding Kasztner, Beisky said. “In my opinion, even to ask again about selection doesn’t show much knowledge of the situation at that time. Kasztner saved 1,684 Jews who went on a train to Bergen Belsen and then to Switzerland. They couldn’t save all but they tried to save whom they could.... Can we convict him for this? I say, no. We should not convict Kasztner.”

An article by Leora Bilky (2000) in *Law and History Review* discusses the different ways in which the judge in the first Kasztner trial and in the second perceived the legal situation. The judge in the original trial perceived Kasztner as an equal in making a contract with Eichmann as though Kasztner had been part of a conspiracy “between a Nazi and a Jewish leader eager to save his relatives and friends and willing to deliver the members of his community to the Nazis in exchange.”

However, the judge who presided in the posthumous procedure vindicating Kasztner “allowed the impact of history (the approaching end of the war, the increasing number of trains to Auschwitz, the delay in the West’s response, and so forth) to dawn on the reader...the justice’s opinion reads like a chronology that leaves us with many open-ended moral questions and with legal answers that do not pertain to absolute knowledge and certainty...[He] tried to learn from this incident the limits of ‘heroic action’ given the historic conditions of the Jews at the time.”

Bilsky points out that the Kasztner trials were particularly painful because they judged Jews, not Nazis. I found Bilsky’s discussion most reasonable because it emphasizes—as does Beisky who was a lawyer and a Judge—taking account of the context in rendering judgment about culpability.

As for members of *The Group*, I was shocked to learn that some of the Sosnowiec and Bedzin Hanoar Hatzioni members had murdered another Jew. Rutka and Lusia who were very candid in our extensive conversations never revealed this murder. I think that neither thought it was their story to tell. Lusia urged one friend involved in the murder to meet with me. I believe that Lusia hoped she would share the story of the murder with

me but she did not. Avihu Ronen, a historian, who has written in Hebrew about Sosnowiec and Bedzin Jews, told me about this, to my great dismay. Subsequently, I found testimonies in the archives about the murder.

I was shocked and found the murder out of harmony with my then rather naïve picture of the young people's horrifying situation and how they dealt with it. I even considered giving up writing this book. However, I came to realize that conveying this tale of survival could hardly be a romantic story.

The three young people who participated in the murder were dedicated to protecting other Group members and willing on their behalf to place themselves in great jeopardy. They had no recourse to a judicial system. Just imagine in 1944 their appealing to Hungarian officials or to the occupying Germans for protection from a Jewish man whom they knew to have betrayed Jews in Poland and who knew about them and their passing as Poles in Hungary.

I discussed this with a professor of legal ethics. Under United States law, a murder under such circumstances might be considered *not* morally condemnable and warrant some lesser punishment than that for homicide. Whether under United States law it could be considered *justifiable* homicide and not subject to any punishment is doubtful. The murderers would have had to prove *beyond a reasonable doubt* that the person murdered was intending to kill them and that they acted in self-defense. My legal expert volunteered that nevertheless *under their circumstances*, he too might have taken the chance of murder.

I find it ironic indeed that these young people passing as Poles were jailed in Hungary for one murder while at that same time Hungarians participated in the German deportation of

hundreds of thousands of Jews to Auschwitz and death with almost unbelievable haste.

In reflecting about the implicit messages that Group members conveyed to me, a few emphasized “avenging the deaths” of Jews beyond “living to tell”. There is hardly a survivor who did not lust for the death of Nazis. But only a few became involved in controversial post-war avenging activities. I have not dealt with the post-war period in Europe but want to comment briefly since a few members of *The Group* became ‘avengers’ immediately after the war’s end.

Some Zionist survivors in Europe felt they could not rely on others to avenge the deaths of Jews at the hands of Germans. Until recent years, discussion of such post-war revenge activities was taboo and not to be revealed.

As the years have passed and more records are open, there is greater willingness to consider this aspect of the Holocaust. At a Conference at Brandeis University in 1999, one workshop was devoted to discussion of revenge activities. The leader of the avengers was Abba Kovner, who settled in Israel and became a renowned poet. To many at the time, the avengers’ deeds seemed truly to be “poetic justice”. Those Jews who participated in the post-war hunting down of Nazis saw it as a continuation of wartime resistance.

