And I Survived

by Ann Gendelman Waldinger

Table Of Contents

Introduction

When I was a little girl, I fancied myself a writer. In school, I was pretty good at writing poetry, both in Polish and in Hebrew. At that time I had the command of both languages. Now, I am having difficulty writing in any language. What I am trying to do is to put down some of my experiences on paper.

I started writing my story so my children and grandchildren would know what our life was like. I tried to write mostly about me. My brother and my sisters have their stories. My brother Yitzak died in April 1964, and I still miss him thirty-three years later. He was a father figure and mentor to me. He was a good person, and I loved him. Riva is in New York and ill. Malka is in Florida and ill. My brother's two sons are ophthalmologists and married two girls who are also eye doctors. Phillip has four children, David has two. Riva's children are Lubavitch. The daughter is a computer programmer and has five children. Her brother Michael is a rabbi in Commack, Long Island, New York. He has seven children. Malka's son is a doctor in Washington D.C. He has one daughter. Michele is a teacher/librarian. She has two sons and one daughter-in-law. Our Rosie is a teacher/librarian. She has three children. Her

husband is a doctor. Our Lisa is an attorney, so is her husband. They have one son David. She is divorced after twenty years of marriage.

My mother of blessed memory passed away in March 1978. She was 77. We didn't have it easy. We worked hard and tried to give our children all the things that we never had. All my mother's grandchildren have a good education. They are all good people, and we are very proud of all of them. Good health and good luck are in God's hands, may he be kind to us. Thank God for America, and thank God for bringing us here. As for me, I am still learning from the school of life. Every day brings new lessons.

Dave passed at age 76. He must have helped many people, because he had a huge funeral and many people were crying, including me. I cried even more at Feigel's funeral. She was 80. Roy passed away at 90. My Auntie Ida, my father's sister, lived until 103. May they all rest in peace, with God in heaven.

We didn't have it easy. We worked hard and tried to give our children all the things that we never had.

My biggest pride and joy are my grandchildren, Jordan, Dana, Justin, and David, my daughter's Rosie and Lisa, and my son-in-law Randy Levin.

Harry and I will, God-willing, celebrate our fifty-fifth anniversary on September 30, 2003.

Chapter One—Rokitno

I loved my hometown Rokitno, a muddy little town in Eastern Poland. In the winter it was very cold, and in the summer very hot. But mostly I remember the mud. After the first winter thaw, the streets were covered with mud. I remember losing galoshes in that thick mud. Going to school was tricky, trying to get through the mud. Some of the boys were gallant, finding boards for us and putting them over the mud so we could cross the many deep puddles and get to school.

I remember walking in my little town—we walked a lot, my friends and I. We looked up to a blue cloudless sky and said how boring it was, how peaceful and dull. I wished for excitement, travel; I envied all the heroes and heroines in the books that I read, even their troubles. I thought that I would never leave my hometown nor see much of the world beyond it. Now, after so many years and so many things that happened to me, I wish for the peace, the comfort that was home.

I knew everyone in town and trusted everyone. Doors were never locked. People knew everything about each other and cared. I suppose that I idealize my little Rokitno. When I see a beautiful house in a quiet, gentle setting, a little fence surrounded by stately old trees, it reminds me of home.

Not because my house looked exactly like that, but because the beauty of it makes me feel just like home. Or sometimes a pretty coat or dress in a store window will make me say, "This is just like Rokitno, I have to buy it." The beauty of certain things will make me think of my mother or my father, or some other gentle people that were my neighbors or my teachers. I may sentimentalize my town a little, but not the people. The people were better, a lot better than I can describe them. I'll go way back and start with the earliest memories that I can think of.

The very first thing that comes to mind is a day in 1929. I don't recall what time of year that was. My auntie from America came to visit us in Poland. I was two years old and living with my family in Rokitno. I remember a dark oak dining-room set, a high-backed chair. A lady in a hat gently lifting me up and putting me on that chair, and giving me a piece of candy. I can still hear the rustle of the paper as I opened the candy to eat it. By the way, my auntie is fine—95 years old and living in Philadelphia. It is very fitting that she is in my very first memory, because she is the lady who is responsible for my being in the U.S. Auntie Ida is my father's sister and a very kind soul. She is always cheerful, very bright, sharp as a tack. I am very proud of her. Her

children are very good to her, and I am glad of it. That was a short memory surrounded by fog of time and distance.

Next memory, I am four years old, wrapped in a shawl and looking out the window. It is a beautiful spring day, just before Passover 1931. Through the window I could see children playing—boys playing with walnuts and girls skipping in a game we called "Clas." I was probably sick, and that is why I was wrapped in the shawl inside, instead of playing outside.

The day I enrolled in school looms in my mind now. I was six years old. It was a warm fall day in 1933. I dressed in a pretty pink dress with a matching pink bandana around my head. I had a toothache, and my mother wrapped my cheek in a kerchief that matched my dress. My mother was very style-conscious and always color-coordinated. My school wasn't quite built yet.

I remember walking carefully through the auditorium or Big Hall—*Haulam Hagadol* as we called it—because they were in the process of laying floors. The teacher who enrolled me was Motel Gendelman. I remember his name because Gendelman is my maiden name, but we were not related. His daughter Rivka was eventually my best friend, and Mr. Gendelman himself was one of my most beloved teachers all through my school years. He was tall

and handsome, blue eyes, sandy hair, and carried himself with a princely self-righteousness. A lot of boys emulated him, especially my brother Yitzchak.

My mother told me later that she wanted to sign me up for second grade because I already knew a little reading and math. She said that before enrolling me in grade school I was sent to preparatory school. I don't remember that, but mom said that most children went to that preparatory school for two semesters until they were seven years old. I learned everything they had to offer in a couple of weeks. Mr. Gendelman convinced my mother that as it is, most children in first grade would be seven years old, and his own daughter who was three months older than me would only be in first grade. So my mother agreed, and I started with the first grade.

I remember a man teacher, but no name comes to mind. He is teaching us the Hebrew alphabet. In one hand he has a ruler, chalk in the other. He calls up the children one by one to write a letter on the blackboard. If someone makes a mistake, they get hit with the ruler on the hand. I was worried that I might get hit, but when my turn came it was easy for me, and he patted my cheek.

I don't remember a lot of the early years in school. My school was a Hebrew day school called Tarbut, which means "culture" in Hebrew. We

learned to read and write in Hebrew in first grade, Polish in second, and every subject besides Polish language, Polish history, and geography was taught in modern Hebrew like today's. Eventually it got to the point where Hebrew was the language that I used when whispering with my girlfriends. Yiddish was spoken in my home, but as my Hebrew vocabulary increased, my Yiddish shrank. Our teachers told us that if we have difficulty communicating with our parents, we should hang on the wall a list of the Hebrew words with their Yiddish translations so our parents would learn the Hebrew words. My parents knew Hebrew, so I had no problem.

Our school was built for two reasons. One, there was no school for girls, and since Jewish parents did not send their daughters to the public Polish school, girls had no formal education. The second reason was the boys. Boys could go to the Cheder, where they learned only the Bible. If they wanted a secular education they could go to the Polish grade school, but very few went there.

Our town Rokitno was very new and very young. Young families ran away from the pogroms and the communist revolution in Russia, and they built and settled our little *shtetl*. Most of them came from very religious backgrounds in Russia or Poland, and they would not dream of exposing their

children to the influences of a Polish school. Our town rabbi was not in favor of a school where boys and girls would study together, and where the holy language, Hebrew, would be used for learning everything. He also ran the local Cheder and was afraid of losing business. Well, that it did. As far as I know, very few boys went to the Cheder once my school was built.

Our teachers were the most idealistic and wonderful adults that I had the good fortune to know in my lifetime. They were very modern in dress and manner, slightly religious, very Zionist, and dedicated to teaching and molding us into good human beings—teaching us to love justice, to stand up for our rights, and above all to love our ancient land, language, history, and its people. They gave of themselves tirelessly. We had drama clubs, choirs, a school paper, dancing, science clubs. My teachers visited our homes regularly to see if anyone had problems and needed help. They gave us love, they gave us knowledge, they gave us confidence, they taught us manners, they counseled us on our future. They wanted us to grow up to be the best human beings possible and ascend to then Palestine—which we called Eretz Israel, the land of Israel—and work the land, and build on the wastes, and learn to defend it. As long as I will live, I will always feel guilty that I have not fulfilled my

teachers' dreams for me. Well, there was the war, and my life turned in a different direction.

I can remember my fourth grade homeroom teacher, short and slight in build, very gentle. He taught the boys to treat us girls gently. He called us, *Hamin hahiafe*, the pretty sex. One day he called me in and told me that I would be excused from doing homework for a month if I would try to improve in gym. He was also our Polish language teacher. Language was easy for me, but gym was hard. I would have liked to please him, but I was such a klutz in gym. That was 50 years ago when my teacher had the wisdom to value physical fitness.

I thought that I can remember my teachers' names, but they elude me. Let's see, my principal was Mr. Kulek, Miss Blodawska was a Hebrew language and dancing teacher. I can't remember the name of that very handsome sixth-grade chemistry teacher. All the girls had crushes on him. He was above medium height, brown eyes and hair with a beautiful smile. He was about twenty-four years old and dated the most eligible young woman in our town. I remember her name because she was a neighbor—Lucia Soltzman. She always played the piano, and I would sit on the porch and listen to the music drifting through her open windows. She was beautiful and played the piano

like a professional. This teacher took our class on many trips to visit different sights in Poland, and Lucia always came along. She looked very pretty in her striped bathing suit. Once, on a trip, the police arrested both of them—my teacher and Lucia—while in their bathing suits. We were all wading in a river to cool off after some sights. The teachers were taking pictures when the police arrested them. We were terrified, but they were released after a short time. It turned out that they were taking pictures too close to the Russian border, so their cameras and film were confiscated, but they were let go.

Lucia's father owned a drugstore in the middle of Handlova Street. I can still remember when they were building the house and store, right across the street from our house. It was a big, beautiful structure, brick-on-brick decorations and two porches where kids liked to sit and listen to Lucia play the piano. The Soltzmans were rich, well-educated, and behaved like genuine aristocrats. Before Hitler's Nazis came into our *shtetl*, their whole family committed suicide by taking pills. They chose death rather than run to the communists or take a chance on the Nazis. I guess to them life was either good or not worth living. We didn't know what the future held for us, but we chose life.

There was this short, funny-looking teacher—baldheaded, middle-aged. He was so short that he looked like he was sitting down. We had a nickname for him, "Sadis," it is really Russian for sit down. Some of the kids gave him a hard time. One day the whole class decided not to learn the poem that he told us to memorize. I knew it by heart anyway because I used to have the kind of memory that if I liked a poem, I would have it memorized after reading it once or twice. Anyway, the teacher kept on calling names, and everyone said that they are unprepared. He gave everyone a zero. Then he called on me with a smile, sure that I was prepared. I could not go against all my friends and classmates, so I said that I was not prepared. His face went red and he gave me a zero, the only zero I ever got. During recess, when he tried to talk to me, I turned my face away—hurt. Today I wish that I could apologize to him for having been a brat. The name of the poem was "Borodino." The teacher's name I can't remember, even though I can see his form and face clearly before my eyes.

Then there was the music teacher. He could not sing himself, he whispered, but he had a wonderful ear. We had a great choir. The teacher was funny-looking—skinny, tall, with the face of a turkey. He would make us laugh with his antics. We called him "Pul-Pul," behind his back because that

was supposed to be the sound that a turkey makes. Again I remember him well, but not his name.

Mr. Gurewitz, the gym teacher, always poked his elbow into my upper back, entreating me to stand straight and not slouch. I think of some of the teachers that my children had, especially gym teachers who were mean to them because they inherited my inabilities in gym, and then I think how caring and nice mine was. I was an A student, and he did not want to spoil my report card by giving me less, so when we had to walk on top of a fence for a test, he held my hand so that I could pass it. He would talk to me a lot and tell me that my future is in Eretz Israel. At the time I promised him that when I graduated I would go to a kibbutz for *hachshara*, training, and go to live in a kibbutz in Israel. But as fate had it, I never graduated from my school. First the Soviets "freed" us, then the Nazis ended life as we knew it—forever.

I do walk straight, though, and every day when I go walking (I walk an hour a day for my health), I hear my gym teacher's voice counting, *echad*, *shtaim*, *shalosh*, *arba*—one, two, three, four, as he counted when he trained us for school parades. On the third of May, the Polish day of independence, our school marched along with the Polish school, carrying a Polish flag and a white and blue Jewish flag through the main streets of our town.

My school was a large building made out of wood, surrounded by a big yard with a tall fence. At the other end of the yard was a large outhouse, separated in the middle—one side for girls and one side for boys. Our town had no running water, no plumbing. We had electricity, though. We had no central heating, and in the winter we were cold in school. There were seven grades, each a separate room, plus a science room, offices, teachers' lounge, principal's room, the Big Hall, and a dining room. In the Big Hall we played, danced *horas*, visited during recess. In the dining room, breakfast was served for poor children or orphans. They received bread and butter with zikory (like coffee). The teachers would have some of us eat with them so that they would not feel different.

On Lag Baomer we had an all-day picnic. The whole school went to the woods. We played games, ate homemade ice cream, brought along hardboiled eggs dyed with onion peels, fresh breads, and baked goodies. We stayed late and built a *medurah*—a bonfire. We sang and danced *horas* in front of the fire.

Every Jewish Holy Day we marked by putting on a school play. I can remember participating in a few. In one I played Chalutsah—I was working away while singing merrily. A boy that I liked teased me afterwards that for a Chalutsah I had no muscles—which I didn't. I was a rather fragile child.

The best and funniest plays were put on during Purim, with full dress-up. I had a girlfriend named Lucia. She was short, chubby, and cute as a button. She made the funniest Vashty. We danced, sang, and celebrated for hours after the play.

On the High Holy Days we used the school as a temple and prayed there. We did have a big temple in our *shtetl* with the rabbi, and some people prayed there, but most of the parents of the students prayed in our school. On *Shavuot* we picked wildflowers and sold them to our neighbors. The money was brought to school and put in the white and blue box—the *Keren Kaiemet*—J.N.F. or Jewish National Fund.

We also celebrated non-religious holidays. The first of April—Fools' Day—was always a fun day. The teachers knew that we had painted some wood to look like chalk and similar tricks like that. So the first thing the teacher did when entering the class is grab the "chalk" and start writing an assignment for us. The chalk of course would not write, and the teacher kept wondering why not, while trying again and again to write. We laughed our heads off watching him. When the teachers could make us laugh, they loved it. They would let us sound off for a few minutes, and then in a serious voice tell us that fun and games are over, and it is time to be serious again and study.

Our school was a private school, supported by tuition that each student paid. Poor children received their education free of charge.

I talk at length about my school because I loved it, and these memories keep me alive and going when life gets too hard to bear. I sing the old songs to myself and they make me feel young and loved and in my school in my hometown. My teachers always treated me like an adult, never talking down like to a child. They gave respect and they received respect. I wish that I could span the time, the last fifty years, and reach out to my teachers and tell them how much they mean to me.

My friends liked to come to my house because of my mother: Tall, slender, smiling brown eyes, smooth creamy skin, and brown hair. She was beautiful, and she had a wealth of stories that she told us. Mother always found the time to sit down with us, after serving cookies, and entertain my girlfriends with stories of Jewish folklore, stories of Chelm, Hershele the ostropoler, King Solomon, Kohelet, Tevie the Milkman, Sholem Aleichem, Shalom Ash—stories that came down the generations through her grandparents, and stories from books that she always read..

The stories kept on coming all through her life—she should have been a writer. I didn't realize until after my mother passed away that I took her stories

for granted because I'd heard them all my life. Now, if I want to get a little of the flavor of my mother's stories, I have to go to temples to listen to rabbis, read the Bible, search through current Jewish literature, just to get a taste of it. Mother was a fountain of knowledge when it came to Jewish law and history.

One thing my mother always emphasized: don't be jealous of other people, be a *someach bchelko*—happy with your portion in life. When I was very young, I didn't understand what she was talking about. I didn't have a jealous bone in my body. I was happy for people when they had talents or things, I never compared myself to anybody. But after many years of living, I somehow learned jealousy and envy. I do not envy material possessions, I envy people who made better use of their talents, or better use of their lives.

We would sit in the living room—we called it *zal*—and listen to my mother, then go in my bedroom and dance. That is how we spent many Saturday afternoons.

Our house was a brick house on Handlova Street. The town of Rokitno was new for the most part, wide streets built by engineers, a railroad station, brick homes with some made out of wood sprinkled here and there. Our house was located in a business district. In a four-block area the homes were built around a huge common yard, the walls touched other homes on the right and

the left. On the corner of each block was an entrance to the yard with a tall gate. The fronts of the homes were stores. In the back everyone had a little plot of land fenced in for flowers and/or vegetables. The huge yard contained some huge outhouses in the middle—every family had a key to their own little room, which they kept locked. I don't know why, but we were not allowed to grow grass in that yard, the black expanse had to be swept every day. I remember a policeman coming every day to check it. If he found a piece of paper on the ground, he would write a ticket. I always thought he did that because he was an anti-Semite.

I don't remember how often the outhouses were cleaned, but when they were cleaned it was the most unpleasant memory of my childhood. It stank, and that day I would not use the back door to our house.

We didn't use our front room as a store. It was our *zal*. There was a couch, chairs, the big dining room table and chairs. The walls were painted with designs, gold and flowers in many colors. The floors were painted red. I watched the painters one year, when they were painting the house. The walls were painted first, then a design put on with a large cutout, and painted in with the different colors. On the walls were hanging some embroideries that my mother and I did, mostly flowers on top of black felt. Brocade tablecloth, red

and gold. White embroidered curtains on the windows. The bedroom had a blond bedroom suite and heavy curtains. The kitchen was white with a blue design near the ceiling. There were a table and chairs there, a baker's oven, and stove. In a corner was a barrel of water, pans, towels neatly hung under a name tag, toothbrushes on a little shelf. My mother was a stickler for hygiene, and no one ever wiped with someone else's towel. Since we had no running water, there was no bathroom, and the kitchen was used for washing up and bathing. In the summer we used the *camer* for that purpose. There were at least three rooms that we called *cameren*. They were not quite finished, no plaster on the walls or ceiling, some had no floors. One contained the wood for the winter (for the furnace) and had a ladder going to the attic and a hole in its floor for a basement. Another *camer* had poultry in it. That part I hated. Whenever I came home through the back door there would be a rush of fowl noisily clacking at me and scaring me. The third *camer* was right in back of the kitchen and had a wooden floor and a whole wall of glass windows. There were cabinets there where mother stored food. We also played in there. It was a big room.

We were not rich or poor. By Rokitno standards, a nice brick house was considered *balebatish*, or what we call middle class. But we had only one bedroom. My mother was hoping to build on two more bedrooms, one for the

girls and one for the boys. As it was, my brothers slept on the couches in the *zal*, I slept in the kitchen on a sofa, and my two little sisters slept in the bedroom with my parents. And when we had company, which was often, two chairs with a door across it made a bed for one. There were plenty of down pillows, blankets, and *perinas*—a down-filled mattress. Our beds were clean and comfortable.

Mother was an excellent cook; we always had nourishing meals and plenty of baked goodies. Nobody made a strudel like my mother's.

Before I was born, my mother had a little girl, Leale, who died before the age of two, and my mother was always afraid that she would lose me, so she had me blessed by rabbis and always fussed over me. At the slightest complaint, she took me to the doctor. I was a skinny kvetchy child with a bad appetite, so mom bribed me with money to get me to eat. I would take that five groshen and go to the grocery store next door and buy a chocolate bar. I hated to drink milk, eating chocolate with my milk made it tolerable.

It is funny, when I talk of my childhood I remember a home with plenty of everything. My siblings remember only the bad times and the war. When they talk about home they talk about poverty only. One would think that we were raised in different homes by different parents. I wonder if they might

have fussed a little more over me because I was the eldest of the girls and kind of sickly, but we did have the same home.

I hated meat, vegetables, butter, eggs, and milk, but mom forced me to eat, so when she wasn't looking I would throw my food little by little to the fat rust-colored cat that sat under the table. I hated that cat, every time that I moved to go anywhere, I seemed to step on its tail. I can still hear the *meows* in my nightmares. I liked only fruits, breads with sour cream, and baked goods, I still do, but now I also like vegetables.

Our house was heated by *ribes*, every room had like a fireplace between two walls, only they were completely closed, they heated the walls. My father would get up early, when darkness engulfed the world, and start the fires in the *ribes*, so when mother got up, it was already warm in the house. I can see him now, slender, medium height, jet-black hair, light skin, and the deepest, sharpest bluest eyes—bending over, stocking the *ribes* with wood so the fire would not go out too soon.

My parents were both the same height. Mother was considered tall for a woman and father medium for a man. Father had a deep mind, highly intellectual, trained mostly in the Chumash, Gemora, he attained a lot of secular knowledge on his own. He knew the laws of the Torah, and whenever

there was a *Din Torah*, he was asked to speak for people who had no knowledge or ability to speak for themselves. Father usually succeeded in winning most cases that he was involved in.

Jewish people in the *shtetlach*, when having a dispute, did not go into courts. They had it settled by a *Din Torah*—Law of the Bible. My father had a reputation for being smart and just. He would have made a great lawyer or judge, or even an educator. When I first started learning algebra, the concept was hard for me to grasp, I asked my father why this abstract math was necessary, and after he explained it to me it started being easy. I loved it and got As in it.

My father was a handsome man with a little goatee and mustache. He dressed in nice modern suits, hair brushed to a black shine. Every year when we celebrate Passover or even on Friday nights, I wish that my father could be with us, his clear baritone voice chanting all the blessings and *Zemirot*. We sang, and I loved it so, I wished the evening would never end. I'd wait at the table a long time, hoping to catch Elijah drinking the wine in his cup, I'd fall asleep there and be sorry the next morning that I missed him. Father was a gentle man—he never yelled. When angry he'd pick up his hat, throw it on a chair, sigh and go on about his business. My younger sisters and I loved to sit

on Daddy's lap, and we fought over the privilege. I loved to hug and kiss him. He let me, but I don't remember him ever hugging or kissing me.

My mother gave birth to seven children. The first were twin boys who died before they were named. Then came my brother Yitzchak. He had a big Bris, mother said, and his uncles (my father's brothers) got drunk and danced on the tables, proclaiming to the world that they are uncles. Next came a little girl, Leale, who died from a cold or pneumonia—she stepped into a puddle and got wet, fell sick, and died before the age of two. Mother never stopped mourning for her. All my life I heard that out of all mother's children, Leale was the only one that looked like her and exhibited exceptional talents.

I came after her, and mother told me that she spent the whole pregnancy crying for the little girl she lost. When I was born people told her that she has a cute little girl. She said that she loved me, but I would not replace Leale. After me came my two younger sisters at two-year intervals. Mother also considered her sister's two boys as her own. When she married my father, he had two boys from his marriage to my mother's sister. Mother would always say, "From nine children, I only have four left living," because her sister's two also died. One died in infancy, I don't know the cause, and Reuven, my older brother, lived to

age twenty-four and died while in the Russian Army, defending Stalingrad against the Nazis.

I remember winter afternoons, Saturdays when the snow was softly falling outside, and we would all gather in the *zal* with our backs against the walls warmed by the *ribes*, and father would tell us stories of his travels and sing for us. Then he would sit on the sofa, mother's head in his lap, and he would continue talking.

In the summer, I remember walks in the fields. Mom and Dad would sit down on a stone or log, and we kids spread around the field gathering wildflowers and braiding them into garlands for our heads.

I remember the hustle and bustle before Passover each year. The trips to the attic to get down all those pretty Passover dishes. The whole house being scrubbed, and the kitchen getting a fresh coat of paint.

Summer evenings, the samovar on the table, company around the table peeling apples with little knives, eating, drinking tea, and a lot of conversation—politics, books, writers, Russian poetry, Yiddish poetry.

My parents were both born In Russia in a little *shtetl* called Slovetchno, nestled in a valley between two mountains, a river running through it. It was an old-fashioned *shtetl*, the kind where Tevie the milkman lived, everyone was

Orthodox, dressed in those black caftans, hats. Women wore long skirts with aprons and covered their hair with *pariken* and or scarves. Girls went for long walks, danced among themselves. Boys studied most of the time. Most people were poor.