Some Jews believed that post-war attacks on Nazis were justified and even admirable at the war’s end. Others, including the leaders in Palestine at that time, considered it wrong and inimical to Jewish interests for Jews to have taken the law into their own hands when the hope was that legal tribunals would eventually sit in judgment.

Should the avengers have trusted that bona fide legal institutions would assume appropriate responsibility for punishing the Nazis when all they could see was total anomie with refugees wandering everywhere after the havoc of the war?

One speaker at that workshop had been one of the avengers in post-war Germany. He said something like this: 'Life seemed cheap then...so many deaths; we were despondent...refugees were wandering all over and didn't know where to go. We did not think Nazis would be punished and we could not contemplate their lives going on after they had killed so many Jews. It was a different world!'

Dalia Ofer has written about moral issues associated with *Aliya Bet*, the illegal immigration arranged by Palestine Jews during the War: "Indeed, the mobilization of world opinion for active rescue was practically the only weapon the Yishuv could wield. But here the Yishuv leaders had to face the determination of the Allies to pursue the war according to their own lights. Humanitarian concerns were held secondary to military interests... Thus, we are faced with a dilemma: how to assess *Aliya Bet* if one of its effects was to enable the Yishuv to come to terms with its own impotence and with the pronounced failure to achieve a mass rescue policy." (Ofer 1966)

It seems futile to expect that individuals under such duress as that experienced by Jews during the Shoah can comply with standards of morality that would normally be reasonable. Yet, the efforts to prevent nations from abusing their citizens so far seem hopeless. I would like to think that this book could make at least a small contribution to teaching history as a means to prevent such catastrophes. Contemplating the world situation since the

1940's does not make me optimistic. Nevertheless we must do what we can in education and in politics to foster greater humanity. Perhaps this account of the deeds of these young people can make at least a small contribution.

I am grateful to the survivors for permitting me to tell their story in English to readers who could otherwise not know it.

At the end of the war, Rutka wrote "...our victory over the Nazis was really monumental if over those years of barbarity and humiliation, we had saved not only our lives but some human sensibility." Perhaps that is the most hopeful part of the story of these few who "lived to tell".

*Chapter 9*





B-g d. 18. I. 1943

Sehr geehrter Herr Schwarzbaum!

Ich wende mich an Sie mit einer großen Bitte: Sie beschrittige sie bitte.

Meine Braut dürften Sie kennen: Miriam Tencer, die Tochter von Karola Tencer.

Nun bin ich aber in großer Verlegenheit, da ich unsere Papiere nicht machen lassen kann, meine Braut hat nämlich kein Geburtszeugnis.

Vielleicht könnten Sie sich mit Herrn Dyanzof sprechen, der ihr Opa ist, vielleicht kann der helfen.

Da ich meine Hochzeit gerne am 17. Geburtstags meiner 1926 geborenen Braut von heute in 2 Monaten machen möchte, bitte ich um baldige Zuschrift.

Die besten Grüsse an Frau Gemahlin und Sola

Ihr Herr Harry Blumenfruit!

Letter from Harry Blumenfruit to Schwarzbaum at Zionist headquarters, 1943



Hanoar Hazioni  
Source: 1971 Bayuk biography



From left to right: Motek Danziger, Fredka, Jozek Kouzek, Karola Bojm, Bolek Kouzek



Students of the Furstenburg High School in Bedzin some time in the 1930's.

Karola Bojm is in the first row first from left.

Harry Blumenfrucht is in the first row sixth from the left.

Jadzia Szpigelman is in the second row, seventh from left.

Izrael Kiamantis in the second row, fourth from the left.

Source: *Before They Perished, Photographs Found in Auschwitz* edited by Kersten Brandt, Hanno Loewy and Krystyna Oleksy, 2001.