Father's family owned a mill, but with twelve children, they had a hard time materially. As soon as a child reached age nine, they left home to look for employment. Some of the girls hired themselves out as domestic helpers. One went to America, that is Aunt Ida in the beginning of my story.

My father started teaching kids. He would get free room and board for a semester, and a few rubles to take home. Some of his students were teenagers, while he was a little kid. They were children of Jewish farmers who had no affinity for learning Torah. In his free time, Father continued to learn on his own. One of my last memories back home is that of my father poring over thick books, squinting over the little words in the volumes on his desk, always learning. The money earned teaching went to his father to fix the mill that always broke down. In spite of their poverty, they kept their grandparents in their home and supported them with honor.

I never had the privilege of knowing any of my grandparents, I am just repeating what my mother told me. The Iron Curtain fell after the Russian

Revolution between Poland and Russia—we could not go there, they could not come to see us. In our town composed of runaways, very few had extensive families—I had none. My mother told me of my paternal grandfather, that when people told him that it must be hard for him to support his parents, old and sickly, he said that as long as he lived and breathed the parents would stay in his house. Nowadays we all put our parents in old homes and we live in nice big houses with plenty of extra room. To top it off, my grandfather gave his parents the warmest spot in the house for sleeping and made sure that they always ate first, so they wouldn't go hungry.

When my father grew up, he engaged in commerce, buying and selling almost anything.

Mother's father was a butcher, a gentle learned man who studied the holy books when not selling meat. He could have been a rabbi, but being of very gentle nature, he preferred to be a butcher. He never quarreled with anyone—if someone wronged him, he didn't even call them to a *Din Torah*, he said that the Almighty evens things out in the end. Mom did not remember her mother—she was blond and beautiful and the soul of goodness, mother was told. My maternal grandmother died in childbirth while giving birth to her only son Motel. Mom was three years old at that time. She was raised by a

stepmother and her older sister. She didn't like her stepmother but worshipped her sister. The sister's name was Chana-Chaia, and she was nine years older than my mother. As most girls in the *shtetl*, they did not have much formal education, just some *Cheder* for a few semesters. Chana-Chaia was very intellectual, she learned on her own the Russian language, poetry, and to speak Hebrew. She taught my mother—they both shared a love of poetry and knowledge in general.

My mother's sister fell in love with my father, who was two years her junior. It was unheard of then to marry for love, without a matchmaker and with little dowry. They married and had two little boys, Reuven and Yosele. With the bride's dowry they bought a small grocery. The business did not do very well because all the customers were Dad's relatives buying on credit, and one does not ask a relative for money.

Meanwhile the pogroms of 1917 started in Russia. There was a bloody pogrom in their *shtetl*. Chana-Chaia was shot fatally. My mother who was a beautiful teenager then, was hiding in a cellar when she saw its door open and a *Kosak* jumping in, pulling his pants down. She screamed so loudly and piercingly that he covered his ears and ran away.

Before Chana-Chaia died, she asked my mother to marry her widowed husband—my father, so that her sons would not be raised by a stranger. Both mom and dad promised her that they would marry. After her funeral they packed the children and their few belongings on a horse-drawn wagon and set for the border for Poland.

Mom told me how bad she felt when her father expressed that he would like to come with her, but she said nothing. Here she was, leaving everyone that she loved and going away with her sister's husband and children—after burying the sister who was mother, mentor, and best friend to her—going to a country with a strange language, and

even the alphabet was different than Russian. How could she say anything to her bridegroom who was in mourning for his beloved wife and had to leave his own parents behind, whom he loved dearly. He barely scraped enough to get his little family out. So my mother and her father both cried knowing that they would never see each other again, and they never did.

Mom and Dad were married in Poland in 1919 on her nineteenth birthday. They brought very little with them, and there was no way to earn money. They were starving. There were some soup kitchens maintained with money sent from America. Some of the big shots stole the food for themselves,

and all Mother got to feed her sister's orphans with was some watery mush. My father had two brothers in Poland with families of their own, but they did not help. I don't know if they were uncaringly selfish or if they could not help. My father had a reputation for being resourceful, possibly that's why no one helped them. The little baby Yosele died, possibly from lack of vitamins.

To get out of Russia my parents had to smuggle themselves through the border. That gave people ideas, since the prices of food and clothing were different in Poland than in Russia. People started smuggling back and forth for profits. In Poland there used to be a saying that Jews have to know how to milk a stone or make a living from empty air. So many things were closed to them, they had to survive any way they could. Jewish people don't steal when they are hungry, but they do smuggle across borders. I understand that that is what my father and some partners did.

My parents made a little money, bought a home, had more children, started a dry-goods store. My father was a very trusting person and had very bad luck with partners. While he traveled on buying trips, his partners stole him blind, and that was the end of prosperity. So he found new partners and went smuggling again. By this time all the children were born in our family. I was almost six years old.

One of my father's partners was caught crossing the border and claimed stupidity, he pointed his finger at my father. My father was arrested and spent four years in jail. I don't understand why the Polish government called him a communist. He never helped the communists in any way. I always figured that part of his reason for those border crossings was probably to bring food to his parents, because they were all starving. When Daddy was doing this business, I was too young and had no understanding at all about what he was doing. My thoughts about it came later as an adult, thinking back on his life.

When father got out of jail, he was not allowed to live in Rokitno because it was too close to the Russian border. We had to move to Lodz—I'll write more about that later.

Chapter Two—Father In Jail

Well, my next memory is of father packing to go to jail. He had a suitcase covered with a gray material, he was putting clothes in there, and somehow he reached inside and pulled out a little tiny doll that he gave to me. My mother had tears in her eyes, but my father was matter-of-fact, just getting ready. I did not understand the tragedy, that my father was going away for four years and leaving my mother with nothing, with five children to raise and support, because everything besides the house and furniture was confiscated. And I certainly did not know what losing one's freedom meant.

To me, my mother was the next person to God—I did not worry, and she did not burden me with her problems. She only gave me kindness and love. I think that my brothers and little sisters were smarter in that respect. They seemed to worry more. Mother went to manufacturers in bigger towns and persuaded them to give her merchandise on credit, and she'd pay them as she sold. Beautiful and persuasive as she was, they helped her. She came home with huge boxes of dry goods, buttons, needles, candies, and fruits. You name it, she sold it. And of course she paid everyone back.

My mother was a shrewd businesswoman and prospered quickly. A little town in Poland is not America—we didn't get rich, but we had enough to

send the children to the private Hebrew school, have nice clothes and food, and save money for the day that Daddy would return. Mom arranged to do her business in the towns where Dad was in jail. This way she could visit him every week when she came on a buying trip. She stayed in a Jewish home there and paid the people there to take kosher home-cooked food to my father every day, because he could not eat the food in jail.

While doing all that, my mother barely understood Polish, spoke less, and could not read it. She hated Polish and refused to learn it, while reading a lot in Russian, Yiddish, and Hebrew. She learned the Latin ABCs when she came to the United States. Mom liked English, went to school to learn, and studied the Constitution for citizenship. It was hard for her—by this time she was over fifty and had suffered a lot.

Mother kept the merchandise in the *cameren* and sent the kids to let the neighbors know what she was selling. My brothers were good at it, Reuven especially was a great help to my mother in raising us. Reuven had green eyes like his mother and black hair like our father. He was a good-looking young man, above medium height. Mother believed that everyone should know a trade, so she tried to send my brother to learn a trade, but he was bad with his

hands, ten thumbs, and could not learn anything. He was good at business—he was busy all day buying and selling and bringing home the profits.

Once a week there was something like an open market in the town square—it was called a *yavid*. The farmers and merchants from all the villages would bring their wares and sell them on makeshift tables. On those days our front room would be really busy. Our brother brought the farmers to the house to pay them for their wares, and he also got my mother's opinion and blessing. Reuven loved my mother, called her *muma*—auntie—and believed that if she would touch whatever he was buying, it would be lucky for him. He wanted to call her "mother," but she thought that the honor belonged to her dear sister, so she instructed him to call her auntie.

Reuven bought pigs' hair and mushrooms—that was a specialty. They used to buy a lot of it and sell it to manufacturers who made brushes. The mushrooms went all over the world. When there was no market in our town, Reuven traveled to other towns. I remember cold winter nights, Reuven getting dressed with the *burka*. It was a large cape with a hood that went over the coat. He traveled in a horse-drawn buggy most of the night to be early in the morning at some town's market in order to get all of the good buys before someone else did.

Next day he would come home, either with merchandise or with money, which he happily turned over to my mother. He was a very good brother, especially to me. When I was born he was twelve years old, and he asked my mother to name me after his mother, which she gladly did because she worshiped her sister. So they named me Chana. Reuven was always fussing over me, buying me chocolates. When I was sick, which was often, he brought me bags full of chocolates. I couldn't eat that much, so I gave away the chocolates but saved the pretty papers. I had a collection of pretty candy wrappers, bottles from medicines and boxes from vitamins that I treasured.

My second brother Yitzchak had sandy blond hair and blue eyes with some green in them. He was tall, big-boned, and carried himself with dignity. Our family was not the hugging, kissing kind. Mother kissed me only when I was sick, never hugged me. The only one I liked to hug and kiss was my father—and as I said, he let me, but he never hugged me back. I would have been afraid to touch my mother, she seemed so important. I couldn't bother her.

Yitzchak was four years older than me, and he took care of us girls when mother was gone on her buying trips. He babysat us, read to us. I was a quiet little girl, sandy blond hair parted in the middle, two braids in the back

with ribbons matching my dresses, blue eyes and dimples in the cheeks. I often heard people tell my mother that I had charm and beauty, but I felt that they are just saying it to be nice to mother, because I did not look like my mother nor have her abilities. Yitzchak used to help mother also with the business.

Anything she told him to do, he'd jump up and be ready to do it. Because I was shy and quiet, they let me be and did not expect me to help. Sometimes mother would complain that she's spoiling me, and consequently I acted like a princess, reading all day. With my father in jail, she thought I ought to find a way to help her. I was an obedient little girl, good student, but no talent for helping in the house or making a living at that age. It made me feel bad—I told her that I had a stomachache. She would take me to the doctor, and he'd say that I am a weak child, and prescribe more vitamins. Our doctor was an interesting person—tall, dark, and handsome. He was born in Grusia, where Stalin was born. He was always available when we needed him, and when mother paid him, he never looked at the amount of money she was giving him, he just put it in his pocket. I did not like the frequent visits to the doctor—I was embarrassed and shy.

My younger sister Riva was very blond, blue-eyed—a happy child, outgoing, full of life and outspoken. She was always playing happily, helping

with whatever she could. Mother told me that one day she observed Riva, who was four at the time, pushing a chair toward a tall cabinet. When asked, what she was doing, she said that she's trying to get on top of the cabinet so she could talk to God in heaven and ask him to send her father home. Riva was good and kind, and my brother had a pet name for her, Beloon, which meant Sweet Blondie.

Malka, the youngest, was the prettiest—hazel eyes, brown hair, nice build. Malka was very smart, bright, like mother. She had a good business sense, and capable hands. Slightly temperamental at times, she was outgoing and very helpful to mother. She was adorable, and I loved her. I was very proud of her, and being four years older, I used to rock her to sleep (when she was a baby), singing lullabies to her, and taught her how to walk.

Our town of Rokitno had mostly good people, some religious, mostly with the socialist Zionist leaning. These people who had suffered so much prejudice and persecution mostly wanted a country they could call their own and justice with equality for all. When a speaker came to town, a lot of people turned up to hear him. My mother never missed a speaker. They spoke on modern ways to raise children, vitamins in fruits and vegetables, and manners. They spoke about the need for a Jewish homeland, books, authors. I heard a lot

of discussions about Prosterowna, a Polish woman of influence who made laws against Jews, depriving us of kosher meat. There were concerned talks about the war in Granada, Spain. What baffles me today is that I don't recall anyone worrying about Hitler. These were the '30s, but I never heard of what was happening to the Jews in Germany.

At one time I had a girlfriend named Gretchen who was German. I met her when we were on vacation one summer in a resort area. She was very proud of her *führer* and showed me a picture of Hitler. She also wanted me to visit her church. I was afraid to look at the cross, but I looked inside the church through the window. We were very good friends, and the fact that she loved Hitler like I loved Jabatinsky did not disturb me. I didn't understand politics and couldn't know what destruction her ideal would bring to us.

People worried about making a living and about health problems. Mother had an enlarged heart and rheumatism. Sometimes she could hardly walk. Still, people had become so used to wars, they thought nothing of another one. Besides, the Germans were supposed to be so intellectual, and in the first world war they actually treated Jewish war prisoners a lot better than they treated the Russians. Jews were allowed to pray and keep their diet. So nobody worried about the Germans, at least that's what I remember.

There was a shoemaker who got drunk and beat his wife, there was a neighbor merchant with a bad temper—every time he got angry, he broke all the dishes in their house. His wife said that their dishes were always new. One of our neighbors swept her yard and left the garbage in our yard. I remember mother yelling at her, because if that snooping policemen would have found the garbage in our yard, we would have had to pay a fine.

There was a crazy woman, I forgot her name, who would go into everybody's house and look for soldiers under the beds. I don't know why mother put up with her—she felt sorry for her, I guess. She was married and had a daughter named Fradele. This woman had always been of a jealous nature, and although she had a faithful husband, she did not trust him. Once while sleeping with him in bed, she dreamed that her husband was in the attic with another woman. Leaving him asleep in bed, she lit a candle and went up the ladder to the attic. There the candle got extinguished leaving her in the dark. She started screaming hysterically, and when her husband woke up and came to her aid she was incoherent. After trying for a couple of years, her husband divorced her and left town with the little girl. He supported her, though, and very nicely. Fradele would come to visit every summer. I played

with her in her mother's house. Her mother never hurt anyone, but she would show up to inspect our house every so often.

There was an old maid, very plain-looking, who thought that all the men were after her. There was a boy named Bear, very disfigured and on crutches, but he sort of crawled on the ground. He couldn't talk, either. My mother had compassion for all these people and invited them in when they came to our door. My littlest sister once said that she was going to visit this boy named Bear, because his mother's name is Chava—Eve—and Eve knows where God is because she is his cousin and she lived in heaven. The reason she wanted to see God was the same as my other sisters, she wanted to ask him to send Dad home, and she was only two years old.

I can still remember what it felt like to be six years old. I felt small, dumb, and helpless. I heard a lot of talk about Eretz Israel, and imagined it to be a wonderful place. Our town had a military regiment residing in it. All I had ever seen of it were the big gates—the barracks were behind it. I used to look at the gates from far away and imagine that behind it lies Eretz-Israel. I had no problems that bothered me, except maybe my brother teasing me. I loved uniforms, and therefore declared myself a *Betar*, that was a Zionist organization that believed in fighting for Israel. They wore brown uniforms,

their leader was Jabatinsky. I watched them march down the street and couldn't wait to be older and join them. My brother was a *Shomer*, they believed in coexistence, defending oneself only when attacked. I thought that my leader was beautiful, and my brother would tease me that Jabatinsky had crooked teeth. I didn't like being teased, still don't. I don't recall anyone ever hitting me. Never fought with my sisters. I didn't like fighting, still don't. I remember once watching my mother having an altercation with a neighbor lady, and I told myself then and there that I hated fighting, and I would never fight with my neighbors when grown.

My mother was very friendly with the neighbors, usually always willing to help in any way she could. There was one lady, a widow with a son my age who lived a couple of houses away from us. One day mother came to visit her and found them sick without anything for the Shabbat. Mother donned her shawl and walked around to all the neighbors in the four-block area. She told them someone needs help without mentioning names, they all gave my mother some money, everyone trusted her. Then she went to the grocery, bought food, brought it over to the sick neighbors, helped them cook it, got a doctor for them, and the left over money she left with them.

In her business dealings, mother used a system called *neemones*—trust. She would tell the customer (or show the bill) how much the merchandise costs, asking them to add 10 percent for her expenses and thus pay her accordingly. Everyone trusted her, and admired her for doing so much for us. In contrast, the wives of my father's partners, whose husbands were also in jail for shorter terms, did nothing, just waited for the Jewish community to support them.

When I was seven, a classmate of mine, a boy named David, died from an infection he received from falling while skating with rusty skates. We planted tree in his name. I cried a lot because I was fond of him.

At eight years of age, I was very ill with an ear infection, and could not lift my head for days. The doctor told mother to take me to the hospital in the city to operate on me. I can remember how scared I was of the operation. We were supposed to leave at dawn that day, but in the night I had a dream. Mother said that she was afraid that I would die during the night, so she slept at the foot of my bed to keep an eye on me. In the middle of the night I sat up on my own power and asked for water. Mother was very surprised and asked me how I felt. I told her that I had a dream, and in that dream four angels surrounded me. I can still see them, four men clad in white robes, flowing

white beards, and wings outstretched, holding hands while dancing around me. To me they said, "Don't be afraid, Chanele, you will not need an operation, we fixed it so that you will get well without it." Seeing me sit up for the first time in days and hearing my dream, mother decided not to take the train early in the morning, and instead wait for the doctor to examine me at home. After the doctor saw me, he said that the crisis was over, the infection opened, my fever broke, and the trip was not necessary. That dream left a strong impression on me for the rest of my life, that God and his angels are watching over me.

I was a religious child by nature and always said my *shema* before going to bed. Hence the four angels in my prayer (Michael, Gabriel, Uriel, Rafael) came to my rescue, dressed probably like a picture in my children's Chumash. I'll always be grateful for that dream, knowing that someone granted me a special vision. Granted, a naïve, religious child who had total faith in God without reservations dreamed it, but I did get well without the operation, so that dream had a touch of the supernatural.

I learned to worry when I turned nine. I heard the first rumors about little girls being kidnapped and sold to the black men somewhere in Africa. There were stories of little girls of eleven having black babies, being treated like slaves, and unable to escape. I remember on cold winter days, walking to

school all bundled up, feeling real heavy, and worrying that if a *chapun*—kidnapper—came along and tried to grab me, I would not be able to run with all these clothes on me and I would be caught.

I always walked to school alone, because I was a procrastinator when little. My sisters walked with friends, but I was always late and alone. On the way back I walked with my friends. I think maybe getting dressed was a chore with my ten thumbs, and mother made me eat breakfast, which I could not abide. I'd have to swallow at least a couple of bites before she would let me go. I would walk in with the bell into my homeroom, and when asked why I was late, I always said that the clock in my room was broken. Always the same excuse, no imagination. As a matter of fact I did not even have a clock in my room. The teacher came to visit my mother to ask her not to spoil me so much.

I had imagination when I felt about things. I remember walking from school with my girlfriends and making up adventure stories that I told them. These stories were about the popular kids in the upper grades, and some sexual overtures were in them. My friends believed that they were the truth and always asked for more. I can still remember some of them. I did not think that I was lying, that I would never do. I just thought that I was being an author, making up stories for entertainment. My ambition as a kid was to be a writer

and a teacher. What surprises me now is that at age seven, I put so much sex into the stories. Why? I did not understand the meaning of the word until many years later. Maybe because I realized that the kids preferred juicy stories and I made them up accordingly.

I guess I learned to fear black people then, without ever having seen one. On the other hand I learned in school about their struggle for freedom, read Uncle Tom's cabin in Hebrew, and felt compassion for them.

Chapter Three—To Lodz And Home Again

When I was ten my father came home. I do remember visiting him in jail, but briefly. Every summer mother would take us along on some of her trips to the cities where father was so we could see him, and so he could see us. I recall a trip to Drohabit that was a long train ride, we passed by some huge oil reservoirs.

Father came out, and we saw him like through a cage. He was pale, sad-looking, and wore some beige uniform. I remember he picked up Malka to see her better and he kissed her. I was jealous, but I knew that he could not pick me up because I was nine, a serious child, the oldest of the girls. Malka asked mother on the trip back if that soldier was her father. I remember another occasion when I was jealous of my little sister. When my father was arrested, Mother tried to calm us and said, "Everything will be all right." But Malka, two years old, spoke up and said that our father will go to jail for four years. Her prophecy came true, and after that mother always asked my sister what will be. She never foresaw the future again, but I wished that I could do that and thus gain my mother's respect.

For Father's homecoming, mom made for us girls off-white silk blouses and blue silk skirts with pockets and straps, all three matching, even matching

socks and shoes. When he came home, after a big meal, Mom took Dad to the dry-goods store, picked up three different cuts of good English wool for three suits for him. Our joy didn't last long. Father was told by the Polish government official that he had to move farther inland, because our town was too close to the Russian border. Soon after, my father left for Lodz, taking my brother Yitzchak with him. We would follow after we sold our house.

Mother was very unhappy about leaving town. Until then she took everything in stride, but having to leave all their friends, our *shtetl* where she was so successful and admired, to go to a big Polish city were even the Jewish people seem strange because they speak Polish instead of Yiddish—and some are not very honest. About that time mother got pregnant, and the doctor forbade her to have that child because it was a danger to her life. Mother had an abortion and lost a lot of blood. We went for couple of weeks to a resort area for mother to rest up. That is where I met Gretchen.

For me that vacation was a pleasant time. Besides Gretchen, I met an older boy that I liked a lot. The countryside was beautiful, but mother was not getting better. We moved to Lodz, not really in the city. We lived in a suburb called Wisniowa Gora—Cherry Hill. Lodz was big and full of polluted air, jobs were scarce. I remember seeing children in torn clothes, torn shoes, selling

thread or other small items in the streets. I have never seen such poverty. I asked my mother why these children were not in school, and she said that they had to make a living because some of their parents had tuberculosis, and if not for the children's help they would all go hungry. Mother always made sure to buy something from them.

Mother did not want us to go to the Polish school. There was a Hebrew school like ours in Lodz called Yavne, but the tuition was very high. Only the children of the very rich went there. Mother went there, saw the principal and asked him to accept us at half the tuition. She promised him that if he didn't find us a pleasure to teach to, and never a problem, she would pay the full tuition. After a short time he agreed with mother. Only Riva and I went to that school. Malka was too young and Yitzchak too old. Reuven stayed behind in Rokitno. I don't know why, but he never came to Lodz. I enjoyed that period. The kids liked me, appreciated my talents for drawing and writing poetry.

There was a little girl named Perelka who was being picked up by her private chauffeur every day. She wanted to play with me. I had to wait for my brother to pick me up after he finished his job. Then we took a train to the suburb where we lived. Perelka made her chauffeur wait every day, until my brother came, so she could spend time with me while I waited.

I think that I am the only one that remembers that time fondly. Malka was bored not going to school, Riva did not like this school and missed her friends. Yitzchak did not like his job. Father could not find a job, and mother was sick all the time. She went into deep depression. She missed our hometown and worried that the money that she saved up while doing business was dwindling.

After six or eight months and many doctors, father decided to send us back home. He stayed in Lodz with Yitzchak, and the rest of us moved back home. Our house was sold, and with the money father bought a knitting machine to make sweaters and cloth.

We moved into an apartment in the old city. Rokitno was mostly new, but there was a stretch of empty land, the railroad tracks, and then a long crooked street called the Pilsudski Street. There were some nice old homes there and a lot of thriving shops. This was called the old town. We rented a nice apartment in a big white wooden house. The house was almost out of the city. There was grass, flowers, and trees. Three other families each rented an apartment in that house. There was a Polish high-ranking officer with his wife next to us. Mother got to be close friends with that woman. She believed in my mother and asked mother's advice about everything. The third apartment was

occupied by the Freimans. Their only daughter, Hadasa, and I were close friends in time.

My father and Yitzchak plus some hired workers worked the machines in Lodz. I don't honestly know if they did well financially. I only remember that mother was herself again. She was planting a garden, doing a lot of knitting. All I know is that both my brothers were always there to bail us out when bad times loomed. In spite of the fact that I made some good friends while living in Old Rokitno, I did not like living there. I missed my house. We lived so far out, it was a long walk to everywhere, especially to school.

When going to school, we passed some houses occupied by non-Jewish people, and the little boys would sic their dogs on us. I can still remember the fear I felt when walking through that empty stretch of ground, past the railroad tracks that separated the old from the new town. There were no houses or people there. I used to have nightmares about that empty stretch, and about the dogs. In my dreams when I saw a dog I would lift my arms like wings and fly above and away from it. But the empty stretch I would try to run through, and like in a dream I would fall, be unable to move, and wake up with a scream stifled on my lips. I liked to stay in the house and read, but mother made me go

outside for the fresh air. Hadasa's mother did the same, so finally we started talking to each other, and got to be close friends.