Janek Cymmerman



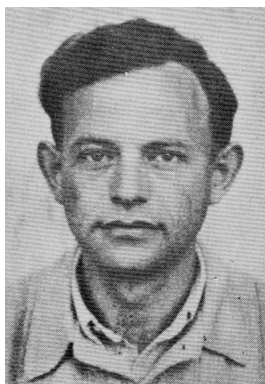
Lolka Pomeranc-Blumen



Hanoar Hzioni before the war.  
Source: 1971 Bayuk biography



Nathan Rozenzweig



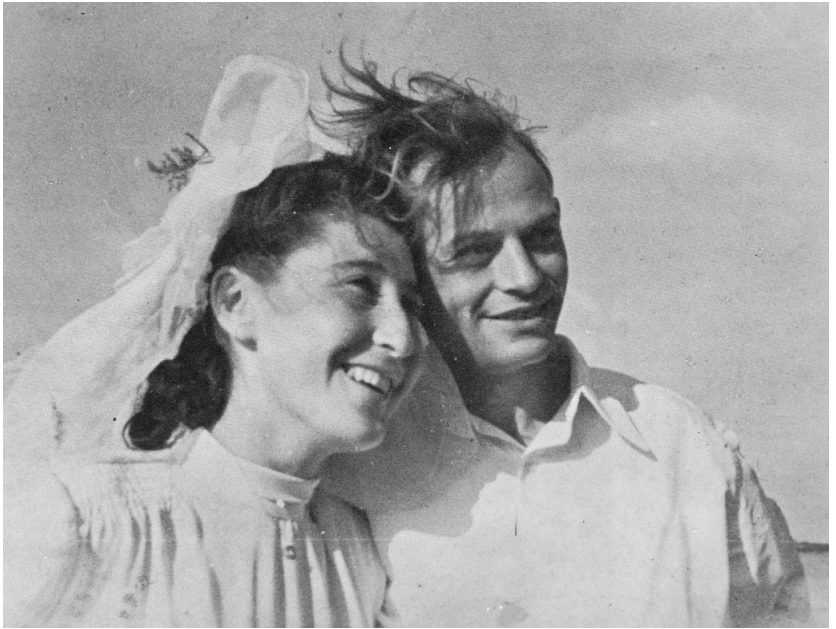
Bayuk in 1948



Henia Rotner



Hipek Glickenstein



Rutka and Bayuk's wedding in Israel.  
Source: 1971 Bayuk biography

Absender: *Schneidersammlerwerkstatt*  
*Bendburg, Alte Hauptstr. 45.*  
 Wohnort: *Bendburg*  
 für *Korrespondenz*  
 Straße, Hausnummer, Gefäß, Inhalt, Stückzahl oder Postfachnummer  
 gleichzeitig dem *Wenig*, der  
 uns *schick* das *zweite* Mal  
 vom *16. Kolotype* *Grüne* *über*  
 hat. Ich *grüße* *Sie* *sehr* *gern*  
*Sein* *Arzt*

Hörliche Grüße  
 Gern Ihre Freundin  
 Dein *Herrmann*

**Faßt Kohlenklaus!**  
 Er kauft das Gas  
 und sticht das Licht,  
 heißt Strom und Kohle  
 Duld'rs nicht!

5412



Herrn

N. Schwalb

Geneve!

131 rue de Lausanne

Strasse, Hausnummer, Gefäß, Inhalt, Stückzahl oder Postfachnummer

Schweiz



lieber Natan,  
 Ich habe dir schon lange nicht geschrieben.  
 Seitdem hat sich manches bei mir geändert. Ich arbeite  
 jetzt in der Schneidersammlerwerkstatt in Bendburg.  
 Wohne aber bis jetzt noch in Sosnowitz zusammen mit  
 meinen Eltern. Hier arbeitet auch Erenszel, der mich  
 mit Frumka schon kennt. Und wie geht es dir? Bist  
 Du sehr beschäftigt? Was macht Deine Familie?  
 Unsere Familie hält sich zusammen und die meisten  
 sind in verschiedenen Geschäften beschäftigt. Du hast  
 doch ~~bestimmt~~ die Briefe der Truma erhalten, die ich  
 mich mit welcher Frau, Tamara in Kuchel (nicht Rot),  
 über Heitlis in Rosencamp, Lipman ausführen geschrie-  
 ben hat. Ferner haben mich auch Suschka in Gelbhar  
 dir die besten Grüsse übergeben. Sonntag, wenn ich  
 mehr Zeit habe, werde ich schreiben, ich noch an  
 dir einen Brief, ~~ich~~ ~~bitte~~ bitte ich dich um  
 ein baldiges Antwort, die uns über dich,  
 seine ganze Familie, Chaila in alles was dich angeht  
 unterrichten wird. Noch eins: Ich antworte jetzt!

Cards sent to Natan Schwalb in Geneva. The first from Frumka Ploznika the second from Jozek.

## References

- Ainzstein, R. 1974. *Jewish resistance in Nazi Occupied Europe*. Eleks Books Limited, London
- Apenszlak, J. (ed.) 1943. *The black book of Polish Jewry under Nazi occupation*. American Federation for Polish Jews, New York (sponsored by Eleanor Roosevelt)
- Archives of the Holocaust*, vols. 4 and 10. 1990. American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, Central Zionist Archives 1939-45. Jerusalem
- Bartoszewski, Wladystaw 1969. *Polish-Jewish Relations in occupied Poland, 1939-1945* Earls court Publications,
- Bar-Zohar, M. 1968. *The Avengers*. London: Arthur Barker. (Translated from French by L. Ortzen.)
- Bauer, Y & Rotenstreich, N, Eds. 1981. *Essays and a Discussion. The Holocaust as Historical Experience* Holmes & Meier Pubs., New York
- Bauer, Y 1970. *Flight and rescue: Brichah, the organized escape of the Jewish survivors of Eastern Europe, 1944-48*. New York: Random House.
- Bauer, Y. 1978. *The Holocaust in historical perspective*. University of Washington Press, Seattle.
- Bauer, Y. 1981. *American Jewry and the Holocaust: The American Joint Distribution Committee, 1939-1945*. Hebrew University, Jerusalem: The Institute of Contemporary Jewry.
- Bauer, Y. 1982. *A history of the Holocaust*. New York: Franklin Watts.
- Bauer, Y. 1994. *Jews for sale? Nazi-Jewish negotiations, 1933-1945*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Bayuk, R. 1945. Unpublished memoir: 1939-45. Microfiche: University of Haifa, Ghetto Fighters' House. (Translated from Polish by Tadosz Szafar.)

Begley, L. 1991. *Wartime lies*. New York: Knopf.

Beisky, M. 1994. *Oscar Schindler and Schindler's List*, in Yad Vashem Studies XXIV.

Berenbaum, M. & Peck, A. 1988. *The Holocaust and history*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Bilsky, L. 2000. *Judging evil in the trial of Kastner*, Law and History Review, Spring.

Blum, J. 1994. *Closing America*, in: *ADL Dimensions*, vol. 8, no. 1, pp23-28.

Braham, R. L. & Vago, B. (eds.). 1985. *The Holocaust in Hungary: Forty years later*. New York: Columbia University Press. (East European Monographs, no. CXC, City University of New York and University of Haifa.

Braham, R.L. & Vago, B. (eds.) 1986. *The tragedy of Hungarian Jewry: Essays, documents, depositions*. City University of New York. (Social Science Monographs, Institute for Holocaust Studies.)

Bronner, E. 2000. "Nemesis". A review of Rich Cohen's *The Avengers*, in *The New York Times Review of Books*, October 1.

Bronowski, A. 1991. *They were few*. (From *Studies on the Shoah*, Institute for Research on the Shoah, University of Haifa, Ghetto Fighters' House.)

Cohen, A. & Cochavi, Y. 1995. *Zionist youth movements during the Shoah*, vol. 4. (From *Studies on the Shoah*, Institute for Research on the Shoah, University of Haifa, Ghetto Fighters' House.)

Cohen, A. & Cochavi, Y. 1986. *The Halutz Resistance in Hungary 1942-1944*. New York: Columbia University Press. (Social