She told me about this boy she liked, Mayto Tchetchik. His parents had a lumberyard not far from us, and he had to watch it evenings. One evening we walked over there. He was sitting on a log, a fire burning in front of him. Mayto invited us to join him, we sat and talked for hours. Before long I got a crush on him too, although I didn't know then what a crush was. I just liked looking at him, listening to him, being where he was.

At about that time I joined the Shomer Hatzair, because I was expected to. All the best kids in town were in it. My brothers were in it. I was invited to come to a meeting. I was about eleven years old and very religious. They were having a discussion about why we should speak Hebrew. We all agreed that it was the language of our forefathers and the sounds were suitable for the climate in Israel. Well, I raised my hand and said that God gave us Hebrew in the Torah and that is why we should love and speak it. They very gently tried to explain their theories, that they do not believe in the existence of God.

I respected all their goals, but I never stopped believing in and loving God. I did go to Shomer meetings, danced *horas*. Mayto, who was older, was always there. He had a girlfriend named Dina Negel. They were a very active

and admired couple. But that did not stop half of the girls from having crushes on him. Since I lived in the old town and so did he, before going home he would say, "Who is here from Pilsudski Street, I'll walk them home." Well, it was me, so he walked me home. I remember he would whistle while we passed the empty stretch, and I asked him if he was afraid. He said, "That is why I am whistling, to keep from being afraid." He was a nice boy, full of ideals, and once he told me that I am the nicest girl in school. The girls started telling me that he likes me, but I never believed it. He would tease me for being so skinny. Once in a school play I was Chalutsah, working and singing, and he teased me, with those skinny arms you are a Chalutsah? I can still remember how nice he smelled, even though he never touched me, and it was a natural smell, not from a bottle. Hadasa and I both wanted to be writers, so we used to walk around in the woods past out house, make up stories, and tell them to each other. Hadasa was a year older and a grade higher, so was Mayto. In my grade, I was friends with Tsipora Shapiro, Genia Rutman, Malka Lichtman. I visited them often—they all lived in the old town. We walked to school together.

I heard talk of war, but I was too busy with my friends and books to worry. Then one fall day I remember standing outside, the sun was nice and

warm, when we heard the noise of approaching airplanes. They came in formation, and we froze with fear. We thought the Germans had come to bomb us. But the planes took a low dive and we saw the Russian emblems. We were very relieved. The year was 1939, and the Russian army came in to annex us to Ukraine. They came with song and dance, with chocolate and candy. I know some people did not like the Communists, but I was happy to see them. I saw beautiful girls in colorful outfits dancing with handsome soldiers playing accordions. They danced and sang for us in the street. They hugged us and kissed us. Mainly I was glad they were not the Germans. My father and Yitzchak were still in Lodz, and that part of Poland was taken by the Germans when Hitler and Stalin divided Poland between them. Mother cried her eyes out wondering what happened to them.

One day as we were sitting by the kitchen table, the door opened, and Yitzchak and Father walked in. They were raggedy, unshaven, skinny, and could barely make it to a chair. They walked all the way home. It took them many weeks, walking while the Germans were bombing Poland like crazy. They tried to bomb it out of existence. Father said they had to beg for shelter from the elements, and for food. They walked out of Lodz with nothing, leaving the machines and everything they owned behind.

Some people helped them, but most Polacks were anti-Semites and refused them shelter. Father told about how they passed a hut with Polish men, it was raining hard, and father asked if he and Yitzchak could come in to warm up. The men said, "We don't want Jews in here."

Father and Yitzchak walked on, and just as they were far enough from there, a bomb fell on the hut, destroying them all. Father said, "Sometimes God's wrath is spontaneous." They both stayed in bed a few days, until they came to.

Life went back to normal. My father got a nice job. Reuven got a nice job. Our Hebrew School was turned into a Russian Jewish ten-year school. Their span of education is more concentrated, so it takes ten years instead of twelve to finish high school. We all went back to school, including Yitzchak. My father contacted the people who bought our house and told them that we would like to buy our house back. I think they had to go to court to settle it. I don't remember who the people were who bought our house. I know that father paid them back the amount of money that they paid us when they bought it. Maybe all transactions had to go through court.

Well, we moved back into our house and installed electricity. Life might have been good then, but there were problems. First, there was a shortage of

bread. Part of Father's job was to find bread for the city. He would travel to the farmers and buy grain, but it was never enough. When the bread was baked, father made sure that the first batches went to widows and orphans. We ourselves ate potatoes most of the time. The town swelled to triple its size with people who'd run away from the Nazis and were hungry. They would come to father and ask for bread. Sometimes, they would come during mealtime and find us eating baked potatoes with herring. They were surprised, they assumed that because father was in charge, we had plenty of everything. But father had so much integrity, we always came last. We had plenty to eat, we did not go hungry. After a while, people stopped hiding their merchandise, and things settled more to normal.

Well, it really could not be normal. People who owned stores were lucky if they were allowed to run their stores, which automatically belonged to the government. They became paid workers. My teachers were arrested and jailed because they were Zionists. Some Polish officials were taken away in a truck and never seen again.

All through my childhood my best friend was Rivka Gendelman. We were not relatives, even though we had the same last name. Her father was the one who signed me up for school, and I admired him all through school. He

would let me and Rivka help him correct the Hebrew papers. We had so many laughs together. Rivka was well-built with chiseled features, green eyes, and two thick braids of copper hair, shiny like a new penny. She was mature for her age, and my mother adored her. Of course I was childish compared to her. She was full of life, full of plans for the future—she loved boys. She had a voice like a nightingale. We loved having her around.

My mother had a lot of pretty sweaters, because when father was in Lodz he sent them to her to sell, and she kept the prettiest ones. Rivka liked to borrow mother's sweaters, especially gold colored with gold zippers. She was a tall girl and they fit her. I developed early too. By age twelve I had a shape of a woman, filled out, and had peaches 'n' cream skin. The boys started paying attention to me, but I was childish and could not figure out why. The girls started being very friendly to me, too. Some of the girls were older than me, but they hadn't developed yet. I didn't know then that girls were anxious to grow up, show it, and get the boy's attention. To me, it was a burden to wear a bra and menstruate heavily every month. I had to stay in bed for the first two days every month, and the other five days I always worried I would leak on my clothes. I also had a lot of pain. But my friends acted like I was lucky, hanging around me and asking me questions.

My friend Rivka had freckles all over her face. She liked to kiss me because of my creamy smooth skin, and asked me to kiss her on the cheek as proof that I am not repulsed by her freckles. I kissed her, but God forgive me, I did not like it. Her love of life and fun spilled over on me. She taught me to read romantic novels, romantic poetry. When a new boy showed up in the neighborhood, she'd come calling for me to check him out We were too young to do anything but a lot of looking from afar while whispering to ourselves.

Rivka wanted to be a teacher of languages and to write. She dreamed of faraway places. She'd say, "How dull and boring are the skies of Rokitno, forever blue and predictable." In the years since then, I have seen the sky from a lot of different places on our small globe. Sometimes they were stormy, sometimes lonely and scary. I would recall my friend's words, and how I wished to be back in my peaceful, predictable Rokitno, dreaming with my friends. We would walk for hours talking and dreaming.

I think that I adopted Rivka's dreams as my own. I started writing and found out that I was good at it. I started drawing and liked that very much. I don't know how good my poetry was, but whenever the teacher assigned a poem for homework, I wrote—besides my own—also for half of the class. It was easy for me, and I loved doing it. The kids would come to my house and

beg me to help them, so I did. Once for Mother's Day in Polish language I got a B+ for my own poem and the poem I wrote for a girlfriend got an A+.

I was used to helping my classmates, because all through my school years the teachers would assign the worst learners to me. Our table in the *zal* always had many kids around it doing homework, which I was supposed to help them with. I loved to play teacher, but one or two would defy learning no matter how hard I tried. My mother was proud of me for helping, but I didn't like it when she was showing off. Once or twice she opened the door to our *zal* when we were doing homework, show a friend of hers, and say, "These kids all come here so my daughter will help them."

I would get embarrassed and say, "These are all of my friends, and we are just doing homework together." But of course they were not my close friends. My close friends were the best students in the class: Rivka, Lucia, Lea. Lucia Spivak was short and chubby with the cutest face. She was also very funny, and we all loved to kiss her smooth cheeks. Lea was skinny, delicate, big brown eyes, a gentle girl. She was not an A student, but I liked her a lot. Rivka, Lucia, and I were the best students in the class.

There was a boy named Boria who was also on par with us. He was short and cute, brown eyes and hair. He had a crush on me, but I was not

interested in anyone except Mayto Tchetchik. Once, the teacher sent us together to do something, and I was reluctant. Boria said to me, "If I were Mayto you would not act like that." And he was right. When I look back through the maze of the years and remember all these dear people, children that never grew up, dreams that never had a chance, I loved them all so much. Even the ones that I did not like then. I wish I would have one day from my past so I could go back and tell them how much I love them, and how sorry I am that Hitler did not let them grow up and experience life.

Our neighbors next door had a little boy named Yosele. He must have been about two years old. He was very smart, I played with him often. He liked his clothes coordinated, and once I came into their house while he was crying bloody murder. When I asked him what was wrong, he said that his mother made him wear grey socks with a brown suit. He refused to get dressed until his clothes matched. He was killed by Hitler, and I often sing the Yiddish song "Yosele" and cry for my lovely little neighbor who is no more.

Rivka's father, my favorite teacher, was taken by the Soviets and put in jail. He was there only a few weeks, but when he returned to teach, his sandy hair was gray. They made him sign a statement that said Hebrew is a rotten language and he would not teach it. Rivka told me that they beat him with an

electric rod. That is why he did not choose to run to Russia when the Nazis came. He did not trust the Soviets, and he and his family lost their lives. May their memory be blessed forever. The only discomfort that I personally suffered at that time was giving up Hebrew studies. The school taught Yiddish and Russian. I like Russian—it is very pretty, especially the poetry.

But my first love was Hebrew and the Bible. Not only did nobody teach it to me anymore, my father was afraid to have the books around. My favorite book was the Prophets. We had been studying Jeremiah and Jesekial when we were so rudely interrupted by the division of Poland between Hitler and Stalin. I used to like to read the prophecies aloud, trying to memorize them. One day my father took my Hebrew books, including my Prophets, and put them in a sack and hid them in the attic. He was afraid that if someone saw those books around our house, he would be jailed.

I accepted that and settled for reciting Russian poetry. I was chosen to represent my school at a December 25th, celebration in the town square. My brother Yitzchak wrote a speech for me in Yiddish. There was a high podium built in the square, and there, way above the sea of faces, I delivered my speech by heart, trying to turn in every direction and gesticulate the way my

brother taught me. My speech was a success. Everyone shook my hand, and I received a wood carving as a prize.

They (I say "they" because I don't know who was behind it) gathered all the best students to be honored on stage in the town theater. There was a huge audience. They made us repeat an oath and then put red scarves on all of us. In recognition of our excellence in school, they rewarded us by inducting us in the Pioneer Communist Youth Organization. I did not understand the implication of that. I liked my red scarf—it was very becoming with my face, and I wore it with all of my dresses.

There was a Russian officer who used to come to our school and talk to us, trying to wean us away from our Yiddish school to go to the newly built Russian school. He promised me trips and special favors if I changed schools. I was too dumb to be afraid of him. I said no, my friends are here, my teachers are here. I love my school and want to stay. In general for me, this was a good time. Everyone was working, the kids were in school. Everyone liked me and treated me with respect.

I thought that I loved Stalin because he saved us from Hitler and promised us a free education. We were taught in school to love the almighty father Stalin and his little princess Svietlana. Of course I heard jokes about

that. For instance, there were many meetings in the town square to which the farmers were told to come. They were asked to vote or approve certain things. The farmers did not understand what they were doing there, so the official from the podium would show them when to raise their hands or when to clap in approval. And there were jokes about Stalin's almightiness. But I remember that my father had a problem with an anti-Semite on his job, so I wrote a letter to Stalin and told him about it. Some official came to check it out and reprimanded the person who gave Father trouble.

My brother Reuven, who was twenty-four years old at that time, decided that it was time for him to marry and start his own family. He found a lovely girl from Dombrovitsa and married her. Her name was Golda Fishbein, she was the eldest of seven beautiful girls. Their mother was dead, but they had the nicest, warmest father. Golda had green eyes, brown hair, tall, with a wonderful personality. We all fell in love with her. She was very good with her hands, could sew dresses, and was always cheerful, always pleasant. She made friends quickly. I could not be at their wedding because they went to another town where no one knew them and were secretly married by a rabbi. Officially in Rokitno, a judge or official married them. I remember drinking white vodka. Someone gave me a glass when my mother was not looking.

Reuven and Golda were very happy about ten months, and then he was drafted into the Russian Army. I remember how they both cried. I remember him training in Rokitno for a few days. I saw him marching in uniform and then the train took him and the others away. Golda went to visit her father in Dombrovitsa. I can't say what had a great impact on my brothers or sisters, or how they felt. All I can recall is the way I felt and the way things looked to me. My sisters, being younger, can write their own impressions. My brothers did not talk to me like to an equal, expressing their feelings. Maybe boys were trained to hide their feelings. On the other hand, my father always talked to me like an equal, explaining life's crazy ways. I don't really feel like leaving this part of my story, because an era, a feeling of belonging, had ended.

Chapter Four—War Again, And On The Move

In the middle of a dreamy summer in 1941, the war started up again. First there were rumors, and then the planes flying overhead started dropping bombs. We girls used to walk to the railroad station to meet the trains. Sometimes passengers talked to us. It was interesting to meet new people. I was only thirteen, but some of my friends were sixteen years old. I was flattered when the passengers assumed that I was also sixteen.

One day in June 1941, my sister-in-law Golda was a passenger on the train. She said that she was running from the Nazis toward the Russian border. Most of her and Reuven's belongings were in our house. She didn't take the time to take anything. She advised us to do likewise, and she was gone.

My friend Doba Shafir said to me, "Your family better leave before the Germans come, because they kill communists first, and your father was considered a communist by the Polish government." Then she told me that the Germans operate on all young Jewish girls so they cannot have children.

I think that the fear of that operation is what saved my life. For I decided then and there to leave home, and run with all the other people toward the Russian border. First, I asked my best friend Rivka to come with me. She

wanted to go, only her father did not permit it. His experience with the Soviet government was so bad that he preferred to take his chances with the Nazis.

Rivka and her family were all shot by the Nazis when they came to Rokitno. Of course I was not there to see it. After the war, people from my hometown that survived and fought with the Partisans told me that all the Jews in Rokitno were rounded up, made to dig a hole, and shot in the back. When this common grave was opened after the war, Rivka's copper braids were right on top.

When my father heard all that talk about the Nazis, he decided that we should all go. That afternoon, bombs fell on the railroad station. Father was packing a suitcase when our ceiling almost caved in. He said, "What is happening? Children, are you all here? Let's go to the woods." We ran and hid in the woods until the bombing stopped. That night, back in the house, we barely slept. With sunlight, we were up, everyone packing up some clothes, valuables, pictures. I packed my school bag. Father had arranged with a Polish friend to come and get our furniture, dishes, whatever he could take to his house and save it for us when we return. That man lived at the edge of town and was not likely to be bombed. The railroad station was the main objective of the bombings, and our house was close to it.

When we left the house, a lot of our things were taken away already. Father did not bother to lock the door. As we were leaving, we saw little Polish boys going into the house to steal the rest. They yelled after us, "*Zydy do Palestyny*!"—"Jews go to Israel!" We girls each carried our school bags. Father, Mother, and Yitzchak carried suitcases. We had a horse and wagon, but something happened to it, I don't remember what, and we left on foot, taking our cow with us. We walked toward the woods and rested when we got there. There were a lot of people there all going in the same direction, away from the Nazis. I saw my school principal Mr. Kulik there, his wife was crying. Someone told me that she lost her mind and was like a child. Fear does that to some people. We milked the cow, drank some milk, ate food, and moved on.

When we got to the Russian border, there was a gate open, with no one in sight guarding it. We crossed and thought, "We are safe now." That night we slept in a public park in Olevsk in the Russian Ukraine. My parents met a lot of people they knew before leaving in 1919. It seems that the Jewish people on this side of the border were also leaving their homes and running away. And with all their troubles, I heard them blame each other for the war. The Russian Jews said, "If we hadn't liberated you in 1939, we wouldn't be in the war now." And the Polish Jews said, "If you hadn't invaded us in 1939, the Polish

army would have saved Poland." Of course they were all talking nonsense, venting their bitterness on each other.

My father had high hopes for the future. He said, "A man who is willing to work at anything should be able to provide for his family, buy pillows and necessities." How wrong he was. My mother had a brother in Dniepropietrovsk who was chief engineer over some factories. His name was Motel Melamed. He was married and had a little girl named Julichka. They also had two sons from his wife's first marriage. Until 1939, my mother didn't hear from her brother. He told us that he was afraid to admit he had a sister in Poland. He was also an inventor and had certain privileges. After the Ukraine annexed us to its eastern part, we received pictures and letters from my uncle. They had a beautiful apartment, furs, nice furniture, and never had to wait in long lines whenever they wanted to buy something—food or clothes—from government stores. The only place there are no lines is the black market, but the prices are exorbitant. Anyway, my auntie and uncle used to enter the stores through a side door reserved for special people.

So we headed toward Dniepropietrovsk. That is easier said than done. The trains were packed with soldiers. Long lines of people waited for tickets, but no one was selling any. My father opened the doors of a train that stopped

for a few minutes and shoved us all in. When we said, "Daddy, we have no tickets," he said, "Just go in and sit anywhere." He was right, there wasn't even a conductor looking for tickets. The train was slow, stopping a lot. Food was hard to find, especially bread.

When we finally arrived in Kiev, we were pleasantly surprised. The city was beautiful, and the stores had plenty of food. We bought five loaves of bread. It is funny how the memory is selective. Some things I remember, and some are a blank, as if I was never there. We wandered around Kiev some, then went to the train station. This time we didn't even try to wait for tickets. As soon as the train stopped, we got on it, but soon found out that the train was destined to go back to the border. So we all quickly got off the train and quickly got on the next train that was already leaving. As the train was chugging away, we suddenly saw our mother on another train, going in the opposite direction. We could not get off and watched helplessly while leaving Mother behind. At the very first stop, we got off that train. We were still in Kiev, and headed for the biggest city park. There, Father settled us kids with our packages, and went to look for Mother. He was gone all day. He came back with dark, looking helpless and forlorn. The same thing happened the next day. Meanwhile at night, while we were sleeping in the park, planes overhead

dropped bombs on nearby Kiev. I remember I wasn't sleeping—who could sleep with worrying about Mother's whereabouts, and knowing that the bombs could hit us?

There were a lot of people in the park. Father was asleep, exhausted from walking all day, looking for Mother. My sister Riva was afraid to sleep, and kept pulling at Daddy, "Don't sleep Daddy, I am scared." I told her to leave him alone, that he is too tired, but she didn't even hear me. Now in retrospect, I realize how traumatized Riva must have been. Losing her mother suddenly, the bombs overhead, and Father asleep. I should have been more scared, too. But I was always a religious child and believed that God protected me at all times. I just prayed to him to help us survive and all be together.

Father met trains, went around Kiev asking everywhere for three days, and no sign of Mother. On the fourth day, he said, "We have no choice, we have to go on. The front is coming closer, and we can't get trapped here. God will look out for Mother and bring her back to us." No sooner said than done, suddenly Mother appeared, walking in the park, looking lost and unbelieving. She just cried and cried when she saw us all there. She'd gotten off that train and walked around Kiev looking for us. She said she felt that people didn't believe her when she told them that she was looking for her husband and

children, that they thought she is off her rocker, without documents or any belongings. Finally she stumbled into that park and walked right into us. We all cried and then let Mother rest a little. Then we got up our things, and set out for Dniepropietrovsk, where my uncle lived. That city is located in the Ukraine on the river Dnieper.

I don't remember how we got there. Riva tells me that we took a boat down the river, but I don't remember being on a boat or train. Well, we got there.

My Uncle Motel, Mother's brother, was a handsome man—brown hair, green eyes, and dark skin. His wife, can't remember her name, was beautiful, even though she was older than her husband. She was very jealous of her husband and made our stay there unpleasant. She liked to walk with Yitzchak. It made her feel young walking with a handsome eighteen year old. But the rest of us, she disliked. I tried to surprise her, and cleaned up the house while she went walking. When she came back, she only yelled, "I don't need you cleaning my house and don't want you here."

Uncle Motel felt bad about her, and told us that she is hard to live with, but he loves his little daughter Julichka and that is why he does not leave. He took us to the stores to show how he can go everywhere through a side door

and buy anything ahead of the crowds in the long lines. That was because he was an able inventor. Besides being head engineer for some factories, he invented something new every month. His apartment was full of all kinds of inventions. He also received many prizes. He told us not to try and settle in his city, but go farther inland because there is talk of evacuating his factories and he will probably have to go, too. Father wanted to wait and go with them, but Auntie What's Her Name told us to go on by ourselves.

The trip from there I don't remember, probably on a train. We wound up near the Kafcauz Mountains. As I am writing this, I am looking at a map trying to remember something about the place where we lived happily for three months. The name Armovir sounds familiar and the location seems right.

As I said, I don't remember some of the trips, there were so many. I remember seeing my father's older brother somewhere in our travels. This was a treat for me, since I had no relatives in Rokitno beside my immediate family. I was always curious to meet Mother's or Father's brothers and sisters. I never met my grandparents. Anyway, this uncle was very old, tall, gray, full beard, all covered with wrinkles, and had a heavy voice. He was probably twenty-five years older than my father.

I remember entering a train, an opened-roofed car. There were a lot of people, and not enough room to sit on the floor. Mother yelled to Father, "Save the children, never mind the suitcases." We threw away our belongings. I took my school bag off my back and threw it on the ground. All my papers were there, my clothes. I was left with nothing. The only one who insisted on keeping her bag was Riva. Thank God that she did. She saved her papers, and they were the only papers we had to get out of the Soviet Union after the war.

I remember that the train before ours was all bombed out. The tracks were littered with bodies and belongings. Our existence was from minute to minute. Young people from my hometown who left home alone wanted to latch on to us, but we had nothing to help them with, so they went on alone. I have never seen them again.

We did not stay in Armovir itself. My parents brought us to a village near there. I don't remember its name. The people were told by the government to treat us nice, and they did. When we arrived they made a supper for us in a big hall. There were a few more families with us. I remember they served us cut-up red tomatoes, cucumbers, onions in lots of oil, chickens cooked with tomatoes, fruits. But best of all, there was lots of fresh, good Russian rye bread. By then, we were months away from home and hungry. We couldn't

believe our eyes. We ate and ate. My little sister Malka, who was always very resourceful, tried to pack some bread into her clothes. One of the women serving us saw her, came over and said, "Take those slices of bread out. You don't have to hide any. Here is a whole loaf that you can take with you openly."

They put us in a house with a lone Russian woman. Her husband and sons were in the army, fighting the Nazis. She was so good-hearted. I don't remember her name or what she looked like. I just remember that she treated us like family, shared everything she had with us. When it came time for us to move on because the war was coming closer, she asked us to stay on. She said that she would protect us from the Germans, tell them that we are her family, and that there is plenty of food in her barn for the winter. Father thanked her, but said no, he would not take that chance and would not have her risk her life for us.

I am not sure if the people in the village knew that we were Jews. None of us looked particularly Jewish. Our Russian speech was quite fluent, and if there were a trace of an accent they might have assumed that we were Ukrainians and Christians. We never discussed that.

The three of us girls enrolled in school. I remember the German teacher (all Russian schools taught German as a second language) was not pleased when I translated German into Russian easily. The German sounded like Yiddish to me, and I understood it. I made very good friends there. Maria Zychorenko was the best, small and dark with a heart of gold. Marycia was blond with braids, vivacious. They came to call for me to go to school. The path to school led through mountainsides, climbing, crossing a hanging bridge, crossing a stream on a fallen log. I was scared, but I loved it.

Funny, I can see in my mind now those paths along the mountains. When I was afraid to cross the streams, my friends teased me good-naturedly, and dared me until I crossed. They called me "Gorodskaya," city girl, because I wore short skirts and wore ribbons in my hair. They wore long skirts. They could also do farm chores and everything around the house. I was very good in school, but I seemed spoiled compared to them, and they assumed that it was my city upbringing that made me that way.

They liked me, they liked all of us. Every day someone would come with presents for us, mostly fresh fruits. In the evening everyone gathered in the village square. They sang, danced, played instruments. There was a boy named Misha who played the accordion quite well. He was short, red-haired,

full of freckles, and very popular. All the girls liked him. He decided that he liked me and wanted me to be his girlfriend. I liked him as a musician, but did not want a short thirteen year old as a boyfriend. I told the girls that I like older boys. In fact, I was not ready yet for a boyfriend who might expect more than talking. In Rokitno, a nice girl of thirteen was not expected to hold hands or kiss the boy she liked. Talking and eye contact was all. Here in this village in the mountains, kids kissed and acted more adult. Maria told me that the parties every evening are in our honor, and not to tell people that I don't like Misha because everyone loves him, and they would turn against me.

I don't remember how the adults in our family spent their time, maybe they helped on the farm. I tried to bake once when no one was home, but I didn't know how. I poured flour on a working table, made a well like I thought I saw my mother do, opened some eggs, put them in the middle, and the whole thing started running on the floor. I wanted to surprise everyone and bake a cake, instead they found me upset and helped calm me. I found out years later that I didn't use a bowl.

We all gained weight during those months in the village. When it came time to leave, the villagers gave us a big send off. We had no more luggage at all. Anything we had left, we sold in order to have money. We had brought

along some of Golda's dresses, thinking that we would find her and give them to her. Well, we sold them in that village. They had never seen such beautiful clothes, but we needed the money. We went back to Armovir. From there we took a train to Baku. I don't remember the trip. I remember being in Baku. Big piles of white salt or sand. My father walking the streets with two packs on his shoulder, his chin pulling determinedly forward.

Everything we had was packed in two sacks, tied with ropes, and father carried it, one in the front, and one in the back. They must have been heavy—he struggled to walk straight. I didn't ask it then, I never criticized my parents when young, but now I wonder why he carried everything himself, and let us just walk free. I remember there was a lot of walking, a hot sun, we were tired. Maybe that's why he carried everything alone, to spare us.

I remember sleeping outside on top of those piles of sand or salt. We must have been waiting for a boat that would take us across the Caspian Sea. Then there was the boat trip, like a dream I remember sitting on the deck of the boat. Moonlight night, water gently rippling as far as the eye can see. My family were all asleep and I couldn't sleep, so I moved closer to the railing to see the water better. I had always loved to watch the movements of a living

body of water, be it a lake or river. This was beautiful. Then I noticed a handsome blond sailor also looking at the water. He saw me and came over.

I don't remember his name, or anything about him. But he came over and we spent the whole night talking while watching the moon color the ripples in silver and black. We told each other our life stories and dreams. I felt so grown up talking to this seventeen-year-old stranger, and yet I felt safe because my family slept nearby. I don't remember where we disembarked. There were trains going north to Siberia and trains going east to Tashkent. I don't know if Father knew which train to take or if it was pure luck that we wound up on a train going to Tashkent. People who wound up in Siberia had stories afterward of frozen, amputated toes or limbs. We found ourselves in Fergana, Uzbekistan. Big trucks came and took us to a *kolchoz*, a communist cooperative farm. I remember the driver of the truck was a young, slender Uzbeck who spoke Russian quite well. The older people did not speak Russian. All of them spoke Uzbeck among themselves. I realized quickly that I would have to learn the language. I asked him words in Russian and he translated them for me to Uzbeck. By the time we arrived in the *kolchoz*, I already knew some Uzbeck.

We were hungry, and here they gave us nothing for free. Father warned us that Uzbecks are Muslims, shrewd merchants, and tight-fisted, not kind-hearted like the Russians. Well, there was a store. We still had some money. I went into the store and asked for five breads—*lepioshkas*. Their bread is like a huge pancake, a pita or a big pizza with nothing on it. They did not really sell their wares unless someone had permission from the president of the *kolchoz*, but they were so impressed with my Uzbeck that they laughed in delight and sold me five *lepioshkas*.

I don't remember where they put us up. But every day we had to be out in the fields, clearing them. We all had to work to get our ration of bread. I remember the president of that *kolchoz* was nice because he treated us with respect and allowed Malka to stay in the shade or home. She did not have to work. The rest of us had to work from morning 'til dark six days a week. At noon we rested in the shade.

Father did not want us out of school, clearing fields, so he packed us up and had us moved to the nearest town—the name escapes me. We sat in a railroad station while father tried to find work and a place to stay. But he found nothing. We were strangers, and no one wanted to help. Our money was running out. I remember father had tears in his eyes when he said, "I came with

the hope that if a man wants to work, he can support his family and send his children to school. But no one will give me a job."

Finally we had to sign up to go back to a *kolchoz*. Only this one was bad. The president there treated us like beggars. Well, we looked like it. We were hungry, and since we had sold any extra clothes we had, we'd begun to look raggedy. Winter came, and the fields were covered with snow. They did not know what to do with us. There were other runaway people in that *kolchoz*. They sent us like a brigade to pick up the leftover cotton in the snowy fields. Some of the people were Jews from Besarabia, Jews from the Ukraine, and Gypsies. Maybe it is the way the Gypsies behaved that made the Uzbecks there distrust us all. I remember a dark curly-haired little boy who stole and swore a blue streak. That was the first time in my life that I heard swearing, and some of the other kids had to enlighten me on what it meant. His mother was also a thief and a nasty witch.

Well, the Uzbecks there were very primitive, never left their village, and the only white people they knew were raggedy and hungry, so they assumed that all white people are nothings. We were hungry all the time. All of us had to work, including Malka, or they would not give her her piece of bread. All we got for working all day was a small piece of bad bread each. We had no

money to buy anything on the black market, and no way to earn any. Father, having faith in people, tried to work harder, figuring maybe they will appreciate it and help us.

I remember a cold wintry day, Father, I, and Riva went out into the fields to pick cotton. The fields were covered with snow. No one else of the brigade came. Riva was cold and told Father that she can't pick the cotton because she doesn't feel good. He took of his jacket, spread it on the snow, and told her to lie down. I worked diligently with him picking the mostly closed cotton buds, filling up our bags, and I complained to Daddy that Riva is not working. He said, "If she says that she doesn't feel good, then she doesn't. Believe her." There was so much emotion in his voice, he so loved his children. No one noticed Father's efforts. There was a man, a runaway from Poland, who was commander of our brigade. He laughed at my father for being so devoted to the work. He didn't help us, but he knew how to pad his own pockets. He was not hungry.

This was a very difficult time for us. We were hungry all the time, all of us. The piece of doughy bread that we received once a day was our sustenance for the whole day. Working extra got us nothing. Winter was coming, and our clothes were wearing out. I remember that I had no coat, and one of my sisters

had no shoes. When we went out into the snow, we took turns wearing each other's shoes and jackets. The one left home wore no shoes. We started scavenging for food. Every pit from every fruit that we found on the street we picked up and brought home. There, we washed the pits and divided them evenly among the six of us. We went into frozen fields (on our own time) and tried to dig something out to eat. Once we found a couple of frozen potatoes, another time some onions.

We started watching the natives. They would go to the Chaichana—tea house, drink tea and sometimes, someone would have a feast. Then, they cooked rice with onions, carrots, and potatoes. We watched and waited. The fact that hungry children were watching them did not prompt them to offer us anything. They only had contempt for us. Well, we waited for them to throw away the peels into the garbage. As soon as they were gone, we took out all the peels, brought them home, and mother would somehow grind them up and make some sort of peel-pancakes. But that was not often. My father cried like a child for us and for himself. He said, "I am so hungry that I could eat a stone. I would beg for food, but no one will give us any." Malka and Riva started to stand by the door of the Chaichana looking beggingly into people's faces. Sometimes, someone would give them something.

I guess my sisters and I do have different memories. I remember that I was too proud to beg, and I told my father that I am too old because I look like a woman and not a little kid. He agreed with me, and I was so grateful then that I did not have to do it. But today in retrospect, how I wish that I would have begged, even done anything to save my father. Then, I thought I was being a good girl, but now I think that I was selfish. Riva remembers when she waited there by the Chaichana door, and an Uzbeck asked her to come with him. She went to his house and he said he would give her some fruit if she would have sex with him. Riva was twelve years old and grew big breasts while we weren't looking. She grew up during our running, and we didn't notice. She knew nothing about sex, and didn't understand what he was talking about, but some inner sense made her realize by his gestures what he wanted. She dropped the fruits and ran away.

Today, Riva remembers it bitterly, that we did not protect her, sending her to beg. She was lucky that she was not raped. But then, Riva did not even tell us of the incident. She went back to beg but was more careful. I can remember clearly how my stomach hurt all the time from being hungry. I would get the piece of bread in the morning and save it all day to eat it in the

evening. Malka says that she was not above taking food away from some poor little Uzbeck kid when no one was looking.

One day Mother had a meeting of all of us to decide if we should give Father a double portion of bread, because the hunger was hardest on him. When we received the bread, mother divided it into six even pieces, one for each of us. She asked if we should divide it into seven portions and give father two. To my eternal shame, I spoke up and said that we are all hungry, and it is not fair to deprive us more. If we can take it, so can father. My suggestion was our decision. Every one is equal. In my own defense I should say that we believed that the war would be over soon, and I certainly didn't think that my father would die from hunger. I was fourteen years old and thought that I was being just.

Meanwhile Riva tells me that she used to save her piece of bread and give it to Father, telling him that she wasn't hungry. She did it secretly, and she went secretly without food all day. I wonder now if that had something to do with her life-long illness. Maybe Riva is just kindhearted, compassionate, loving, and giving, and life's realities were harder on her. We were all deteriorating. I got malaria and didn't know it. We were all very skinny.

Mother had a big swollen stomach with a skinny body. She tried to teach us good morals and survival at the same time.

The Uzbecks lived in clay huts. They had no furniture, mud floors. The floors were covered with carpets, lots of blankets, and pillows. One room served for sleeping, living and entertaining. In the middle of the room was dug a pit, and over it built a short table. The table was covered with a blanket over the pit. In the winter, the pit was filled with hot coals. Everyone who came into the room would put his feet under the table to keep warm. A *piala*, a small bowl of tea, would be passed around the table. Their food they kept hung on ropes suspended from the ceiling. The milk in a bowl would hang on a triple rope until the *kaimak*, cream, would come to the top. The bottom part was used to make round, hard little cheeses. I don't think that the houses had doors, just blankets hung up.

Anyway, eventually we had to learn to steal, Mother mostly. We would walk by a hut, check through the window if no one is home. By the way, the window was just a square hole without glass. Then, mother or Malka carefully sneaked in, grabbed a bowl of milk from the ropes or a little piece of cheese and quickly got out. Mother didn't do it too many times, but each time that she and Malka came home with something Mother cried. She cried and said,

"Remember, Malka, I am teaching you to steal because you are so capable, but stealing is wrong. It is only for thieves, and we are not thieves. We are respectable people. Remember that when the war is over and never take anything that does not belong to you." Begging, stealing, this is how Mother saved our lives. Her pride, her safety, her health meant nothing to her, just everything for her children.

Mother's nerves were deteriorating. She cried a lot and she yelled a lot. She was angry with Father's helplessness and mine, but she was kinder to me because I was a child. Father received the brunt of her anger and complaints. That commander of our work brigade used to hear her yelling and said that Father would not last long because the complaints are harder on him then the hunger. She also refused to have sex with him because he never used preventatives against pregnancy, and she was terrified of getting pregnant and having a child in these horrible circumstances. I used to look at Father's hungry eyes, suffering face, and wished that Mother would be kinder to him, but I could not say anything because she considered me a parasite, too.

When Father and I worked the wintry cotton fields I would ask him why Mother is so angry all the time, and he would say, "Don't blame your mother. She had a hard life, life hasn't been fair to her." He also said that the body

needs more than food, and she is denying herself that need, and lack of it is what makes her nervous all the time. Father understood and he loved her in spite of the way she was treating him then. For the rest of my life, if I was ever tempted to get angry at my mother for anything, my father's gentle face would appear before me asking for understanding. Also, when troubles came in my later life, no one could understand why I put up with so much. Every time my husband would look at me with a tortured face, tears in his eyes, I'd forgive him no matter how bad he'd hurt me, because his face was my father's, pleading for understanding.

Our house was a one-room clay hut with a porch. We had no furniture and no blankets. We slept on the floor on a pile of leaves. On the porch we put together some stones in a circle. That was our stove. We found an old pot and an old frying pan. For making a fire we used cow-dung chips that we collected on the street, or *kuzupaia*, that is a dry rolling bush like wool. The *kuzupaia* we collected and tied together in big bunches, then carried it home. We seldom cooked, because there was nothing to cook, but we needed hot water for bathing and washing our hair. We had no soap, and for our hair we used ashes for shampoo. Ashes work quite well—it would leave our hair shiny, and clean. One day Riva and I were gathering *kuzupaia*, and we made bundles to carry

them home. I am shorter than Riva, and physically weaker. I tried to pick up my bundle and couldn't, so Riva picked it up and carried it. I did not have a coat, and Riva had one since she refused to throw her things when getting on the train. So, I was walking, getting blue with cold, not complaining, when Riva suddenly unbuttoned her coat. She told me that she was very warm, and would I mind carrying her coat for her. I said, "Sure, I will even wear it, because as a matter of fact I am very cold." I put on her coat, and we walked on. Then I noticed that she was shivering. When I asked if she was cold, she said not really, but when I insisted, she admitted that she is cold. She told me that she was warm because she knew that I would not take her coat otherwise, and she saw that I was cold. I loved Riva as much as she loved me, but I never did anything like that for her. There is a certain saintliness about her and her child-like devotion. Before I'd give someone my coat, I'd have to think it out. It would not be spontaneous.

I was shivering a lot that winter, was sick a lot, stayed in bed (or on the leaves). Winter was drawing to the end, and spring was coming. No relief from the hunger, but it got a little warmer outside. I don't know how, but father heard that Golda was not far from us in the city and doing all right. He set out to go there, mostly on foot—we had no money for any transportation. He was

hoping that maybe he could find a job there with Golda's help. Golda was doing all right because she was a wonderful seamstress, but she could not help us. All she did was feed father for a few days.

Father's stomach was not used anymore to a lot of food. He got diarrhea, and came back. Father always had problems with his stomach, I remember at home he ate the big meal around two o'clock, and in the evening only crackers and tea. He never ate anything heavy at night for fear of stomach trouble. Months of starving, traveling on foot, sudden over-eating, exhaustion—the diarrhea would not stop. Mother begged from somewhere some prunes, and we tried to feed him, but he could not even eat anymore.

Father had pelagra, an illness brought on by lack of vitamins and hunger. We did not know what he had. The village doctor, a young Russian girl, did not let him go to the hospital because he had no fever. In the Soviet Union they would not let a person go to the hospital unless they had a fever. We didn't know what to do. Father laid there on the porch for a week, his life running out of him through his bowels. He could not eat, he did not say much. Malka, who was only ten years old, got up early every morning, took father's dirty clothes, and the rags he slept on, and washed them in the *arik*—a man-made stream. Then she dried them in the sun, and put them back under father.

When I think about that, I wonder why I did not do anything to make Father more comfortable. Was I stupid, or was I sick? Mother said that I was very sick around that time.

It was May 2, 1942. I got up with the sunrise and looked out to Father on the porch. Before going to sleep, I remember giving him a prune. The prune was still between his lips where I put it the previous night. He was awake. I asked him why he hadn't eaten the prune. His eyes looked strange and glassy. Suddenly the prune fell out of his mouth, and he said, "Shema Israel," loud and clear.

I yelled, "Daddy, what are you saying?" I was scared. Father was not very religious, and was not in the habit of reciting prayers. He saw the fear in my eyes and stopped reciting the Shema. An apologetic expression came on his face. He looked childish and helpless, then his eyes closed. I yelled for my mother. She came out, and said that he was gone.

Father had dreamed about spring, he was hoping to find a way to get us over the mountains to Afghanistan. He was hoping to work and send us to school. When the village doctor pronounced Father dead, she said that he had pelagra. Diarrhea is one of its symptoms. There was another Jewish family in the *kolchoz* by the name of Munioz. They came and helped my brother

Yitzchak wash my father and prepare him for burial. The *kolchoz* issued white linen to bury him in. They would not issue food for him to live or even medicine to save him, but they respect religion and they issued linen.

I don't remember Dad's burial because I did not go. I had a fever and stayed in. All I remember is that when they carried out his body, I told Mother that I was hungry. She stopped and gave me a piece of bread. I was waiting while they carried my father out. I had a high fever and they sent me to the hospital. I remember that I was not hungry, and very tired. In the hospital I would turn my face to the wall and try to sleep all the time. All the nurses fussed over me. They were hoping that I had some exotic sickness like typhus, because I acted so sick. But all they found was malaria and pelagra. I had no diarrhea, also I was young and resilient. Some bed rest, quinine, and some food, and I got better. When I think back, I have so many regrets for the things that I did not do. Maybe fourteen is very young. In certain ways I was smart. In school my teachers and friends thought me to be smart. So why didn't I have more compassion for my sisters, my brother, even my mother?

I don't know how Mother managed to find some flour, and she made pancakes for me and brought them to the hospital. She was always afraid that I was dying. I had no appetite and could not eat the pancakes. The hunger was in

Mother's and my sisters' eyes as they begged me to eat. I just turned my face to the wall, without a thank you to them, refusing to eat. Why didn't I ask them to eat? I didn't even wonder where they got the flour. Did my mother spoil me so much that I thought myself special, or was I feeling like a nobody, a parasite, and therefore showed no concern for anyone? Maybe I was just too sick to care. I don't remember. I hate to think that I was so selfish. Maybe just a childish stupid blind spot.

With the same chance, I have to mention another stupid thing. Since Father was dead, Yitzchak assumed the responsibilities of the man of the house. He was of military age, but Mother did not want him to go into the army. She figured one son in the army and a dead husband is enough. Yitzchak was careful not to be caught in the draft. Every time a stranger came to the door, he would hide, fearing that they wanted him for the army. When they left, I would tease him and call him "deserter." I thought it was funny to see my big brother afraid for his life, and his life was all devoted to us. I, fourteen, so young and dumb? I have no other excuse. I loved everyone with all my heart.

When I came out of the hospital, I felt a lot better. I went to the place where my father was buried and built a monument. They buried him between

two roads. Mother said since there was no Jewish cemetery there, he should be buried between two roads so there is no room there to bury anybody else of a different faith. Someone was helping me to make the mud bricks, but I don't remember who, unless it was the whole family. I remember building the monument, the length of the grave and a high wall as a headstone. If I ever wanted to visit the grave, I would not know where to look now.

Sometimes I wonder if the monument still stands there. I daydream about visiting his grave. It is strange, but I cannot manage to dream about my father. I sure wish that he would visit me in my dreams. I knew my father for such a short time, and I never stopped missing him. He died at forty-nine and I am fifty-nine now, but I want to see him so badly. Well, writing about it helps, I feel like I was visiting with him for a while.

When I think back to those years, I blame myself a lot for not being "the older sister," and not discussing love and sex with my younger sisters. I could discuss it more easily with my friends. But my sisters seemed to me too young to care, and at the same time too serious and grown up. I had a lot of feelings and daydreamed a lot, but I was ashamed of it. I didn't realize then how important love and sex is in living a normal life.

Even though my mother tried to be modern about love and sex, she managed to give me the feeling that only bad people are interested in it. When I was nine years old, my mother gave me my first lecture. She explained that children are born from a union between man and woman. When I asked how it is done, she told me that there are special organs for it and where they are located. Then she told me that men always want to use women, so they pretend to love them. Women don't want sex, they just do it as a duty to the man that they marry. To the men, the sex act is not more important than going to the bathroom. They forget the women as soon as they leave their beds. Therefore, any woman who gives herself to a man without a wedding is a fool. These unions produce babies, and these babies are a difficult responsibility to raise and care for the rest of a woman's life. She said that some men were responsible, but they are in the minority.

I understand that my brother had a lecture, too, mostly that sex is not free. She told him that some bad women use sex as a lure to catch a good man and force him into a marriage that he does not want. She also told him that if a boy happens to make a girl pregnant, he is just as responsible for the new life as the girl is. Then when I was eleven I got another lecture. We had a class in school called "Handwork." A teacher taught the girls knitting, embroidery,

crocheting. A few classes would have the lesson together. We would sit and talk while knitting. I was bad at knitting, but I enjoyed the class because there were older girls there. Older girls always befriended me, and I was their adoring fan.

These girls would tell stories and jokes, and I laughed a lot. In spite of the education that my mother gave me about sex, I really didn't understand the jokes. The girls used double talk, and I found it funny anyway. One day I came home laughing and told my mother a joke. She didn't laugh, asked me to explain what's so funny. When I explained, she realized how childish I was, and that I was laughing for no real reason. Mother told me that I did not understand the joke, and that I would not really understand it 'til I was older. Meanwhile, she said I should not repeat the jokes that the older girls tell. I was eleven years old, but I had the shape of a woman and the monthly period. So right then and there Mother told me that even though I am too young to understand, I am physically able to have baby. She wanted a promise from me that I would never be in a room alone with anyone male no matter who he is, unless he is my husband. I promised, and I kept that promise to this day.

Mother told me stories about girls my age who were sent by their parents to be helpers in hotels. They slept in hallways. During the night some

man would rape them. The girls didn't complain because they were shy and afraid. They also didn't understand what he was doing. He would walk away without knowing her name, without looking at her, and she would get pregnant. Pregnant girls were sent back home to their parents. Their parents called them whores, but they had no idea what happened to them. I don't think that my sisters got this education. My mother always worried that she would die young and we would be left orphans. My brother got the education so he would grow up to be a righteous man. She even taught him to sew. And I got the education because I was the oldest of the girls. But I had no real understanding. All I knew were my emotions. I was a believer in love, real love.

Back home, Yitzchak was a librarian in the school library. He tried to get me to read serious books: biographical, political, or even detective books. But I found those books boring. I read historical novels, science-fiction books, a lot of modern romance tearjerkers. All the books I read had to have love, and some sex. In those days, authors were not as explicit as now, but I found it exciting anyway. I would daydream about love a lot. My mother would never have believed my thoughts if she could have read them. I also cried a lot over some books. And my mother would yell at Yitzchak for letting me take out sad

books. I took these books out when the other librarian was there. He was a friend of my brother's, and he gave me books with a lot of descriptive love on purpose. He loved to see me blush when I brought the books back.

My sisters were too young for lectures back home, and then the war came. In the war all things seemed suspended. My monthly period stopped the day I left home, and returned the day the war was over. So the education for my sisters never took place because Mother was thinking of survival now.

But my thoughts and daydreams never stopped. When I would get a good dose of how worthless and lazy I am, and how no one is ever going to want to marry such a lazy fat-bottom, I would go to the *arik*—a man-made river. Its water was pure, slowly flowing. It had high banks with grass and wildflowers. I would climb down to the water's edge, sit down, and watch the ripples. It had a calming effect on me. I would sit for many hours and daydream about a wonderful man who would love me with all my faults and rescue me from my mother. Maybe that is the answer to all my questions. I was a dreamer, and not a doer. But that daydreaming was my lifeline. Bad times and bad people disappeared, and I was in a world of my own choosing. I varied my dreams according to my moods, and I spent a lot of time in a wonderful world. When I'd get back home, Mother would say, "Where have you been?

You have been gone so long I thought that you killed yourself." Suicide never occurred to me. I thought that she was joking. I had faith in God and in love, and I was expecting a wonderful future.

Spring was coming to the *kolchoz.* Maybe I should talk about that for a minute: *kolchoz* is a collective farm. All the fields and equipment belong to the state. A man called "president" runs the farm. Everyone is obligated to work the fields. Every family had *kibitke*—a mud hut, a vegetable garden, goats that belonged to them, and they could tend those in their spare time. I don't remember what they received for their work in the fields, maybe money. They grew enough vegetables in their garden plots to sell on the black market. And they had milk and cheese to sell.

But we had no money. They gave us none for our work. We learned to speak Uzbeck like natives. Mother found us jobs weeding someone's garden on our day off. I remember working for a woman all day pulling weeds, and the pay was a bowl of watery rice soup. I was hungry and tired. If we asked the president for help, he laughed at us. He was a mean Uzbeck. Once someone managed to get to town and complain at the Communist Headquarters to someone that we are hungry. They sent a man to check it out. He was dined and wined by the president. He was given steaks and grapes to take home, and

he never talked to any of us. I ask myself why no one noticed that children were not attending school and were working the fields like slaves. Maybe this happened because the war was going badly, and more and more people had become runaways. Or maybe Uzbekistan was backward—it is one of the Soviet Republics in the their southern border. Their own children did not get much education, especially girls.