## References

- Science Monographs, Institute for Holocaust Studies, City University of New York. Translated from Hebrew by C. Alpert.)
- Craig, G. A. 1996. *How hell worked*. A review of D.J. Goldhagen's "Hitler's Willing Executioners and John V.H. Dippel's "Bound Upon a Wheel of Fire", in The New York Times Review of Books, April 18.
- Dawidowicz, L. S. 1975. *The war against the Jews, 1933-1945*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Deak, I. 1992. *Strategies of hell*, in The New York Times Review of Books, October 8.
- Deak, I. 1992. *Witnesses to evil*, in The New York Times Review of Books, October 22.
- Deak, I. 1992. *Holocaust heroes*, in The New York Times Review of Books, November 5.
- Deak, I. 1997. *Memories of hell*, in The New York Times Review of Books, June 26.
- Deak, I. 2000. *The Pope, the Nazis and the Jews*, in The New York Times Review of Books, March 23.
- Deak, I. 2000. *Artful dodger*, in The New York Review of Books, November 15.
- Diamant, M. 1995. *Mission Eichmann*. Wien: Jugend & Volk. (German only),
- Encyclopedia of Zionism and Israel*, 1971, Herzl Press, New York
- Encyclopedia Judaica*. Kater Publishing Ltd., Jerusalem, Israel 1971
- Engel, D. J. 1987. *In the shadow of Auschwitz*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Frankel, M. *Willing Executioners?* A review of Norman G. Finkelstein and Ruth Bettina Bern's "A Nation on Trial", in The New York Times Review of Books. 1998

Friedlander, S. 1977. *Some aspects of the historical significance of the Holocaust*, Philip M. Klutznick International Lecture. (A Jerusalem Quarterly reprint, The Middle East Institute, Jerusalem.)

Friedlander, S. 1997. *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, Yad Vashem Studies XXIV. (In Holocaust Memorial Museum Library, Washington, DC.)

Friedman, P. 1957. *Their brothers' keepers*. New York: Crown.

Friedman, P. 1980. *Essay, in Roads to extinction: Essays on the Holocaust*, edited by A. Friedman. New York: The Jewish Publication Society of America and the Conference on Jewish Social Studies.

Friedman, P. *The Jewish badge and the Yellow Star*. J, vol. XVII, no. 1, April 1955; Includes bibliographical footnotes.

Gay, R. 1992. *The Jews of Germany*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Gilbert, M. 1966. *Twentieth century Europe: A history*. New York: Schochen Books

Gilbert, M. 1986. *The Holocaust: The Jewish tragedy*. London: Fontana/ Collins.

Gilbert, M. 1993. *Atlas of the Holocaust*. London: Dent.

Gilbert, M. *Surviving the Holocaust* Historica Judaica Vol. 17, 1995

Gottlieb, R. S. (ed.) 1990. *Thinking the unthinkable: Meanings of the Holocaust*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.

Gutman, I. 1986. *Unequal victims: Poles and Jews during World War Two*. New York: Holocaust Library.

Gutman, I. 1987. *Polish-Jewish relations during the Second World War*, commentary, in *A Journal of Polish-Jewish Studies*. Oxford:

R e f e r e n c e s

Basil Blackwell. (Published for the Institute for Polish-Jewish Studies, Oxford.)

Grubszstein, Meir, ed, *Jewish resistance during the Holocaust*, Proceedings of the Conference on Manifestations of Jewish Resistance, Jerusalem April 7-15, 1968, Jerusalem: Yad Vashem 1971 in Yad Vashem Conference Reports, 1971. Jerusalem: Yad Vashem.

Gutman, I. 1968 *Youth movements in the underground*, Yad Vashem Conference Proceedings

Gutman, I. (ed.). 1990. *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*. New York: Macmillan.

Gutman, I. & Zuroff, E. (eds.) 1977. *Rescue attempts during the Holocaust: Proceedings of the Second Yad Vashem International Conference*, Jerusalem, April 8-11, 1974. Jerusalem: Yad Vashem. (2nd edition.)

Gutman, T. *The yellow book*. Unpublished memoir.

Haas P.J. 1988. *Morality after Auschwitz: The radical challenge of the Nazi ethics*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Hausner, G. 1966. *Justice in Jerusalem*. New York: Harper & Row.

Hilberg, R. 1985. *The destruction of the European Jews*. New York: Holmes & Meier.

Hilberg, R. 1992. *Perpetrators, victims, bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe 1933-1945*. New York: Harper Collins.

Hirschmann, I. 1946. *Life line to a promised land*. New York: Vanguard Press.

Hoffman, E. 1994. *Let memory speak*. A review of two books by Aharon Appelfeld, in The New York Times Review of Books, January 23.