I remember being friendly with some Uzbeck girls. They were pretty, brown-eyed girls dressed in *kaunek*, a floor-length loose gown with long sleeves. Their hair they wore long and loose, or braided in many small braids. They had beautiful black hair. For adornment they wore fancy vests and jewelry. They would stay in groups and giggle a lot. They would let me in on their conversations, but we could not be real friends because I was so poor and different. They talked about boys mostly. Some girl turned fifteen or sixteen and the parents had been approached with gifts to sell their daughter to a certain man. They were not insulted, they were complimented and joked about the wedding night. Everyone was invited to those weddings. They gave us no food, but if you danced real nice they threw money at you. We never even tried to dance, we were too raggedy. There was a girl named Marianna, she was a

nurse. She would dance at all the weddings. She floated like an angel and collected good money. She was not a runaway like us.

In our group of runaways there were no girls my age. Clara Munioz was twenty, brown-eyed and sexy, in a chunky sort of way. She came to visit us whenever she could. I think she liked my brother Yitzchak. She would tell us how she cried when her Russian flier boyfriend got killed. My brother never offered to walk her home. Girls were the farthest thing on his mind at that time. When he was still alive, Father walked her home if she stayed late with us. He told me that he couldn't figure out why Yitzchak ignored her. Soon after father died, Clara's father died, too, from hunger.

There were two sisters from Besarabia, Romania. One was older, short, with very intelligent brown eyes. She was good to my mother, always listening and sympathizing with her. Her sister was younger. I don't remember what she looked like, but her image is like a breath of spring to me. She was always singing as she worked the fields. Once I asked her, "How come you are so happy?" She told me that she is very unhappy. She lost her young lover, who was killed in the army, and her parents were killed. "Singing," she said, "is a way to survive. Try it." She taught me some songs, and we sang together. I found it uplifting, and I continue this habit to this day. Different songs remind

me of different times, different people. They take me away from the present if it is depressing.

The Gypsy and her little son influenced me, too. I made a promise to myself not to ever curse anyone. I heard enough cursing and swearing to last me a lifetime. I do not do it, and I hate to hear it.

Summer was coming finally. Along the roadways grew apricot trees. They belonged to no one, and we were allowed to eat the apricots. We ate to our hearts' content.

The grain in the fields grew high, ripened, and was being collected. The Uzbecks observed an ancient biblical custom: When they gleaned the fields, they left a little in the corners. And when grain fell on the ground, they left it there for the poor. We were the poor. After hours when everyone went home, we roamed the fields and picked stalks of grain, one by one. We collected them in a sack and brought it home. There we thrashed the grain with sticks. We learned that from the natives. Then we sifted out the pure grain. I don't remember how we ground it. All I know is that we ate plenty of bread and had a sack left over.

In the Soviet Union, you don't own a sack of anything or you are a capitalist. Bread was still rationed. Someone told the president of the *kolchoz*

that we had a sack of grain, and he stopped giving us the rations of bread. As a matter of fact, all we had was apricots and flour. We had no salt, no dairy products, no meats, no vegetables. Mother wanted to save the flour for the coming winter when there are no free apricots, but with no more rations, we had to eat the flour. We continued working the fields, picking cotton. I got to be expert at picking the white blooms with both hands and stuffing them in the bag that I carried on me. Then we took it to the trucks, weighed the sack, emptied it, and went back to picking until we filled our quotas. We worked hard and got nothing for it.

Mother sent me to the president to ask him to reconsider and give us some bread. She could not have picked a worse person for the job. I am too proud and hate to ask favors. She thought that maybe he would be influenced by the fact that I was a cute fifteen year old. A lot of other people liked me. With my blue eyes, blond braids, suntan, and perfect language, people mistook me for a native Tatar girl. But he was not influenced by me or the tears in my eyes. He told me to eat the stones in the *arik* and drink its water if we are hungry. He didn't believe us that we gathered that grain one by one from the leftovers on the ground. We worked hard many weeks to get that sack of grain. He thought that we had money and bought it.

They said that this president liked pretty girls because he always did what Tamara asked him to do. Tamara was a pretty, blond Russian girl, and we saw her often walking with this skinny dried-out middle-aged Uzbeck who was the president. Tamara was in her early twenties. She ran away with her younger sister and was looking out for her. Tamara was sweet and nice to talk to. When I asked her why she gets everything she wants done, and the president will not even talk to me, she told me that she slept with him. But she said that she is not doing it for the favors she gets, those were his idea. She said that she has to have sex to live, that her doctor told her after her husband died, if she abstained she would die. She told me that to some people, sex is more important than food. Tamara told me a lot of stories, and I believed her. Where I was concerned, I thought that virginity was the most important thing in the world, and I was not going to give it up for any reason beside love and marriage.

Yitzchak started to look for some way to earn something. One day someone told him that a dozen eggs on the black market would fetch triple the price in the village. We managed to buy a dozen eggs—it was precious cargo to us. We put it in a little pail with a handle. With the first rays of the sun, Yitzchak and I got up. Mother fixed us breakfast to keep us for the whole day.

Breakfast was Zaterucha. It was flour cooked in water, and instead of salt, mother burned a little flour and put it in to give it some taste. We thought that it was delicious. Having a bowl of warm food in us made us feel strong.

We had no shoes. Barefoot, we set out on the way to the little town where the black market was. It was twenty-four kilometers away, over hilly country. On the dirt road were a lot of Uzbecks riding their donkeys, and bringing their wares to the market. We walked fast singing Hebrew and Russian songs. We tried to remember marching songs to help us march faster. We passed up all the donkeys. They were trailing at a slow speed. It felt good to be young and strong, and get there ahead of the crowd. It took us four hours, while clutching our precious cargo. When we arrived there we saw a lot of booths and tables filled with all kinds of foods. It took a while to find buyers for our dozen eggs. When we sold them we took the money and went home the way we came, and arrived home with dark.

We walked that path many times, earning a little money. Once, thieves tried to steal the eggs from me. My brother left me alone for a minute. Two young men came up to me. Once tried to distract me, while the other grabbed quietly the little pail with the eggs. Luckily, Yitzchak was coming back and saw him. He grabbed the pail from his hand and made a terrible face at them.

They split. Yitzchak was good at making terrible faces. He was tall and big-boned. If someone threatened us, he would put a mean expression on his face. He looked so scary that they always backed off and ran away. Then, we both burst out laughing. I used to think that if they knew how sweet and kind my brother was, they would not run away. He could not hurt a fly.

There was no reason for us to remain in that *kolchoz* since they gave us nothing. Someone had told my brother that they needed a watchman for some fields. I don't remember who the fields belonged to. I know that there was no private enterprise in Uzbekistan, but the fields did not belong to a *kolchoz.* We talked to a man, and he told us that we can move into a house in the middle of the fields. Moving was not difficult. We carried our belongings while walking there. The house turned out to be three walls with no roof. It offered no protection against the sun or rain. As far as the eye could see, fields full of green cucumbers and big watermelons stretched out. Probably other things grew there, but I don't remember what. We had no other place to go, so we stayed there. Our presence there was supposed to discourage thieves. We had permission to eat everything that grew in those fields. When the man came to visit us, he brought an old canvas that we fastened to the walls to be a roof and a door on the open side of the walls.

It was not too bad there during the summer, it was just very hot. I remember walking over the fields and picking out cucumbers to eat. I liked them little and green. We ate them with the peel, and they were delicious. In the afternoon Yitzchak and I looked for ripe watermelons. We learned to discern with a knock of the finger, which melons were ripe. We would drop it on the floor so it would break, and then we ate the cool, delicious, red halves to our hearts' content. I developed a liking for young cucumbers and very ripe melons that lasts to this day. I don't like them out of season, when they are not perfect.

One day while walking in the fields, I met a young man. He was a watchman for the neighboring fields. I saw him from afar before that. On this day he came over and introduced himself. I don't remember his name or what he looked like, except that he was very handsome. I was fifteen, and he was sixteen. After some conversation he told me that he was a native, a Muslim, and that he is studying to become a Muslim holy man. When I told him that I was Jewish, he asked me if I knew Hebrew. When I told him yes, he started speaking to Hebrew to me. His Hebrew was impeccable. He was studying the Torah in the original. In order to be ordained in his faith, he had to know our Torah in Hebrew. We talked for hours in Hebrew. I can still remember the

excitement I felt. This was the first chance to speak Hebrew with someone besides my family since I left home, and to think that he was a Muslim! We talked occasionally after that. It was good to have a friend my own age.

Fall was coming, and the rains started. One morning we woke up all wet. The old canvas was no protection against rain. Everything was soaking wet. Luckily, the sun came out and we spread everything out to dry. The fields were being emptied. It was getting too cold at night to sleep in the open. We had to find a new place. During our stay at the *kolchoz*, we sometimes walked to the nearest town, which was Vadil. I don't remember the reason for our going to town, but I remember walking with mother, just she and I. It was far, and mother always had trouble with her legs. Open trucks or maybe army Jeeps passed us by. We looked so tired that a couple of times they offered us a ride, and we rode some of the way. My memory is cloudy on that, but I know that somehow my brother Yitzchak was in town, maybe in the hospital. Anyway, it was important for us to go into Vadil. Now I wonder, where were my little sisters on those occasions? Were they left home alone?

Anyway, during these trips my mother got to know some Uzbecks in Vadil. When we had to leave our garden home, Mother went to Vadil and found an Uzbeck who was willing to let us stay in his barn for awhile. I

remember he had red hair and a beard, slightly balding. He was 40 years old and had no wife because he did not have enough money to buy one. He was taking care of his mother, who lived with him. He was saving a dowry to buy a wife, and he told us that we could sleep in the barn until he married, which would be soon. There was hay in the barn, but when winter came it was too cold. We might have stayed someplace else, too, but I do not remember. It was getting cold and we were getting hungry again, our grain long gone.

Mother went to the office of the Communist Party in town and told them that we live in a barn, are hungry, and three of us are children who don't go to school. She still had her naïve beliefs that someone would care. Someone did come to see us, gave us a little piece of meat and some grapes. And that was the end of it. When mother went again to ask for help, they refused to see her. We registered for rations and got some bread. Malaria got a hold of me. I remember waiting in long lines for our bread rations, when suddenly I would start shaking uncontrollably. I could not leave the line until someone replaced me. By the time I got home, usually aided by one of the family, I had a high fever. They would put me down and cover me with everything we had. I don't remember if we had quinine, but the attacks usually passed and I felt better. I developed sores on my scalp, another pelagra symptom. Mother cut off my hair

completely, all the way to my scalp so she could treat my scalp sores. I remember wearing a scarf on my head afterward to cover my baldness. When my scalp was healed, and the hair started growing back, I took off the scarf and was often mistaken for a young boy.

At about that time, my brother Yitzchak found out that there was a sanitarium in town. The sanitarium was like a resort, and it served as a resting place for vacationers who were lucky enough to be sent there by the Communist Party for a week or two. During the winter it was closed for renovations and cleaning. My brother had to keep a low profile, so he did not apply. But he told me to go and ask for a job. He said if I got a job now, I might be lucky and they would let me work there when it opens. When the sanitarium had vacationers, they got plenty of food. Anyone working in the kitchen might get their hands on leftovers, if nothing else.

Well, I was almost sixteen, skinny, short, no hair. The man doing the hiring was a middle-aged Russian. I knew that I could not have a chance if he were an Uzbeck. They are hard and have no pity. Russians are generally kind and soft-hearted. When I asked this man for a job, he burst out laughing. He said, "I am hiring men for heavy work. Look at you. What can you do?" I promised him that I would keep up with the men, and work as hard as they do.

When that did not help, I started to cry, and told him that we are hungry. He did not like the fact that I was Jewish. He hated Jews but felt sorry for me and hired me. Then I asked him for a job for my younger sister. He said, "Do you have an older sister?"

I said, "No, a younger one. She is thirteen." He said, "Leave me alone." But I begged and promised that Riva is taller and stronger than I am even though she is only thirteen. He said, "All right, you are both hired, but if you expect to stay on here when the place opens, you are dreaming. We already have too many people."

Riva and I never worked as hard in our lives as we worked that spring. We had to climb on roofs carrying heavy stretchers filled with dirt or bricks, pulling up pails of water with ropes to the second floor. This is how primitive the building industry was then. Everything was done by hand, and by sweat. All the other workers were men—Uzbecks. They delighted in piling our stretchers to the top. They hired white people, and wanted to see these two little girls quit. But we didn't quit. Once, I remember, they were all laughing and putting more and more dirt on our stretcher. Riva and I were holding the front and back handles. Our legs started to buckle under us. Riva almost fell, but with the last strength she said, "Let's go," and we started climbing up with

it. We made it. After a while they stopped tormenting us and accepted us as workers. As a matter of fact, we worked harder than the men. Uzbecks are lazy—they like to lay around, smoke, drink tea. Riva and I never stopped working because we wanted to be asked to stay on for the summer.

The man who hired us finally said one day, "I have never seen Jews work so hard. You are good people, and you need a rest." His wife was a doctor and headed the clinic. He told us to go see his wife. She gave us two days' sick-leave passes, just to stay home and rest. Pay was never important. I don't remember what they paid us, but it was not enough to buy anything. Everything was rationed, and on the black market the wages for a week might buy a half loaf of bread.

The work was finished, it was the last day. We all gathered eagerly by the wall with the latest announcement on it, to find out who would stay on for the summer. Well, I made it. He made me the official yard sweeper and Riva was to be my assistant. We were in charge of keeping the grounds clean. There was not really much to that job. In one hour we swept and picked up the grounds. The rest of the day we spent as volunteer helpers in the kitchen. That was the reason why we worked so hard all spring. Being official employees of the sanitarium, we were allowed to be there. We helped the waitresses, the

dishwashers. I remember wearing a little scarf on my head, carrying heavy trays, and serving girls my age. The girls were vacationers, daughters of party members, and I was a kitchen helper. It felt strange. I felt like I should be friends with them, not their servant. I listened to their care-free girlish giggles and felt like a flower that has been picked from the ground and then thrown away to wilt. I had to get over my personal feelings and be helpful.

The kitchen workers let me clear the tables. I carried the dishes to the kitchen. There I had a big pot into which I threw the leftovers from the plates. Malka would come three times a day with the empty pot and then carry it full, back home. She was hiding outside, waiting for the leftovers. Riva made friends with a Jewish woman, also named Riva, who worked as a dishwasher. She let us scrub the pots. We would take the pots to the *arik* that crossed the sanitarium woods to wash. But first we spooned out all the food that stuck to their bottoms into our pot, and Malka carried it home. I can still remember her skinny little figure crossing the bridge, and running fast through the trees.

We were afraid that if someone caught us, they would take away the food and fire us. As a matter of fact, the man in charge (I don't remember his name) came over a couple of times and yelled at me, that my place is in the yard, not in the kitchen. I would take a broom and proceed to sweep

nonexistent dirt. When he left, I snuck back to the kitchen. The work in the kitchen was hard. The pots were heavy and big. Everything was done by hand. But we had plenty to eat that summer.

Something funny happened to me there. I offered to wash the big meat grinder. I carried it to the *arik*, took it apart and cleaned it. But I didn't know how to put it back exactly. There was a part that looked to me like a thick ring. I couldn't figure out where it went, so I threw it into the *arik*. I brought the grinder back and no one noticed anything wrong. Later on when they tried to grind meat for supper, they couldn't do it because the knife was missing. Anyway, that is what they called the inner part. No one remembered that I cleaned it, and they said nothing to me. When I heard the commotion in the kitchen I asked what happened. They told me that they can't cook supper because the knife is missing in the grinding machine. I remember wondering if that little ring that I threw away could be a knife. It certainly didn't look like one. I went back to the *arik*, and sure enough that little ring was right there in the shallow water. I picked it up and brought it back to the kitchen. They were all so grateful and praised me like a hero. No one knew that I'd thrown it away in the first place.

Summer went and so did our jobs. This time Mother found a job. She was night watchman in a bread store. The bread was brought during the night. She had to take it in, weigh it, and watch it until morning, until Grisha came. Grisha was running that store for the government. He was a young man of average looks, white Russian, with a limp. The limp is what kept him out of the army and got him his job. In the morning the people lined up in front of the store to redeem their ration card for their piece of bread. By then, Mother would be gone and Grisha was in charge. I was worried about Mother staying there alone, so I went with her. We sat and talked until midnight when the bread delivery came. The bread was fresh and hot. They put it on this huge scale and weighed it. Mother signed for it. There were hundreds of kilos of bread there. When they left, we slept on the floor until morning.

While playing with the scale one day, I discovered that if you move that thingamajig on top, the weight changes. You can have ten pounds and it shows only five pounds. I practiced until I had it running smooth. Before the bread was delivered, I set the scale to show five kilos less. After the delivery, I fixed the scale to its correct weight. From the pile of bread I took a five-kilo loaf of bread and took it home. I can remember putting the loaf of bread under my coat and running through the streets of the sleeping little town, over the bridge,

through the trees, and home. I was afraid if someone caught me with the bread, my mother and I would both go to jail for stealing. On the way back, after leaving the bread home, I only worried about being attacked. But the will of survival was the most important thing. Work or danger did not matter. We had to live, to show Hitler that he could not win. Persevering was that main thing.

Grisha liked Riva. She was growing up, tall blond, and well-developed. But Riva was afraid of men. When he talked to her, she would move away to the left. He teased her about it saying, "Baryshnia Leviei"—"Mistress to the Left."

I don't remember exactly when and why jobs ended, especially if it did not involve me personally. This is something my mother told me. It is possible that it happened before Riva and I got our jobs at the sanitarium. Anyway, Mother was working for a doctor. He and his wife were running a nursery, or children's center, for the government. They both had complete control of the facility. There were gardens and orchards that belonged to them. Their tables were full of all kinds of good food. Not for the children though, just for their family.

The children received only some soup for lunch. For her work, Mother received a bowl of soup for lunch, with the children. This was a very hungry

time for us. Mother said that Malka was skinny and hungry, her hair cracked thin, dry, standing up on her head for lack of nutrition. Mother felt so bad for her baby girl being so hungry, so she asked her to come to the nursery. When Malka came, Mother told her to eat Mother's bowl of soup. But that doctor saw them, and chased Malka away. He said that Mother had to eat her own soup or she would not have strength to clean. He never offered Malka a little soup. He had so much. Mother had to watch her baby girl standing there looking so hungry, turning to go. She did not even cry. He forced Mother to eat her soup and she almost choked on it. I know my sister can eat anything she wants now, plus some, but whenever my mother would remind me of that incident, I wished that I could hug Malka and tell her how sorry I am that that doctor was so mean.

I think that through this doctor, my mother found me my next job. She told him that she has an intelligent sixteen-year-old daughter who needed a job. He gave her a letter addressed to a friend of his to give to me. I took this letter with me when I applied for a job in the office of the Raispolcom—the city government. I remember that interview well. I had no shoes, so I came barefoot, old dress. My hair grew back to shoulder length and I wore a ribbon in it. A young round-cheeked Uzbeck took my letter. He looked me over, and

did not ask me a single question. He said, "You start tomorrow morning." I was not very worldly at sixteen, but even I could tell when a man looked at my body.

When I left him, I remember thinking that he did not even know if I could read or write. He gave me a job because he liked my looks. But what is there to like? A barefoot little girl, on the raggedy side, with a ribbon in her hair. The next morning, he introduced me to an eighteen-year-old Jewish girl. She was dressed very stylishly with high heels on. I don't remember her name, but my new boss told me that she would be my mentor, and if I learned well, in a short time I would have clothes like hers, plus other comforts. When he left I asked her, "Where can I get a bar of soap?" She told me that I had to wait and learn first. They gave me some papers to copy. I did not know how to type, so I wrote long-hand. After a couple of hours, my boss came in, sat down next to me, and put his arm around me. Being the nice Jewish girl that I am, I moved away. He left. He repeated the same thing for three days, and I moved away each time.

The girl who was supposed to teach me must have decided that I was stupid, for she looked forlornly at me and did not try to teach me anything. On the fourth day, my boss came in with a woman in her twenties. He had his arm

around her, and told me that I was fired. I asked him why he is firing me. He looked surprised, then told me that my handwriting is not pretty enough. Of course I knew why he fired me. I remember thinking that the woman who is replacing me looks old and experienced with men. By the way, I heard that the Jewish girl with the stylish clothes contracted syphilis, and at age twenty was very sick. They dropped her from her job, and she was alone and hungry like the rest of us, plus being sick. I felt sorry for her, but I had no way of helping her.

There was a family in Vadil that hailed from my mother's hometown. The mother's name was Beila, the son's, Aron. Beila used to complain bitterly how misspent her life was. She considered herself very smart, and poverty and hunger were like a personal insult to her. I don't remember who was giving at that time each family of runaways a dish of some soup. We sent Malka to get it, and when she brought it home, we divided it evenly among us. Beila sent her little girl to get the soup. When she brought it home, Beila yelled at her that the dish was not quite full, that she probably drank some on the way over. The little girl got spanked, and we felt very sad.

It never occurred to us that one of us would stuff their mouths without thinking of the others. For all we knew, it might have spilled on the way. It was

so sad to see how otherwise respectable people turned so small when hungry. The little girl cried and swore that she did not take a sip, but her mother refused to believe her. The son Aron was very good-looking—blond, curly hair, blue eyes, tall, straight shoulders, and about my age. He worked in the bakery. I was self-conscious about my appearance, so I never even looked at him. Now I realize I was a cute sixteen year old, even barefoot and in an old dress, but then I acted proud. I was poor, so I had my nose in the air.

The man who was running the bakery was a Jew from Latvia named Lots. He had a younger sister, just a couple of years older than myself. She was fat and plain-looking, even though she had nice clothes to wear. She always flirted with Aron and with all the influential young men in Vadil. They were nice to her because her brother was an important man.

One day I was standing by the bakery, waiting to buy our rations of bread. This young woman came by in the company of the secretary of the Comsomal (Young Communist Party chairman). They did not wait in line. Aron opened the door for them to come in. As they were passing me, she and the secretary made a joke about my appearance. I got angry and yelled, "Stop, you *smarkatye* [in Russian it means 'drippy noses']. Who do you think you are? Back home I probably would not have wanted to talk to either of you."

They stopped and both looked like I slapped their faces. Then they went on without saying a word. Aron smiled at me. I think he was probably the reason that I got so angry in the first place. It is bad enough not to be dressed nice, when I liked him so much, but to have someone laugh at me when he was listening was more than I could bear. Now when I think back, it must have looked funny. This raggedy little girl spitting at the secretary of the Comsomal. Oh yes, I spat on the ground when I finished talking. This is something my father used to do when he was angry.

I don't remember all the jobs that Yitzchak held. At this time he got a job in the bakery. While working there he got friendly with the man in charge, Lots. Lots told him that if he would buy some ration tickets on the black market, he personally would redeem them for a sack of flour, and my brother could sell the flour at a nice profit. He even borrowed the money for my brother and told him to come in through the back door. He was so helpful.

When my brother was leaving through the back door, a policeman was waiting for him and arrested him for stealing. We were all so naïve, we trusted Lots. We went to him and told him to go to the police and tell them that our brother did not steal the flour, that he personally gave it to him for the ration cards. Lots told us that this would make the case worse, because they would

make the charge speculation—black marketeering. While petty theft carries a six-month sentence, speculation could get him ten years in jail. We were going to look for a lawyer, but Lots told us that he would take care of it. He said, "Don't worry. With my influence, I will get him off. He will be home free right after the trial."

When I write this my anger is so strong, my breath is heavy, I see red. I can forgive Hitler easier than this man Lots. Hitler hated Jews and openly tried to destroy them and wipe them off the face of the Earth. This man was a Jew, a runaway, a man who was supposed to have been one of us. He had a big job and a lot of influence. He pretended to be kind, and we believed him. Yet he deliberately set out from the beginning to put my brother in jail, just for being trusting.

Later we found out the reason. In the Soviet Union there was a awful lot of corruption: stealing, speculation, and bribery. Of course, the people who really did those things knew whom to bribe. They were never prosecuted, they were prospering. It seems this Lots had a sister who was caught in some unlawful dealings and was arrested. In the S.U., everyone had to prove that they were doing a job. So, hospitals recruited sick people, police had to make arrests, and courts had to have convictions. In order to free his sister, Lots had

to give them someone to prosecute. So, he saw this poor widow with young children, small-town, naïve Jews, and he offered the eldest son a job in the bakery. Then he proceeded to set him up for the policeman waiting outside.

We were not stupid—we did not trust everyone. But a Jew, a man who looked like the picture of Herzel: serious, tall, good-looking, brown eyes and hair. We trusted him. At the trial, they accused my brother of being a thief. They made an example of him (to show the government that they were doing a good job), and gave him five years. Lots was there and never opened his mouth. When we tried to say something, he told us to be quiet or we will make matters worse. After the trail, we still believed him, and asked him if we could appeal. He just walked away without saying a word to us.

Yitzchak went to jail. I don't remember what we did or how we survived. They didn't let us see Yitzchak. But I found out that he was kept in a certain building, its outer wall was in a small yard. I wanted to talk to him, so

I sat down on a stone in the yard and started singing. I was singing loud and in Hebrew. I was not really singing, I was asking Yitzchak if he could hear me, and how was he doing. He heard me and sang back that he was all right. I came back every day, and we had singing conversations in Hebrew. Once or twice I was chased away by a guard.

After three weeks they moved him to the large prison. We could see him occasionally but could never talk private with the guard always present. I don't remember anymore what our secrets were about. Maybe he gave us survival tips from jail. Anyway, we wrote our messages on paper and hid them in the food that we brought. They found one of our notes and didn't let us bring food anymore, nor visit him. We wanted to let him know why Mother isn't coming to see him, so we made up this game. I came to the visitors window and told them that I was a girlfriend and brought some flowers for him. I put a card with it saying, "Love from Loldkcha Eitselimovna." It sounds like a Russian name, but in Hebrew it said, "They did not take it from Mother," or in other words, they won't let Mother bring food or come. They let me bring food, as his girlfriend, and we never put notes in there again because they opened everything and checked it out. All this time the war was being fought far from us. I constantly heard complaints. Why aren't the Americans coming to help? We knew little of what was happening on the front, and nothing about Hitler's death camps. We had no radio or newspaper. We were so busy trying to survive, there was no energy left for any intellectual pursuits like reading, for instance. Maybe I am speaking for myself, but this was my experience. I knew that a lot of men were dying, that's all.

The end of the war came suddenly for me, since I had not kept abreast of any news. I was standing in line for bread and the sun was shining, when someone yelled, "The war is over!" People started hugging and kissing each other. Complete strangers crying together. Then suddenly, I felt wet all wet. I ran home and discovered that my monthly period had returned.

Chapter Five—War Is Over

We were hoping for amnesty for Yitzchak, and it came. A couple of weeks later, my brother came home. His head was shaved and he'd gained a little weight. He was not complaining about being treated badly. Our life on the outside was so bad that in comparison, jail did not seem so terrible: no freedom, but less worries. He worked, and they fed him. Yitzchak went to Fergana, which was the capital of that province, and found representatives of a Polish government. All Polish-born citizens were to register there. None of us had any papers to prove any citizenships.

This is where Riva's stubborn efforts at keeping her things no matter what saved us all. Among her things she had a student bus pass with her name and photograph that she used when we lived in Lodz. That card had enough information on it to allow us to register as Polish citizens. At that time we moved out of Vadil and into Fergana. We rented a one-room dwelling. There were four walls and a ceiling that was curving toward the middle and hanging low like part of a huge balloon. There was a wooden structure stuck between the walls that served as a bed. We slept on it like sardines, next to each other. We had no bedding. We slept in our clothes and covered with whatever coats

we had. The Polish representatives were supposed to help us, but they gave us nothing.

One day, Malka went with Yitzchak to see them, and she gave them a piece of her mind. They were so impressed by that little girl's guts, she came home with two blankets that they'd given to her. Yitzchak and I applied for jobs in a weaving factory. He knew how to use a machine because he'd learned it in Lodz when father bought the machines there. He applied as a master weaver and I as an apprentice. It turned out that those were very primitive machines, and Yitzchak didn't really know much about them. They showed me how to use it. Each limb had a function. There were four motions, one for each hand and each foot. I learned it quickly, though. The foreman came in on my second day and saw me working. He told them to give me a machine just like a regular weaver. I liked doing it and was good at it. We worked every day, and on Sunday we were expected to come in and work for free for the government.

That was all right with us, but after a couple of weeks passed we still had received nothing in wages. We asked the people, "When will we get paid?"

They were vague: "When money comes in, we have to wait." When we asked some co-workers how they ate without money, they hinted that we were

supposed to support ourselves by stealing yarn or whatever and selling it on the black market. Every day when we left work there was someone checking everybody out. You had to hide things well and pay bribery. I don't remember if Yitzchak ever tried to steal yarn. I was not good at it and I didn't even attempt it at all. We finally quit that job. We couldn't work and get nothing for our efforts.

I got sick around that time. Pelagra again. My face was swollen, my hair was falling out, my eyelashes and brows just fell off. Fever, malaria. My poor mother had her hands full. All I remember is that when I got better, the doctor told me to drink beer with the yeast in it. My brother walked with me to a booth where he bought me a big mug of beer and I had to drink it right away. I did it every day for a while. It didn't taste too bad, and I thought that it did not affect me. But every day when my brother walked me home from that booth, people would stare at me. Kids who knew me teased me about the way I walked. I guess I was walking kind of tipsy drunk.

The houses in Uzbekistan, or at least where we lived, were not single homes. There were big yards that had a few houses connected together with a wall sheltering them from the street. The houses in our yard belonged to a family of Russians. There were three sisters and their families. Their husbands

were in the war. We rented our house from them. The women all worked, and in the evening they drank vodka, sang, and danced. Their houses each had a couple of rooms and were furnished nicely. They were not runaways, so they had all their things with them. They worked hard, but they had everything they needed and were healthy. The only thing they were missing was male companionship, and they complained openly.

Russia lost a lot of men in the war. There were a lot of women who were glad to take and support any man just for the privilege of living with him. I remember there was a "cousin" who came to visit our landladies occasionally. He would go with one to the shed. They openly talked about what they did, and jealously guarded their turns. One of the sisters had a son named Vania. He was tall, blond, and good-looking. He was very popular with the teenage girls in the neighborhood—that is, girls who went to school and lived a normal life. I never even looked at him. First, he was not Jewish, he was Russian. Second, I didn't consider myself attractive. He decided to like me and could not understand why I spurned his attentions. Probably the reason he even noticed me was because I never looked at him.

One of our landladies owned a big dog, and I was afraid of it. Every time I went in or out of our house, I would carefully survey the ground to see if

the dog was there. He barked at me. I learned to throw something, probably food, out of the yard. He would run to fetch it and meanwhile I passed. I didn't need Vania, I had problems enough just surviving. These Russian landladies didn't like Jews, but they felt sorry for us. They even shared their food with us once or twice.

In the neighboring courtyard lived a Russian lady by the name of Varvara Pietrovna. She was one of the loveliest women that I'd ever known. Tall, full-bodied, beautiful, laughing blue eyes, black hair. She was always smiling. She loved the whole world and tried to mother us all, including my mother. She was forever busy making things. We were always welcome in her house. Mother would complain to her, and she would come up with advice. She made a new dress for me out of grain sacks. She bleached it white, then died it blue. I was helping her, learning how to sew. She cooked meals and invited us to eat. Varvara was especially found of Yitzchak. She even said that she wanted to adopt him. He just thanked her good-naturedly, and made a joke of her suggestion. She did take in a Jewish young man, a runaway who was alone. She kept him, fed him, and clothed him. Rumors had it that they were lovers. He was ugly, dull, red hair, no eyebrows, ugly features, skinny, bent over. I remember wondering if someone like that asked me to marry him,

would I have to accept? The thought made me shudder. But I need not have worried about him—he never even looked at me.

Many young women liked Yitzchak. There was a girl named Nina. She worked in the bread store. She was very pretty, tall, slender, brown eyes and hair, small features. Nina liked Yitzchak a lot. When he came to buy bread, she always gave him a little extra, and always smiled. Yitzchak was not in a position to court a girlfriend. He worried about keeping alive himself, his mother, and three sisters. Romance had to wait, that was really my case, too. About that time Mother received a letter from her half-brother. I don't know how he found us, but he wanted to help. He seemed to have kept in touch with mother's sister and brother. He worried about everyone's whereabouts. His family was hungry and sick and wondered if we could help them.

Mother cried when she wrote back, saying that she was a widow with children who were sick and hungry, too. We couldn't help ourselves, let alone anybody else. This half brother, I can't remember his name, must have written to Uncle Motel, mother's brother, because we received a letter from him. He was in Siberia with his family. The factories were evacuated from Dniepropietrovsk to Siberia, and he went with them. He wrote that times had changed. He no longer got preferential treatment. His only daughter, Julichka,

had no shoes to go to school with. When we visited him in Dniepropietrovsk in 1941, he was very pro-Soviet. He made fun of America, and he said Israel would just be a blood bath if the Zionist dream were ever to be realized. He said that the Jewish future would be in the Soviet Union. When we received his letter in 1945, he was very disappointed with the system. He was hurting because a man with his abilities could not get the necessities for his daughter. He could not help us. His advice was to use our Polish citizenship to get out of the Soviet Union. Once in Poland, he said, our American relatives might send us papers. "Try to go to America," he said. That was the last time we heard from him.

I wondered over the years what happened to him and his family, but I was afraid that if I looked for him, I would cause him trouble. Thoughts of America are what kept Mother going all through the war. She would tell us, "Don't despair, the war will end. We will go home. America will send us help. They always help people after a disaster or a war." She had a lot of stories about America. Before and after the first world war, many friends and relatives went to America. Some could not adjust and came back, but most of them stayed. She had stories and anecdotes about how well people lived in America. Mother told me that Father wanted to go to America. He'd even prepared

himself a wardrobe for traveling, but she refused to let him go because she was afraid to be left alone with small children. She used to say, "I was left alone with small children for four years and I managed. If I would have let him go, he might be alive today." Life and its ironies, you can't win.

Yitzchak went to the Polish embassy and signed us up for the return home. This was only in the talking stages, we had to wait. Meanwhile, he dabbled in the black market a little to keep us all alive. The black market was across the street from where we lived. He bought things and resold them right there. Or he would bring home the things and have Riva and Malka go out and sell them.

The marketplace was full of children selling bread, oil, soap, etc. Malka proved to be a wiz at the market. She left the house in the morning with no money and came back in the evening with money. She would go up to someone who looked tired of sitting and waiting for customers, and offered to buy their whole can of oil for a few rubles cheaper. They could go home, and she would pay them when she sold the oil. Malka was little and skinny. She was fourteen and looked ten years old, but she was very persuasive with a good business head on her shoulders. Once she was selling bread, and a Jewish couple was trying to buy it from her. In Yiddish they told each other to

try and squeeze the price down. They assumed that she was not Jewish. Malka, who understood Yiddish, got mad and told them off. She said, "Look at your nice clothes, and look at me," she said in Russian. "You can afford the full price. Don't be dirty Jews." They started yelling that she is an anti-Semite. This time she answered in Yiddish and said, "I am Jewish, but I am ashamed that you are Jews. You penny pinchers who would squeeze the price off from a child." She refused to sell them the bread. They were the nasty kind of people who cared only for themselves and their money.

Riva had an experience with nasty people. There were some runaways from Poland whose fathers did not die. Some were making a lot of money. Their children went to school. They were either tailors or shoemakers who had the right clientele or speculators—big-time speculators who knew whom to bribe made a lot of money. One such family was looking for a domestic helper. Mother went and saw their house full of all kinds of good foods: fish, meat, bakeries. So she decided to send Riva to be their helper. Mother figured that with so much food, Riva will not go hungry. Well, Riva came and worked a few hours, doing what they told her. Then the wife walked into the kitchen, saw Riva's shape and blonde hair, and got jealous. She threw Riva out of her house without paying her, without giving her anything to eat. She came

hungry and left hungry. Worked for nothing. Those were Jews who cared only for themselves and cheated other Jews when they could, even children.

There was a family from Rokitno in Fergana. Their father was also dead, but the widow and her son and daughter managed well by speculating on the black market. They were doing sort of a wholesale business. Their last name was the same as ours, but we were not related. The boy, I think Sholem was his name, went to school with me, and Sinka, his sister, was in Riva's class. They were shocked when they saw how we lived. Right away they asked us to join them in their business.

I don't remember exactly what they did, but I remember going at night in a truck someplace. The sky was full of stars, and I enjoyed the ride because the fear of being caught added excitement to the venture. Yitzchak and I went with Sholem and Sinka. I think that we picked up cases of soap bars and brought them back to be sold individually. Possibly, they were stolen. Somebody had connections there. Maybe the woman's brother worked there. Riva and Malka sold the soap bars in the market. We were never caught, but this did not last long. I don't remember how it ended.

Sinka was the sweetest, kindest girl, and so was her mother. Yitzchak bought ration cards for bread, sometimes reselling them for a higher price.

Other times he would get the bread and sell it. Nina, who liked him, would let him redeem many ration cards for bread without asking questions. Riva and Malka would sell the bread one loaf at a time, and come back for more. I guess we didn't know whom and how to bribe. There were always agents watching the activities on the black market and having raids. During one such raid a policeman grabbed Riva and her loaf of bread. He yelled at her, scared her out of her wits, and forced her to take him home to us.

Yitzchak had just brought a full sack of fresh breads. The money from selling other breads was in a box. We saw the policeman coming. There was no place to hide the bread. They grabbed the bread. I took the box with the money and tried to hide it in the shed. I didn't know that one of the policemen was following me, I thought I sneaked out unseen. Anyway, he took the money from me. They announced that Mother and Yitzchak are under arrest. I remember thinking, "My God, that leaves me in charge of Riva and Malka." The thought terrified me. I didn't think that I could fill that role.

Meanwhile, they were asking for passports, Mother's and Yitzchak's. I offered to get them. This time they didn't follow me. Quickly I hid Mother's passport and brought mine and Yitzchak's. They wanted Mother's passport. I told them she had none. They could not arrest her without papers. I gave them

mine, told them to take me. I figured if Mother is left with my sisters, she will take care of them. Finally, they had to settle for me and Yitzchak. They took us and our passports.

We walked to the police station, us and two policemen carrying our sack of bread and our money. On the way, Yitzchak told me what to say. He spoke in Hebrew and the policemen did not understand. He told me to say that he had nothing to do with the bread, that I'd met a man whose name I don't know, who gave me the bread to sell. This man was supposed to come back for the money and pay me for my trouble. Yitzchak said that if I took the blame, they would release him. If he were charged and sent to jail, he would not get out this time. He already had his amnesty. But I, being a minor, would probably get off with a scolding. I agreed and rehearsed my speech. Then Yitzchak told me to stay awake at night in jail, until after the interrogation.

In Russia, they wake up people from deep sleep to interrogate them. They figure people in a sleepy state are more likely to tell the truth. That's why I had to stay awake, so I would get my lie straight, and not get scared. It is frightening to be awakened for questioning. Maybe they use this system in other countries, too, but I don't know that. The policeman asked us why we speak in a foreign tongue. They wanted to know what we were saying.

Yitzchak told them that he is comforting me because I am scared. They told us to speak in Russian. But of course we had to continue our conversation until we had our story straight.

One policeman, a big guy over six feet tall and heavy-set, got mad and grabbed a rope that he had in his pocket. He shook the rope at me and said that he was going to beat me with it. This time I got mad. I jumped up and said, "You lay one finger on me and I will kill you!" Now when I think about it, I laugh. How could a skinny little girl kill a big man like that? And he had the gun. But at the time, I was angry and believed that I could hurt him. He obviously believed it because this big man stopped in mid-sentence and gaped at me. Then he put away the rope and said nothing else until we got to the police station.

They put me in the women's jail and Yitzchak in the men's jail. He was released after a day or so. They had to accept my story. They had no proof of anything else. They knew that I was lying because it wasn't even a good story. I was awake at night when a man came to get me for questioning. I thought that I was prepared and not afraid. That man led me through the yard to a different building. Then he opened the door and ushered me into a small

room. There was a table with a chair in front of it and a big comfortable chair behind it.

The man in the big chair seemed pleasant enough. He asked me to sit down. I remember thinking, "No matter what he does to me, I will not change my story." Then I thought, "What if he beats me?" I don't like pain. No one ever beat me or even spanked me. "Well," I thought, "I'll scream and scratch his eyes out if he tries to hurt me." He was polite, asked me questions, and I gave him the same story. Without really realizing it, I must have been terrified because my leg started shaking uncontrollably. I tried to stop it with my hands, but it would not stop. I grabbed my knee with both hands and yelled, "Stop, you dog!" He looked up and said, "What did you call me?" I said, "Not you. My leg is a dog because it won't stop shaking." He said, "Oh." I think that he might have believed my story then because it did not seem possible that a little girl who is so scared would not tell the truth. That is when they released my brother. They kept up the questioning routine three nights in a row, then they stopped.

When they first took me to the jail cell, I remember wondering, "Who will be there? Terrible criminals? Thieves? Murderesses?" I remembered a story that my father told us when he came out of jail. Father was well read,

and his cell-mates were mostly illiterate. They were mostly big men and he was of slight build. He did not let on that he was afraid of them, just asked them if they liked stories. Father started telling them stories from books that he'd read. They liked the stories so much that they befriended him and looked out for him. So, I decided to try the same. I don't remember the exact amount of women in that cell, at least eight or nine. Most of them were teenagers like myself, girls of all shapes and sizes.

I looked around the room. It was an empty room, cement walls and floor. One window near the ceiling, no rugs, no curtains, no beds, no anything. Everyone slept on the floor in their own clothes, covering with their own coat. I remember thinking it is good that I have a coat. I hadn't had a coat for a long time. With the money earned on the black market, Mother bought me a second-hand coat. But it was a lovely coat, like new, beige with brown checks and a fur collar. I had gotten the coat only a few days before being arrested.

The man who brought me to this cell left. No sooner had he left, then the girls started in on me. Somehow they knew that I am Jewish and that I was arrested with a whole sack of bread and money. These lower-class Russians were very patriotic in their own way. To them, dealing in the black market was worse than stealing. It was a sin against the motherland. They called me

"dirty Jewess," "traitor," "speculant." They yelled, "Why didn't you bring the bread in here? We are hungry." I looked at them and said that the police took the bread away from me, and that I have nothing.

Then I asked them if they like stories. They sneered and said, "You little runt. What can you tell us that we don't already know?" Most of the girls were a little bigger than me, and I am sure they had more experience, too. I said, "Let's sit down on the floor." They did so grudgingly. All those trashy novels that my brother did not want me to read back home came in handy. I used to have a good memory, and remembered a lot of the books in detail. I started telling them one of my favorites, with great detail and emotion. It is funny—today I don't remember even the titles of those books, and none of the contents of the stories. Well, then the girls liked my stories. They sat listening, entertained, tears coming down their cheeks. They cried exactly the way I cried when I first read those tearjerkers, when my mother yelled at Yitzchak for letting me read sad books.

The format and content of the books was always the same: love, all the roadblocks and troubles in its path, and love always triumphantly wins in the end. Well, my cell-mates were young girls like me, after all. When I finished the story, they asked me if I knew more. I said yes, and they were glad. They

shook hands with me and told me that we were friends. It is very boring sitting all day in the cell with nothing to do, and they were glad to have me entertain them.

I don't remember what they fed us, probably soup twice a day. A guard marched us double-file to the bathroom. At noon he would take us in the courtyard, and we had to march in a circle two by two. No talking allowed. That was our half-hour of mandatory exercise. The guard was a young man. To me he looked like a boy. He tried to look tough, yelled and threatened us. But somehow I was never afraid of him. I thought that he was cocky but insecure. Whenever he yelled, I put a smile on my face and stared back at him. He got red in the face and looked daggers at me. I knew that he could not do anything to me, because I did not break any rules. I wanted to let him know that I was not afraid of him.

I just remembered why that guard assumed that I was a troublemaker: When they first arrested me, they told me that all the cells were full and they put me in a solitairy. I was put in a small room, four by six, cement walls and floor. There was a very tall ceiling and a little window in it. I can remember the empty room with a ray of sun coming in through the ceiling window. They kept me there for 48 hours. They fed me a piece of bread and a glass of water

once a day. I don't remember being taken even to the bathroom. I just sat there thinking. They said that I might get ten years. I figured, "I am seventeen, plus ten years of a jail sentence would be 27, and that would make me an old maid. No one will marry me, and I will never have children."

I did not feel sorry for myself. God's will is God's will. As a matter of fact, I was glad that it was me sitting in jail rather than any of the others in my family. It was ironic that I should be called a speculant. When it came to buying and selling, haggling over prices, I was just a dummy. Mother, Yitzchak, Malka, even Riva knew how to haggle over prices. I would just get tears in my eyes and hide. I never sold anything on the black market. Once or twice I watched my sisters from a distance. So I figured, being the least useful of all, it might as well be me in jail.

I remember asking someone, maybe the interrogator, why they gave me only bread and water, since I am not really in solitary. He said, "We don't change the rules for anyone. When in solitary, that's all you get, even though you did not break any rules and are there because the cells are too full." They moved some women to another prison, and I joined the cell with the girls. That is why they knew everything about me, because I had been in prison for two days. The same guard who brought my bread and water in solitary was

the one who marched us around from the cell. He knew that I was in solitary, and assumed that I was being punished for breaking some prison rules.

To me, the situation was unreal, almost funny. Here is a good little girl who had never done anything bad, being in jail with all kinds of people. And this guard assumes that I am the worst of all. I knew that he was also attracted to me, and my mocking him really infuriated him. Some girls wrote their names and messages in the bathroom. That was forbidden. The messages were obscene and meant for the men prisoners. One day this guard came to our cell door carrying a broom, and while looking at me, shook the broom and yelled, "All right, Susan, this time you'll get it, follow me." My name is not Susan and there was no one by that name in our cell. So no one got up to follow him.

"What is your name?" he yelled. I said, "Ania." "Who is Susan?" "We don't know." He looked so surprised. It seemed that somebody named Susan wrote all over the bathroom walls. After a few such scenes, he stopped picking on me, realizing that I am not really trouble.

All the young women in my cell, including me, were there awaiting trial. I was surprised to find out that in spite of the tough demeanor, most of them did not commit terrible crimes. Some were in for stealing. But in wartime Russia, a lot of people were stealing to survive. So that was no crime

in my book. Some girls were in jail because they were late for work. I couldn't believe that. One girl said that she only came ten minutes late to her factory job, but the foreman made an example of her and had her arrested. She was only sixteen years old. Most of the time the girls talked about boys and dreamt of love. Maybe after receiving a sentence, the prisoners were given jobs, but we had nothing to do. We spent a lot of time delousing.

Ever since early childhood, we always had to worry about lice. I don't know if it was the climate or the hygiene, or both. Some children would be sent home from school because they had lice. Teachers used to conduct periodical checks. My mother would say proudly, "My children were never sent home, not even once." Every week after washing our hair, she put some kerosene on our hair and combed them with an extremely fine tooth comb especially made to get out nits—lice eggs. I remember hating the ritual, but our hair was always shiny and clean. Because other children in our school had lice, Mother had to be always on guard for us not to get some and bring the lice home. When we left home, it was not so easy to keep clean. I remember when we were in the village in the Kafcaauz mountains, weekend afternoons were spent searching each other's hair for lice. That is, me and my girlfriends did that. We still had no lice. So they made a motion with their fingers

pretending to kill lice. It was very pleasing to the scalp. It felt like a scalp massage. I loved it. Well, there was no TV then.

The jail was crawling with lice. We slept and lived in the same clothes. Any time of day some girl would take off her blouse and look through all the seams to kill the lice that were crawling there by the dozens. I remember there were so many lice, I couldn't kill them all. I just shook my clothes and they were falling off to the floor.

One thing a lot of Russians have in common—they may be kind, even gullible, but they are anti-Semites. These girls in my cell who cried over the troubles of some imaginary people in my stories, turned vicious when they brought in a Jewish woman. She was old, gray-haired, skinny, and wrinkled. She was also arrested for selling something on the black market. Somebody's old grandma trying to keep herself or some loved ones alive. It was Friday night when they brought her in. We hadn't lighted Shabbat candles since we left home. We didn't even have any. This elderly lady was a runaway from Poland, and obviously pious. She tried to light a candle that she brought with her. She covered her head and said the blessing, when the girls realized she was Jewish. They grabbed the candle and the scarf from her head.