Kagan J. Hippocene insiders' guide to Poland's Jewish heritage. Hippocene Books, New York

Kermish, J. (ed.) 1986. *To live with honor and die with honor: Selected documents from the Warsaw Ghetto Underground Archives* "O.S." ["Oneg Shabbath"]. Jerusalem: Yad Vashem.

Jozef Kermish and Shmuel Krakowski , 1992. *Polish Jewish relations during the Second World War*, edited and with footnotes, Evanston, Illinois Northwestern University Press.

Korbonski, Stefan, 1989 *The Jews and the Poles in World War II*, Hippocene Books, NY.

Kowalski, I., Ed. *An anthology of armed Jewish resistance, 1939-45*. compiled and edited by Jerusalem: Hebrew University and Jewish Combatants Publishing House, c1984-c1991. (Reprints of randomly selected accounts of resistance including one report on Bedzin.)

Krakowski, S. 1984. *The war of the doomed: Jewish armed resistance in Poland, 1942-1944*. New York: Holmes & Meier. (Translated from Hebrew by Orah Blaustein.)

Lambert, G. 1974. *How young Zionists rescued thousands of Jews*. Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill.

Lang, B. (ed.) 1988. *Writing and the Holocaust*. New York: Holmes & Meier.

Langer, L. L. 1995. *Admitting the Holocaust*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Levai, Von J. 1961. *Eichmann in Ungarn: Dokumente*. Budapest: Pannonia Press. (German from Hungarian documents on Eichmann; translated from German by Magda Tisza.)

Margalit, A. 1994. *The uses of the Holocaust*. A review of Tom Segev's *The Seventh Million* in *The New York Times Review of Books*, February 17.

R e f e r e n c e s

- Marrus, M. R. 1987. *The Holocaust in history*. London: Penguin Books.
- Marrus, M. R. 1995. *Jewish Resistance to the Holocaust*. *Journal of Contemporary History*, London, vol. 30, pp 83-110.
- Marrus, M.R. 1997. *The Nuremberg Trial, fifty years after*. *The American Scholar*, International Law Vol. 66 #4, .]
- Martell, Yann, *Life of Pi*. (Harcourt Inc. 2001)
- Massuah Testimonies. Testimonies by survivors recorded and kept at Kibbutz Tel Izhak, a center of Holocaust education. masuah@netvision.net.il.)
- Mayer, A. J. 1988. *Why did the heavens not darken? The final solution in history*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Mazia, F. 1965. *Comrades in the storm: The struggle of Zionist youth against the Nazis*. Jerusalem: Yad Vashem. (Available in Hebrew only.)
- Melzer, E. 1997. *No way out: The politics of Polish Jewry, 1935-1939*. New York: Union College Press.
- Mendelsohn, E. 1981. *Zionism in Poland: The formative years, 1915-26*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Mendelsohn, E. 1994. *Jewish Historiography on Polish Jewry*, Polin Vol. 8
- Morse, A. D. 1967. *While six million died: A chronicle of American apathy*. New York: Random House.
- Netzer, S. s.a. Unpublished memoir of Azriel Kozuch (1919 – 1943).
- Ofer, D. 1966. *Israel, in The world reacts to the Holocaust*, edited by D. Wyman. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996.
- Ofer, D. 1990. *Escaping the Holocaust: Illegal immigration to the Land of Israel, 1939-1944*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Patai, R. (ed.) 1971. *Encyclopedia of Zionism and Israel*. New York: Herzl Press.

Perl, William, *Illegal immigration 1939-1941*, (microfiche, National Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC.)

Perlis, R. 1987. *The pioneering youth movement in Nazi-occupied Poland*. University of Haifa, Ghetto Fighters' House. (Hebrew.)

Petersen, N. H. (ed.) 1996. *From Hitler's doorstep: the wartime intelligence reports of Allen Dulles, 1942-45*. Penn State Press.