I remember looking in shock and wondering what I should do. They liked me and forgot that I am Jewish. All the good friends that I made in Russia, that liked me, always chose to forget that I am Jewish. To them being Jewish was a sin they could not forgive. Only Varvara Pietrovna loved us indiscriminately. Then I decided that if they didn't hurt her, I would say nothing. They looked so big and wild when they ganged up on the Jewish woman that I was afraid to call attention to myself. Well, they didn't hurt her, they just took her food away from her and ate it. Someone had brought the woman something cooked in a dish and the girls grabbed it and ate it.

Just then my mother brought me some food, and one girl who was new tried to grab it from me. But the other girls stepped in and said that my food is off bounds because I am a friend and tell interesting stories. When the girls weren't watching, I told that woman that I am Jewish also and gave her some of my food. She was so relieved to have someone to talk to her. She looked terrified out of her wits. I was in that jail three weeks. While I was in jail, my mother came every other day to bring me something to eat. She looked crushed. I felt sorry for her. She went all over, raised heaven and earth. I, a nice Jewish girl, only seventeen years old, is rotting in jail.

Mother managed to find somebody who had influence. He was a shoemaker, a runaway from Poland who was doing well. He was making shoes for a lot of big shots in Fergana. He knew the man in charge of the prison. The Jewish shoemaker promised this big shot a new pair of expensive leather boots if he released me. He even donated the leather besides the work. The boots were worth a fortune then, and mother had no money. I knew nothing about this. In the middle of one afternoon, a man came to get me to go to the main building. I didn't know if my trial was going to take place, or if they were going to interrogate me once more. A tall, nervous man fidgeted with some papers when I entered the room. He didn't ask me to sit down. He was standing, too. Without looking at me, he said, "Is it true that you are only sixteen years old, and that if I release you from here, you will go straight to school?"

I was shocked but quickly replied, "Sure, I will go straight to school."

"And you will never go near that black market again?"

"Never."

"Then you are free to go home now." I hustled out of there. My mother was waiting on the street. We quickly went home.

We didn't say a word all the way home. We didn't dare talk, for fear of someone overhearing us and sending me back to jail. We did that a lot in Russia, always looking over our shoulder, always afraid that someone was spying on us. It did not take much to put someone in jail. If a neighbor went to the police and said his neighbor was criticizing the government, they would arrest his neighbor. One never complained to a stranger about being hungry, for fear of being arrested. After 36 years of living in the States, I still catch myself sometimes looking over my shoulder. Some people think that we Holocaust survivors are paranoid a lot. Well, after living in fear for years while children, extreme caution is a normal reflex to us.

As soon as the door closed behind us in our own house, Mother started crying. Yitzchak, Malka, Riva, and Mother all started telling me how hard Mother worked to get me out. This was not the first time that my mother saved me. She saved my life many times, from grave illness, hunger, despair. All through the bad times she kept my spirits up with stories, anecdotes, and promises of a good future. She was my prophet, who promised that God would redeem us, and he did. I don't remember much else happening in Fergana.

Chapter Six—Leaving Uzbekistan

Yitzchak haunted the offices of the Polish Embassy. Finally, they told him that we were on the list to go back to Poland. People got ready for the trip. Some items bought cheap in Uzbekistan were worth many times more in Poland. I don't remember what, I know that we bought some sacks of it, too. In my memory it seems like something soft white, and something black—maybe cotton and raisins. I don't know where we got the money. We were selling our belongings. I thought that we had nothing, but in five years, even a stone gathers moss. I don't recall if we managed to bring those sacks into Poland, or if they were confiscated at the border. I should remember the date we left Uzbekistan, as I remembered the date we came, but I only remember that it was spring.

A whole lot of people were returning home. In our train car were some people we knew: a freckle-faced, red-haired girl named Batia, and one named Sala. Riva knew them from the black market and was friends with them. Thinking about Batia reminded me of an incident with her. Batia knew some boy that she liked, I don't recall his name. One day Riva introduced me to Batia, and that boy happened to be there, too. He later told Batia that if I would come to the movies with them, he would pay for all four of us. I wasn't

interested in him. He seemed like a kid, short and young. But Riva begged me to do it for Batia because she liked him and he'd never asked her out. Well, I went with them. I don't remember what we saw. I remember him buying peanuts for all of us and me feeling stupid for being there, three big girls with this little boy who was trying to play grown-up.

Anyway, Sala and Batia were in our car. Sala was married and pregnant. She was nineteen years old and not in love with her husband. Her husband had an older sister, very plain and married to a younger, good-looking man. This young man also had a beautiful voice. He made it no secret that he married his wife to avoid hunger, because her family had money. Money is probably the reason that Sala married her husband. Well, Sala was having an affair with her brother-in-law. Sala confided in Riva and me, and we were stupid enough to help her. We were young and believed in love. Now I see it as both of them using their spouses and cheating on them. But then I sympathized with them, and carried messages for them. When the train stopped, they were off rendezvousing someplace, and we warned them if their spouses appeared. It was easy to like the two lovers. They were very cute with outgoing, warm personalities. Their spouses, both brother and sister, were unpleasant-looking, severe, and so old and serious-acting. I didn't like them.

This man with the good voice would sing for us every evening. The trip home was very pleasant. It took a few weeks. We slept on our sacks. The day we spent looking at passing scenery. There were something like little bridges connecting the cars of the train. Just a shaking bridge with a little rail, no walls, no roof. We spent most days on those bridges, our hair blowing in the wind, watching the countryside wake up with spring, and singing Hebrew, Yiddish, and Russian songs. Sometimes the train stopped, and we took little walks. In the evening we would gather by the open door at the car, and the man with the good voice would sing for us. He sang Yiddish songs and with so much feeling. In a different time and different place, he could have been a great singer. I remember listening to his voice while looking at the darkening woods and fields that were slowly passing by, wondering what the future will bring. I realized very soon that I was being a fool for helping that cheating couple.

I admired the singer's voice and always begged him to sing more. I assumed that he was in love with Sala, and felt sorry for him because he was trapped in a loveless marriage. When we asked him to sing more he usually obliged us and sang. One night, as the dark descended on us, and we were still up listening to his songs, he made a pass at me. I was so shocked, I was

speechless. My whole theory of pure love went out the window. Instead, my mother's stories of men and their loveless passions came to my mind and mocked me. I didn't say a word, just moved away and went to my seat. I never again helped them or anyone ever to cheat on their spouse. After that, when he sang I listened from afar, didn't come close again.

It felt good to be young, to be going home. I was gull of hope. It is funny—I don't remember engaging in reading while in Uzbekistan, but I remember that when we got to the Russian border, the train was stopped. Two mean wearing brown uniforms came on board and checked our belongings. I don't remember what else they confiscated, but they took all my Russian books. I remember asking them why I couldn't keep my books, and they said that Russian books belong in Russia. I was left with a sense of loss equal in kind to the one I felt when my Hebrew books of the prophets were taken from me. They would not let me keep even one book. Now, I am surprised to realize that I had books. Someone said then that the men probably stole the books for themselves.

We didn't get home. In other words, we never went back to Rokitno. It was our intention to go home, live in our house and get back our furniture. Well, as the train crossed the border and rambled on into Poland, we filled

with anticipation, talking and thinking of home. The train made many stops. There were people at those stops who came to greet the train. They talked to us. Someone from our hometown told Yitzchak that our brother Reuven was killed in the fight for Stalingrad. Someone actually saw him there, and saw him hit. Another told us that Rokitno is all bombed out. He said, "Where your house was, there is now a hole in the ground." They said that there were no Jews left in Rokitno. If anyone came to Rokitno they lived in cellars, but most of all, it was dangerous for Jews to be wandering on their own through postwar Poland, because the anti-Semitism was strong. People had been known to be attacked by hooligans and beaten badly or killed.

The young people who visited the trains advised us to get off the train and go to live in their kibbutz. Apparently the Jews who were trying to return home found that they had no more homes. Some were returning from Russia like we were, some came out of hiding in cellars, others were with the partisans, and some came back from the death camps. Having no home to go to, they organized. They joined one of many Jewish organizations, lived in a communal setting, and hoped to eventually go to Israel (Palestine) to live. There was no official Jewish state then.

It was a great shock to us to realize what had happened in Poland. We had no knowledge of the death camps. We assumed that the people who stayed behind went through some rough times like ourselves or even worse. But the concept that our *shtetl* Rokitno was wiped out, everyone killed, was hard to accept. Someone told us that the Nazis had rounded up all the Jews in town, made them dig a common grave, and shot them all. After the war, when the grave was opened, right on top was that young girl with copper braids—my best friend Rivka. I grieve for Rivka even to this day. She was full of life and love, she had so many plans for the future. She was full of goodness, and she isn't anymore. She never fell in love, never married, nor had children, nor finished school or worked as a teacher.

Well, when the train came into Bytom, we decided to get off and enter a kibbutz, Hashomer Hatzair, there. There were a few people from Rokitno in that kibbutz. Those were people who stayed behind, hid in the woods, and fought with the partisans. These were young men who were boys when the war started. They grew up in the woods and managed to survive the war there. In the kibbutz also was Simka and her brother. Simka came to the train and urged us to join her kibbutz. She and her family helped us in Russia. Simka had a boyfriend in the kibbutz named Motele, and she was crazy about him.

She knew that I liked blond boys with curly hair and straight shoulders, so she "prepared" a boyfriend for me, Aron was his name. Aron was gorgeous and very nice, and we liked each other. He was very proud of me because I could speak Hebrew and I was a nice girl with a nice family. From the camps, the woods, and the partisans, many young men came out alive, but very few girls. Consequently there were many more boys than girls among the survivors. Some of the girls who survived were saved by Polish farmers who lived with them. And the camp-surviving girls, they said all sorts of things. As unfair as that was, most of the boys wanted "a nice girl" to marry. I remember, I once argued with a boy—his name was Joseph, and he liked a girl name Lubka. He told me that he liked her, but could not overlook her past. He wanted me to be his girlfriend because I was a nice girl. I was not attracted to him, and I liked Lubka. I got angry with him, and told him how unfair he was. Lubka was left alone when nine years old. A farmer saved her life and lived with her. Now she was seventeen, and nobody had the right to blame her for how she survived. She was much too young to be held responsible for what happened to her. Eventually Joseph married Lubka, and I am sure that she made him a good wife. She was cute, too.

Quite often though, I felt sorry for the boys. There were so few girls. Sometimes I wished that there would be ten of me, so nine more boys would have a girlfriend. The kibbutz was for young adults only. My mother had to rent a room in town. Simka's mother recommended the place where she stayed, and mom rented a room there. Riva and Malka entered a kinder-kibbutz (a kibbutz for children). Yitzchak and I entered a kibbutz, Hashomer Hatzair in Bytom. I always thought that the name of the kibbutz was "Kibbutz Artsie," but now I realize that this is the name of the Hashomer Hatzair kibbutzim.

We stayed there the summer of 1946. Mother had a nice room and nice company. Aron and I visited her often. She would cook something and treat us. Riva and Malka were unhappy in the children's kibbutz, but I didn't know it then. They were too young when the war started and scarred from all that had happened to us. They never complained, at least not to me, and I never realized how much they were hurting. Yitzchak could have had any girl that he wanted, because he was very good-looking, and his reputation of being intelligent, scholarly, and very nice followed him from Rokitno wherever he went. Even with the shortage of girls for most boys, some of the best girls fought over my brother.

He chose not to have a girlfriend at that time. He felt responsible for Mother and us three girls, so he didn't think that he should get serious with any girl until he settled us somewhere permanently. It never occurred to him to just have some fun. It was either serious or nothing, that is how he was raised, responsible for his actions. Now I think that a person can be too responsible, but back then I felt the same as he did.

Simka was devoted friend, and we joined with Chaiele. The three of us were close—we each had a boyfriend, and we all went out together. Going out meant going to the park or for a walk. None of us had money for real dating. Simka was going with Motele, they were both brown-eyed, brown-haired with dark complexions and warm hearts. Both were probably the best-liked couple in the kibbutz. Chaiele and her boyfriend (I forgot his name) both looked like models. They also had the brown eyes and brown hair, but their skin was light, their features were especially carved, with teeth like rows of pearls. The war didn't seem to have stunted their growth physically or emotionally. They were both only seventeen, the youngest couple in our kibbutz, but both were sophisticated-looking and -acting. I was older than them, nineteen, but I felt younger, I felt like the war didn't age me. I was emotionally still fourteen.

Chaiele sort of manipulated me, teaching me how to act and not be so naïve. Aron my boyfriend was a lot like me, and they called us in the kibbutz "the couple with the two pairs of blue eyes." (It sounded better in Polish, it suffers in translation.) Anyway, I suppose that our nickname referred to our innocence, and we were. We never did anything beside hold hands, even though Aron asked me to marry him. I wasn't ready for marriage, and I wasn't yet in love.

I sensed that love needed more emotion than friendship. I think that we were really good friends, all six of us. Once when we were in the park, the boys started doing headstands to impress us girls. Chaiele thought that this was too juvenile, so she quietly led us away from the park. The boys were busy performing their stunts and didn't notice us leaving. We went back to the kibbutz. When the boys came back, they were angry and would not speak to us. Simka and Chaiele made up with their boyfriends, but I was too proud and too innocent for games. I remember both girls took Aron for a walk and convinced him to apologize to me, which he did.

In the kibbutz, everyone had to share in the cleaning and laundry. There wasn't much else to do, and I don't remember what, if anything, the boys did. I also don't remember doing cleaning, but laundry I did a lot. They had an

honors system for work. If a girl said that she was menstruating, she was allowed to stay in bed a few days, and did not have to do any work. Well, most of the girls were older, and they claimed to be menstruating all the time, because they didn't want to do the work. My friends and I were the youngest girls in the kibbutz. We never claimed disability, even when we had our period. I would have been embarrassed to tell everyone when I had the period, so would Simka. Chaiele found ways to get out of work.

I remember one day my mother came to visit me at the kibbutz and found me bending over a bathtub full of laundry, rubbing away at some clothes. (We hadn't heard of washing machines then). She said that never in her wildest dreams did she imagine me working so hard. Mother always thought of me as the princess type, and back home she never let me do any hard work. She did it herself if there was no help.

In the kibbutz, the girls slept in one big dormitory, and the boys in another. We ate in a big dining room. Every night, meetings were held. We participated in the political scene in Poland. Our leaders watched carefully what was happening and acted when necessary. For instance, I remember when they sent us out with pamphlets to knock on doors and distribute them. I am sorry to say that I was not political at that stage in my life—politics bored

me, and I didn't try very hard to understand why we were doing what we were doing. Naturally, I don't remember what it was that we were pushing. I remember that we had leaflets that said; "Vote three times yes" (*trzy razy tak*). The yes vote was supposed to be good for the Jewish causes. All the kibbutzim participated.

There were many kibbutzim in Bytom from different Zionist Organizations. We the representatives of each kibbutz met in a big hall. (I didn't ask to represent my kibbutz, but when they asked me to go I didn't say no, and so I went). There, they paired me off with a very cute guy. There was instant liking between us. He was an honorable guy and told me right away that he was married. He looked like a teenager, but he was twenty-four years old. I don't recall his name or the issues we were voting for. They gave us a stack of leaflets, and we were taught how and what to say when we knocked on the doors of the Poles. We spent the whole day going from door to door.

I remember having a wonderful time, because my partner, besides being terribly cute, was also very intelligent, considerate, charming, and very funny. I never saw him again after we parted that day. I was very childish then, more interested in cute boys than in issues and goals. Somehow nobody guessed that—because I spoke Hebrew and was kind of serious and quiet, they

assumed that I was smart. During the lengthy meetings I would be thinking of something else, to escape boredom. When they asked for a vote I always voted with the madrichim (the guides), figuring that they knew what was best for us.

One day when I was visiting my mother, Meito Tchetchik showed up there, the first boy that I had a crush on in Rokitno. I used to think a lot about him during the war and wondered if I would ever see him again. Well, when I saw him then, he was just a short boy acting childish. He said that he was twenty-five years old, and I couldn't figure out how he got so much older than me. He was a member in a kibbutz that was not Hashomer Hatzair, and he asked if any of us wanted to join his kibbutz.

At first I was disappointed that he went with a different organization. He was a madrich for young children in the Shomer in Rokitno, and he was a very ardent and idealistic follower of the ideals of Hashomer. Secondly, I found out that Dina Negel was in his kibbutz. She was the girl that he liked originally, and he went with her in Rokitno. They were not going together now, but I figured that he must be carrying a torch for her and that was why he was in her kibbutz. The chemistry that I felt for him as a child was gone. I had also

developed pride and figured if he was interested, let him come to my kibbutz. I acted very indifferent to him.

Now I wish that I would have been friendlier with a lot of people. My false, stupid pride made me lose contact with a lot of people who I wish I knew where they are and how they are doing. The fact that the war interrupted my education gave me a huge inferiority complex. I felt like my future was taken away from me. I remember when I was a child, my mother had a saying: Don't be too proud, because pride is like garbage, free, and anyone can get a heap of it: "*Zai nisht shtolz shtoltz iz afn mist, und ver es vil ken es nemen omezist.*" Basically meaning that false pride is worth nothing.

Out of a feeling of inferiority, I managed to pick up this false pride, in spite of my mother's warnings. One day Meito invited me to visit his older sister, who had an apartment in town. When we came, she was in the midst of setting her hair. She had a nice apartment with furniture, clothes, knickknacks. I looked around and felt like a nobody because I had nothing at all, neither did my mother. I also didn't know what to do with my hair. My teenage years I spent working or being sick, mainly just trying to survive. Consequently I didn't know anything about makeup or how to fix myself up. I felt plain and poor and very ignorant. I stayed only five minutes, and excused myself on

some pretense. Now I realize how silly and childish that was, but then I was hurting a lot. I snubbed Meito, making him think I was seriously interested in Aron so he would not try to pursue me. Actually I figured that I was a nobody and not good enough for him. My feelings were all jumbled.

For a long time I have felt regrets that I didn't go with my kibbutz to Israel, but there were many factors that influenced me to become somewhat disenchanted with my kibbutz. One of them was a girl named Shoshana, who was the madricha (leader) of my kibbutz. She was twenty years old and very cute. She ruled the kibbutz as if she were Katherine the Great. She must have been good at whatever she was doing, because she had most of the boys under her spell. She also had a boyfriend—his name was Yaacov, and he was the madrich of the children's kibbutz where my sisters were. He was very handsome, smart, educated, and a true idealist. We all felt that Shoshana didn't deserve a wonderful man like that, but that was his business.

When my brother came to the kibbutz, Shoshana came after him, but he did not respond. My brother (like me) didn't understand flirting and game-playing. He did not particularly like Shoshana, and he wasn't ready for a serious relationship with anyone. She reciprocated by being mean to us. When the kibbutz received some clothes from America, she gave us something that

we couldn't wear. The dress she gave me was pink and shiny and big enough for a midget, I threw it away. The money that she was given to feed us, she spent on entertaining the boys, while feeding us with old bread and cooked cereals. She would invite all the boys to go out with her on the town. Not one girl was asked to come. The reason I broke up with Aaron was because when he was invited to go out with Shoshana and the boys, he did not refuse.

He told me that all the boys were going and he couldn't be the only one not going, because the boys would laugh at him if he refused to come with them. So, I stayed in the kibbutz with the girls and decided that boyfriends like that I do not need.

Bytom, the city, was a part of Poland now. Before the war it was part of Germany. I don't remember exactly why we came to Bytom, unless Simka wrote to us in Uzbekistan and told us that there were some people from Rokitno there, and that we should join them. When we arrived, we found quite a few people from my hometown. I was surprised to find that some boys who went to school with me and were in my classes had completely forgotten their Hebrew. They use to read and write in Hebrew and spoke it in class. Now, they remembered nothing. So, they made me a Hebrew teacher, and I was teaching it to my former classmates plus others.

Generally this was a good time for me. It was easy for me to shake off the war memories with its hunger, illness, and fears. I had a chip on my shoulder, yes, but I also held high hopes for the future. First on my list was a great love, and I was waiting for that. My siblings may have had a harder time adjusting. I am sorry now that I was not aware of it. I was so childish myself, I really don't think that I would have known what to do for them. Regrets—if I had to live my life over again, I probably would not have made the same mistakes.

We stayed in Bytom a few months, and then came the orders for our kibbutz to move on. The idea was to get closer to Israel (Palestine) little by little. They packed us all up and put us on a train. Our whole family came, of course, Mother and little sisters. My memory is not clear on where we went, except that we were moving into an English Zone. At that time Germany and Italy (the defeated forces) were divided among the allies into zones: The Russian Zone, English Zone, American Zone. The English Zone had a reputation of being the worst of all.

The food that they were giving us was worse, and freedom of movement was more restricted. It seems odd now, but the Russian Zone looked more favorably on us. They were hoping that we would go to Israel to embrace

communism, therefore they were very friendly and helpful to us. But I don't remember actually living in the Russian Zone. We got out of Russia and were careful not to get trapped by them. I remember being on a train that was taking us someplace in the English Zone.

We didn't just get on the train. One night, big canvas-covered trucks came to our kibbutz, told us to pack quickly and get on the trucks. We must have had some previous knowledge about being moved, because I don't recall having been separated from my mother and my little sisters. So, we must have all come together. All I remember is that we snuck out in the dark of the night, crossed the border to Austria, and were put on a train. Before we went on that train, we camped someplace for a few days. I don't remember the name of the place or where it was exactly, but other kibbutzim were there. We went to visit each other, we danced together, got to know many new people. I remember one night, all the young people got together someplace in a huge hall. We were dancing "Julala." People stand in a circle, two by two, one in front of the other. One person was in the middle of the circle. The person in the middle picks a partner from the circle and dances with him or her. The person whose partner was taken goes and chooses another partner to dance with, and that goes on until the dance is over.

That night the lights weren't working, and we could hardly see our partners. But that did not stop us—we danced and had fun until three o'clock in the morning. That's when we returned to our kibbutz to sleep. Since it was dark and I could not see who I was dancing with, when it came my turn to pick, I picked once someone right next to me. The second time I went to the far right, and the third time I went to the far left. I wanted to pick different people because it is more fun to get to know more people. The funny thing that happened was that I picked the same guy, three times in a row, from different places in the circle. I couldn't see him, but when we danced, we talked and I found out that he is the same person. His name was Zvy. I did tell him that I didn't mean to pick him, but he said that the fates must have planned it that way so we could meet. He didn't know what I looked like, either, only that my name is Chana and that I was from the Bytom kibbutz.

So, the next morning he came to our kibbutz and asked for Chana. He told me later, that when I came out, he was happy to find out that I was very pretty. I didn't think that he was handsome, but he was very intelligent and we had many stimulating conversations. Zvy got to know my brother and found out that he was unhappy about going with the kibbutz to the English Zone. Many of the young people didn't want to go there. I remember Chaiele's

parents took her out and kept her with them. Simka and her family went someplace else. Shoshana the madricha went to her boyfriend's kibbutz. It seemed that the only people who came on the train were the young people who had nobody and no connections anywhere. Anyway, we were on that train, and so was Aaron. He was teasing me that Zvy is my new boyfriend, and I was denying it.

Before the train pulled out, my brother asked me to talk to him privately. We went for a little walk, and Yitzchak told me that we can stay there with Zvy's kibbutz if I agreed to be his girlfriend. I saw that my brother really wanted me to say yes, so I did. I did not dislike Zvy, and my family meant everything to me. If Yitzchak was so afraid of the English Zone, so be it.

Zvy took us off the train and brought us to his kibbutz—the Petrolesier kibbutz—his girlfriend and her family. At that time, if he would have demanded that I marry him, I would have for the family. But he didn't—all he wanted was to have a family. Now, when I look back, I wonder if he ever loved me. He said many times that he loved me, but I think that he loved my family more. He would have made a good son for my mother. They were very protective of each other. I don't think that he ever felt passion for me, and he

never pushed for marriage. He liked telling everyone that I was his girlfriend. The more I got to know him, the less I liked him.

He was somewhat stereotypically Jewish-looking: bent shoulders, kinky curly black hair, huge eyes with enormous whites. He laughed funny, walked funny. Even though he was tall, he was always bent over. I was a little bit ashamed of his looks, because I always liked handsome boys. He was extremely frugal, which embarrassed me also. He collected other people's old sweaters, and wanted me to unravel them and make sweaters for him. He collected other people's old shoes, sometimes just one shoe, that he thought would come in handy. I didn't like being his girlfriend; I thought that he was ugly. I liked a man who walked tall and straight, handsome and preferably blond and blue-eyed. I liked a man who looked good while dancing ballroom dancing. Zvy could only dance Jewish dances, and he danced with the zeal of a yeshiva boy.