Pinkes Bendin: *A memorial to the Jewish community of Bendin (Poland)*. Association of Former Residents of Bedzin in Israel, published in Tel Aviv, 1959

Pogonowski, I., 1994. *The Path of the Righteous*. Polin Vol. 8

Polonsky, Antony, 2003, *Poland Facing the Shoah: Polish Society and the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*, unpublished paper commemorating the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto uprising

Porat, D. 1990. *The Blue and the Yellow Stars of David: The Zionist leadership in Palestine and the Holocaust, 1939-1945*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

Prekerowa Teresa, *Zegota: Commission d'aide aux Juifs*. Monaco: Editions du Rocher, 1999, Translation, Relief Council for Jews 1942-45

Ranz, J. 1976. *In Nazi claws: Bedzin, 1939-44*. New York, 1956.

Rapoport, J., Pinkas Zaglebie; Memorial Book (2nd edition.)

Ringelblum, E. 1967. *The Story of the Jewish Resistance in Nazi Europe, in They fought back*, edited and translated by Y. Suhl. New York: Crown.

Ringelblum, E. *Ksovim fun geto, vol. II*, Warsaw, 1963, 328 (quoted in Polonsky\_

Ronen, A. 1994. *Battle for life. Zionist Youth Movements and anti-*

R e f e r e n c e s

- Nazi Resistance Yad Yary*. (Available in Hebrew only; sections of book translated by Gay Pariser.)
- Ronen, A. & Cochavi, Y. (eds.) 1995. *Third person singular: Biographies of youth movements' activists during the Holocaust, vol. 1* (of 2). (Title in English but rest is in Hebrew.)
- Roth, J. R. & Berenbaum, M. (eds.) 1989. *Holocaust: Religious and philosophical implications*. New York: Paragon House.
- Roth, P. 1988. *Walking the way of the survivor: A talk with Aharon Appelfeld*, in *The New York Times Review of Books*, February 28.
- Rothkirchen, L. 1968. *An asylum for refugees*, in *Yad Vashem Studies*. Vol. 7 pp. 127-146
- Rozett, R. 1994. *From Poland to Hungary: Rescue attempts 1943-44*, in *Yad Vashem Studies XXIV*. (In Holocaust Memorial Museum Library, Washington, DC.)
- Shaw, S. 1993. *Turkey and the Holocaust: Turkey's Role in Rescuing Turkish and European Jewry from Nazi Persecution, 1933-1945*, New York University Press, New York
- Stone, I. F. 1976, (Reprint of 1946) *Underground to Palestine and reflections thirty years later*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Suhl, U. (ed. and translated.) 1967. *They fought back: The story of the Jewish resistance in Nazi Europe*. New York]: Crown.
- Silberklang, D. 1994. *The Allies and the Holocaust: A reappraisal*, in *Yad Vashem Studies XXIV*. (In Holocaust Memorial Museum Library, Washington, DC.)
- Steinlauf, M. 1997. *Bondage to the dead: Poland and the memory of the Holocaust*. Syracuse University Press.
- Szonyi, D, Hoboken, N.J. (ed.) *The Holocaust: An annotated bibliography and resource guide*. Ktav Publishing, New York

Szternfinkel, N. E. 1946. *Zagłada Żydów Sosnowca*. Katowice. Document for Central Jewish Historical Commission, in Polish describing Sosnowiec from 1939-43, translated informally by S. Janowska.)

Tenenbaum, J. 1952. *Underground: The story of a people*. New York: Philosophical Library.

*The Holocaust*. 1982. New York: Garland Pub., (18 volumes of documents and papers)

Tory, A. 1991 *Surviving the Holocaust: The Kovno Ghetto Diary*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press

Trunk, I. 1972. *The Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe during the Nazi Occupation*, New York: Macmillan.

Vago, B. 1974. *Article on Joel Brand*, in *Yad Vashem Studies X*. (In Holocaust Memorial Museum Library, Washington, DC.)

Wyman, D. S. 1984. *The abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941-1945*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Yad Vashem Testimonies, Archives at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem

Yahil, L. 1990. *The Holocaust: The fate of European Jewry, 1932-1945*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Youth Aliyah: 1933 to Post World War II, in *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, , edited by I. Gutman, New York: Macmillan 1990.

Zuckerman, I. 1962. *The fighting ghettos*. University of Haifa, Ghetto Fighters' House. (Also: Philadelphia: Lippincott, listed under Barkai, M.)



*R e f e r e n c e s*