He was well versed in a few languages, including Hebrew, and I enjoyed our conversations. Funny—when I think about it now, I realize that I never found out anything about his past, or his family. I don't even recall his last name, and he was with us for a whole year. Our conversations were mostly about ideas, abstracts, writers, books, and dreams. Maybe if I had

loved him, I would have tried to learn something about him. I don't even know where he was from and how he survived the war. If I saw him now, I would ask him all these questions, simply because he was a part of my life and I would like to know.

Zvy was very devoted to his kibbutz. The young people called him father of the kibbutz because he often argued with people he thought were not idealistic enough. He was twenty-one then and I was nineteen. I respected his idealism and admired him for it. I didn't like the members of that kibbutz too much. Most of them were very promiscuous. There was a girls' dormitory and a boys' dormitory—many of the girls' beds contained boys in them. I hated the thought of them having slept there, even though I slept peacefully and never heard anything. When I think about it now I am more understanding. These young people were each, all alone in the world. They went through hell and survived, but their worlds were completely destroyed. Chastity was the last thing on their minds. They needed each other's bodies to survive each nightmarish night. These are the kids who went to Israel and fought for it. Many even gave their own lives so we all could have a country.

People always considered me smart, even when I felt very childish. This kibbutz sent me for training to be a madricha. I remember many boring

seminars, and my mind wondering, not listening. I didn't really want to learn about the history of the Shomer. I felt guilty for being shallow. Now I am beginning to forgive myself. I realize that the war made an adult out of a little girl. I looked and talked like an adult, but I hadn't finished growing inside. The little girl had to mature, and that took many years. Needless to say, I was never a madricha. A couple of months went by, and this kibbutz was ordered to move on.

I don't remember all the details, except that they didn't want my mother with them because she had an enlarged heart. They wanted just the young people. So, we stayed behind. We were in a displaced people's camp, or D.P. Camp, as they called them. We were someplace in Austria. Zvy refused to go on with his kibbutz and stayed behind with us. I remember how shocked I was when he announced that he was not going on with his kibbutz. My whole respect for him hinged on the fact that he was a dedicated Shomer and a dedicated kibbutz man. He said that he loved me and that is why, he had to stay with us. In my young idealistic mind, ideals were more important then relationships. To my thinking, no girl was worth giving up one's dreams for, and I lost my respect for Zvy.

Now I understand that he needed a family even more than ideals. Too bad that my mother couldn't adopt him, because he had no way of becoming a member or our family unless he married into it. Now I understand enough to have compassion for him. Ideals are fine, but everyone needs a place to belong to. Zvy was treated like a member of our family, and he didn't want to give that up. But then, I was very annoyed. I guess that I was hoping that he would leave with the kibbutz and set me free of our relationship. He didn't really demand much from me, but I wanted to be free to meet and like other young men.

My mother thought that because he was an orphan, it was her responsibility to protect him like a son. She even protected him from me. I didn't like housework, didn't know how to cook. To be perfectly honest, Mother was not a good teacher of these skills. If I ever tried to help her, she yelled at me that I was clumsy and incapable. She didn't have the patience to teach me, nor the opportunity. Usually after being yelled at I got insulted and left without finishing whatever it was that I tried to help with. I did not have natural talents for being a homemaker. My hands were not used to these chores, and they were clumsy. Many years later, mother expressed surprise at my being such a clean and capable homemaker.

At the time however, she figured that I was so lazy and incapable that she could not in good conscience let any nice Jewish orphan boy marry me. So, she told Zvy that since he had no parents, it was her duty to tell him that I am lazy and unwilling to learn or do housework. What she didn't realize was that very few girls possessed these skills even in good times, but we went through a war—none of us had homes to practice in. Eventually we all learned when we had homes of our own. Mother felt guilty and responsible for raising such a nothing. Luckily I did not love Zvy, or I would have hated her for doing that. As it was, it didn't bother me. I was used to my mother reciting all my faults to anybody who would listen and saying that nobody would ever want to marry me.

Now I realize that she must have thought that I spited her on purpose and snubbed her. Maybe she just said those things in anger, not meaning it. But then I believed her about being inferior, I guess in a way I shall have an inferiority complex all my life, somewhat. I didn't believe her about nobody wanting me. First of all, all my life, boys and men seemed to like me a lot. Second, I had this fantasy about a handsome young man with all the positive qualities I did not possess who would fall in love with me, just because of our matching chemistry. He would teach me how to be better and elevate me to

his level. But, first of all he would love me and try to please me. Zvy was definitely not it. He always sided with Mother against me.

Maybe that was the mature thing to do, but I needed someone to care about my feelings. I acted like a rebellious teenager, which I was, emotionally.

We were in Austria now, and I don't remember much of the place. We lived privately in the D.P. Camp, as a family without a kibbutz. Many of the camps were on the sites of former army camps. There were huge rooms, divided into cubicles by some wires. Each cubicle contained a big bed, and blankets were hung on the wires to make it a separate little room. We had a blanket-walled little room with a few beds in there. Zvy stayed with us, his army cot in our little cubicle. Our goods we received from the camp kitchen. We stood in line with a container in our hands and waited our turn for some food. They fed us a lot of starchy food, because I gained weight and even acquired a little stomach. I remember that once somebody asked me if I was pregnant. I was so shocked and hurt at such a question, I didn't know what to say to that person. It was beginning to be obvious that because Zvy stayed with us, some people assumed that I was sleeping with him.

I was a nice little girl form Rokitno, and he didn't even dare to suggest anything to me. He was right to treat me the way he did, or I would have

shown him the gate right away and would have told him to leave. I didn't like people spreading rumors about me, and I wished that I could get rid of Zvy, but every time that I mentioned it to him, he started crying like a little baby. He didn't want to leave us, and I felt sorry for him when he cried and let him stay. Mother always fussed over him, cooking special things just for him.

At the time most people in the camp intended to go to Israel (Palestine at that time). Little by little people crossed the borders into Italy, one leg of their long journey to the aspired Holy Land. We had to move, too. In order to get accepted for crossing the borders illegally, Yitzchak had to join the Bricha. The Bricha was a group of young men who came from the Holy Land to organize the D.P. people, and help us to cross borders illegally in order to get to Palestine. The roads were dangerous through the mountains at night, and they did not want to accept our mother. We wanted to cross into Italy as a family, but Mother had an enlarged heart and nobody would take us.

So Yitzchak had to sign up to work with the Bricha (Bricha means "escape"). For six months he had to risk his life working with the Bricha, almost every night helping Jewish people to cross through the mountains from Austria into Italy. It was a treacherous journey, in the dark of the night. There was snow and ice in the mountains, and the border patrols were shooting at

them. I remember worrying every time he left and praying until he got back. Then finally our turn came to cross the border into Italy.

I remember that it was very dark. They drove us (a large group of people were crossing with us) close to the mountains, and then we had to walk. There were a few young men in charge of us all. They told us to walk single file, a few feet apart from each other, so when the patrols shot at us they could not kill or hurt too many. I never heard of anyone being killed or even wounded, but the bullets were real and so was our fear. I remember walking alone, barely seeing the person ahead of me because of the dark, trying not to slip and fall on the ice of that narrow mountain path. Everything we owned, we carried on our backs. I didn't have much, but whatever clothes I had and my coat, I was wearing, and I felt very clumsy. Zvy and Yitzchak were someplace behind helping Mother to make the crossing. I think that some boy was helping Malka, and Riva and I just walked alone, each with the crowd.

As I was walking, I felt like I was alone in the whole world. There was the night and the silence. No one made a sound. Then I heard the shots. We were warned not to panic but to continue quietly on our slippery way. So I did, and I came to a big hole in my path. There was no way around it. I had to jump it. I was scared and started praying. Suddenly another human form

appeared next to me. She seemed tall and very fat. Without saying a word, we stretched out our hands to each other and jumped together. We made it across and silently hugged each other with relief. That's when I realized that this fat lady was my sister Riva. She looked so big and fat because she carried a lot of clothes on her body. We walked through most of the night. When daylight came, we were in Italy.

The sun was out, bright and warm, and our spirits lifted. Gone was the fear. We walked four by four singing Hebrew songs. We were now in Italy in the Russian Zone. Their sentries stood there with smiles on their faces, bidding us welcome. At that time the Soviet Union assumed that all those young kibutzniks would go to Palestine and build a socialist state. They probably were hoping that we would belong in their camp. So, they were all for us, and we marched and sang freely in front of them.

If I remember correctly, we came to Grugliasco D.P. camp number 17. Italy I remember very fondly, from the first entrance until the day we left. I remember a big gentle sun by day, huge golden moon by night, gentle breezes, warm sandy beaches and friendly people. If it snowed in the winter, by noon all of it was melted. Grugliasco was a big camp, there were thousands of people there, displaced people. The site of a former American army camp, it

had those huge barrack-like buildings with huge rooms divided into blanket-wall cubicles.

We didn't have much to do in the camp. Mostly we did a lot of walking, talking, and joking with our peers. That, I was good at, always ready with a quick quip. My brother, sisters, and I were in the habit of speaking Hebrew to each other when we wanted to say something private. One day a man approached us and told us that he is from Palestine, here to organize Hebrew schools so the children of the camps would get some education plus learn some Hebrew before they went to Palestine. Most of the people were hoping to eventually wind up in the land that we were going to make our own. The man said his name was Zur Arie, and he needed people who speak Hebrew to serve as teachers for the school. Some went to work with him. Yitzchak was made principal of the school, and Zvy and I were teachers. My sisters were too young before the war to learn as much Hebrew as Yitzchak and I did, so they didn't remember enough to be able to teach. I started teaching kindergartners ages two to five. They gave me no books or plans for a curriculum. I just taught them the Hebrew songs and dances that I remembered from my early school days. I told them Bible stories and played with them. I was good at that. The children loved me and I loved them.

I remember one day—on a Sunday, not a school day—Mr. Zur Arie came looking for me. He told me that an important representative from Eretz Israel was coming to the camp, and we needed a welcome ceremony from the children for him. I went to the cubicle where a little girl in my class lived with her family. I forgot her name, but she was a truly talented dancer, anything I taught her she danced so very gracefully. I asked her parents' permission for her to come with me and dance for the occasion. We bought flowers—or picked them, more likely. When the Sheliach came, the little girl gave him the flowers, and then proceeded to dance for him. I was the music. There I stood in the camp square and sang, "na, na, na, na," while she danced the dance that I taught her. I loved to teach, but all my life for one reason or another, my teaching got cut short. Of course I never had the credentials to be a bonafide teacher, except for a natural talent and excitement for teaching.

The leaders of the camp started organizing young people to go to the Hagana to learn to fight, because when we got a country, we knew we would have to fight for it. I am not a brave person, but I figured it was my duty to volunteer for the Hagana (the word means "defense"). After all, I was healthy, and if God let me survive the Holocaust while better people than me perished, it was my duty to use my life to work and fight for our own country.

I told my family that I wanted to sign up for the Hagana. Mother took it very hard. She asked my brother to talk to me. He walked with me for a long time and explained that I owe my life to my family and my mother. She had a very difficult life, lost many children, lost father, and she could not bear to lose me, her oldest daughter. She had done so much for me all my life, and I couldn't leave her and follow my ideals. I had to think about mother's health.

All my life I was afraid that mother would die on me because of her enlarged heart. I could not bring myself to go against her wishes. So, I didn't register for the Hagana. A lot of young people didn't register besides my sisters and brother, and their friends. Riva said that the organizers don't send their own sons and daughters to the Hagana, just someone else's, so she felt justified in not going. I felt differently. Just because these people tried not to send their own, it did not diminish my duty. I felt guilty then, and retained guilt feelings to this day. I felt that I did not fulfill my duty toward my people.

Well, a lot of young people did go into the Hagana, mostly those who had no parents. Singing, they left one day in trucks to go to a Hagana training camp. I watched them leave and felt small, like a traitor. I also felt sorry for them. They were left all alone in the world, but each one did not shirk his or her responsibility. They did what was expected of them.

The camp organizers thought that the teachers in the camp should be among the first to volunteer for the Hagana, to set an example for the other young people. Basically, I agreed with them, but I had promised my mother not to go and I didn't. Not going in the Hagana was not a good example. They came to officially fire us. My brother found out about it a day before they came, and he warned me not to go to work. I quit and was spared the public firing.

There were A.R.T. schools in the camp, offering sewing and other courses. I took English, Riva took English and sewing. Our English teacher was very interesting: He was fluent in Hebrew and English, and he kept us amused with his quick wit. He enjoyed his class.

Riva and I had a funny incident involving this teacher before we knew him. There wasn't much that we could do in the camp to keep ourselves occupied, so a big part of our day was spent walking. One day as we walked form the nearby Italian village to our camp, there was a man walking ahead of us. He was tall and handsome with a little goatee on his chin. Riva and I were talking away in Hebrew, feeling free that no one would hear us because very few people in the camp spoke Hebrew, and Italians surely didn't speak it. We talked about all kinds of private matters. Then we noticed the man ahead of

us, and stared discussing him, whether he was Jewish, how handsome he was, and we didn't like his goatee. He never turned around or let on that he was aware of us.

The next day when we came for our first English lesson, it turned out that the man with the goatee was our teacher. He started writing some English words on the blackboard and then he said in Hebrew: "For those of you who converse in Hebrew, here are the translations of the words in Hebrew." He spoke perfect Hebrew. And he added, "For those of you who do not like my goatee, I'll have to let you know that I like it." By then Riva and I were blushing, we knew that he heard our whole conversation that other day, and I was embarrassed. But he was so nice and funny, that he soon made us all laugh. His name was Mr. Wood.

I didn't learn too much English—I don't remember why, maybe the course was canceled, or maybe we were moved to another camp. Mr. Wood had a beautiful brunette wife. They always played cards with each other. They came to the camp dances, and he asked us girls to dance. His wife danced with other people, too. He was a good dancer and a nice man. He treated us with respect and also made us laugh. I liked him a lot.

When we came to Milwaukee, we found that Mr. Wood, his wife, and a little son were here. We had them over to our house once, but then we lost touch with them. Malka told me that Mr. Wood was an Arab and not a Jew. Well, he was a nice man, treated us with dignity, and I remember him fondly.

In the school in the camp, one of the teachers who replaced us drew my sister Malka's attention. He was teaching geography. He did not speak Hebrew. He was a good teacher, though, and the children liked him. His name was Sammy. He was very different from us. Dark and very lean with a black mustache—he looked like an Italian. He wore velvet jackets and silk scarves. He always flashed big dollar bills around, and was fond of telling anyone who would listen that he did not live in the camp but had a place in town. He would tell of his rich relatives and of his academic achievements. I was not interested in his type and never listened to his stories. I liked men who were blond and not so flashy and show-offy. Malka listened and liked what she heard and saw. He was the man she wanted. Eventually she married him.

Among the many people in that camp, there was a family: a mother and her four daughters. One of them was really pretty, her name was Tsili. Yitzchak liked her and tried to see her. So did a lot of young men in the camp. That family was like the Gabor family here in the U.S. If someone wanted to

date one of the girls, they had to be nice to momma and bring presents. The most expensive presents got the date. My brother could not compete, he had no money for presents. The boys stared joking about that family. Everyone said if they owned all four sisters, they could make a fortune. When I last saw them, they hadn't married anyone in spite of all those suitors. Maybe they didn't think that anyone in the camp was good enough for them.

There were a lot of lonely young men and older men in the camps: Men who lost parents and siblings and were alone now, and men who had families of their own before the war but now were the lone survivors. More females died in the concentration camps, so there were few girls and single women in the camps after the war. So, some girls thought that they were hot stuff. I might have been a little guilty of that myself, but I wasn't looking for money or prestige. All I wanted was a cute guy who had the same values that I had and was sincere and loved me. Zvy was still living with us. He didn't go in the Hagana, either.

I started losing weight, my hair got thin. Mother's friends started telling her that this is happening because I wasn't married. She started telling me that I should marry Zvy. I told her that I don't love him, and also that I had a suspicion that he was not interested in marrying me, either. I told her that we

should tell him to leave, so that I can go on with my life. Instead she went to Zvy and told him to set a date to get married. She mentioned a couple of dates to him, and he told her that each of those dates was an anniversary of someone's death in his family. She finally caught on that he was hanging on to us but had no marriage on his mind. So, finally my brother told Zvy to leave. His leaving meant nothing to me but good riddance. I guess that I never considered him even a friend, just a user. I went for a walk with my sister when he was packing to leave. Later he complained that he expected a romantic farewell. I didn't feel romantic, just glad to be rid of him.

In the spring of 1948, Malká married Sammy Natanson. I should mention that Malka blossomed into a beautiful young woman. By the time she was sixteen she developed a movie-star's shape and hair. When she walked, heads turned to look at her. She also had a very outgoing personality, and Mother was very proud of her. She was a very single young woman and obviously a prize. Everyone was surprised when she married so young. Mother told me that Malka loved Sammy and wanted to marry him. At first I burst out laughing. I was twenty years old, and considered myself too young to settle down to a married life. She was four years younger, only sixteen years old. I thought it funny. Mother told me that this was not a joke, Malka

was mature for her age and wanted to be married. Mother wanted my blessing, because my younger sister was going ahead of me. I said that she had my blessing. Maybe she was old enough to marry, but I was not. After Malka married Sammy, I stopped saying that I was too young too marry, just that I was not ready to settle down. I started feeling a little funny, a little older, and after a few months passed by, I thought that if the right person came along I might be willing to marry him. There were a lot of young men I talked and joked with, but no one special to me.

In the summer of 1949 they moved us all to another camp, to Senigalia. Senigalia was located on a beach on the Mediterranean Sea. It was on the site on an old U.S. Army camp—one large building and many metal tents. They looked like halves of huge metal cans. Our family was housed in the main building in a tiny cubicle room made out of blankets for walls as we had in the other camps. I took a job in the health office. I worked for two doctors and wore a white gown.

I measured and weighed people and kept the records of their health tests. It was fun working there. People who came in to my office assumed that I was very educated and smart. They would speak to me in French or English, and I always said: "That's all right, I understand Yiddish." Actually I did not

understand French or English, I just didn't want to disappoint them and let them know how little I knew.

After work, Riva and I would go walking in the camp—Malka was already a married lady. From every corner we'd see young men watching us. There were a lot of them, and we were the new girls in the camp. Eventually one of them came up to talk to me. His name was Urman, and he told me that he had a friend who was very interested in me. I told him that I'd be happy to meet his friend. Other young men came over to talk, Bolek and his group of friends. One gorgeous boy kept on staring at me. I couldn't believe that he was staring at me. I didn't think that I was very pretty, and he was really gorgeous. After a couple of days of playing staring, he came over and introduced himself. His name was Arthur, and he looked like a movie star. He also spoke perfect Hebrew, because he was in Israel, perfect English because he was in the British army. We got to be very good friends. He tried to get romantic, but first, there was no chemistry between us, and second, even with all his adventures, he seemed childish to me. He would stand on the shore and throw rocks into the sea for hours at a time. We talked a lot, but he came across as very young and immature, even though he was older than I.

The camp in Senigalia used to hold dances outside. There were little tables. A lot of paper moons were hung by the tables. A huge silver moon hung in the sky presiding over a balmy Italian summer night. The first dance we went to, I refused a date with a young man who was trying to pursue me. He followed me from the other camp, thinking that I would go steady with him because I knew no one here. There was nothing wrong with him. He was blond and good-looking, nice, well read. Well, he didn't know how to dance, and to me then that was important. I just felt nothing for him. I went to the dance with the girls: my sister Riva and two of her friends. I wanted to meet the boys in the new camp.

As soon as we sat down at one of the tables, the boys started coming over to invite us to dance. Two of the boys were very persistent. Both of them were tall, blond, and good-looking. At first I couldn't tell them apart. They each in turn kept on asking me to dance. Then one gave up and let the other one win. The one that didn't give up was the friend of Urman who wanted to meet me. His name was Harry. Harry wore a nice brown suit, and looked cute and debonair. He was a very good dancer.

When he first asked me to dance, the girls wondered if he was Jewish, because he didn't say anything, just kept on smiling. He carried himself very

straight, especially when dancing. His smiling face punctuated small features, golden curly hair, and a long neck. His manners were both aggressive and shy at that same time. It was like he was not afraid, just humble. He was charming and he smelled very nice. He had everything that I wanted in a man: good looks, nice manners, smelled good, good dancer, and was very infatuated with me, at least that's how he acted.

He didn't let anybody else dance with me. After his friend Urman came up and officially introduced us, I knew that Harry was a Jew from Romania. The reason that he didn't say much was because his Yiddish was very bad—his native tongue was Romanian. He knew that I hailed from Poland and spoke Yiddish, and his vocabulary in Yiddish was very limited.

We had a lot of time on our hands, and we walked around the camp a lot. Malka was married and pregnant. She was very sick during her pregnancy and spent a lot of the time in the hospital. Mother was with her a lot of the time. Riva and I filled our days with walking around. The day after the dance, when Riva and I were walking, we spotted Harry talking to some of his friends. He smiled and I responded with a smile. He came over and asked me for a date. It probably was my upbringing, but I had this habit of refusing a first date, or hemming and hawing, always unsure if it was appropriate to

accept a date and let him know that I was interested. I thought that a nice girl had to play hard to get, to let everyone know what kind of a girl she was. Well, Harry had his own system. He never asked for a date. He just said; "I'll pick you up tonight at seven, we're going to the movies." He was so positive that I didn't get a chance to refuse.

We dated every day for three weeks. Days I worked in the doctor's office, and evenings I went out with Harry. We went dancing a lot. In the office where I worked there were two doctors, two brothers and both bachelors. They both displayed interest in me. They were probably in their thirties, and I thought that very old. I was not interested in them. Their profession did not impress me. Sometimes those bachelor doctors showed up at our camp dances. One of them would get up and start walking toward our table with the intention of asking me to dance. Harry waited until he was almost at he table, then quickly got up and maneuvered me away to the dance floor. Harry laughed, he thought that this was funny. The doctors complained to me the next day, saying: "We have an attractive secretary working for us and yet we can never dance with her because of a possessive boyfriend." I thought that that was real love. It took me a lifetime, but I learned otherwise.

I liked Harry a lot, but I wasn't really ready yet to settle down. There were stories going around in the camp that men who come from Romania make bad husbands. I even knew some that didn't treat their wives kindly. So, one day I told Harry that I didn't want to date him any more. I couldn't give him a good reason because I didn't really have one. So, we stopped seeing each other for a few weeks. I missed him a lot, and kept wondering if maybe I would never be able to forget him, and I'd be sorry the rest of my life for breaking up with him. Riva, who guessed how I felt, told me to make up with him, but I said no. So, she went and told Harry to ask me out again.

A big dance was coming up in the camp, and I didn't feel like going with anyone. I was sitting on the porch steps in front of our building feeling kind of lonely. Suddenly Harry came marching down the street, dressed up in his brown suit, smiling, looking cute and confident. He said, "Aren't you ready yet?"

I said, "For what?"

He said, "We are going to the dance—hurry up, get ready." I was glad that he came, and I quickly got ready to go with him. I was very glad to be with him again, and made up my mind then and there, that if he asked me to marry him, I would say yes.

It wasn't too long after that dance that Harry asked me to marry him. He said that he wanted to go to France, and would I go with him? I said that if this was a proposal, the answer was yes, but I would not go to France with him because I wanted to go where my family goes. Mother had made up her mind that we were going to the United States. She said that she'd had enough of war and dying. She wanted us all to live and live in peace. Harry agreed that he would go with us to the U.S.

We were married on September 13th, 1948. I wore a beautiful white gown, borrowed from some friends of Harry's. Seeme and Harry Sapunaru were married a couple of weeks before us. She brought the material with her from Romania and had it custom-made. We were approximately the same size, so it fit me fine. They both were in our wedding party, so was her sister-in law Rianca. They set my hair, and put lipstick on me. That was the first time in my life that I was made up. I liked the way I looked and wore lipstick and that hairdo after the wedding. We invited everyone in the camp to our wedding. The wedding was outside, with all the full ritual. Chupah and candles were carried by the members of the wedding party. As glasses we used baby food jars that Mother saved up. Someone produced an accordion, and there was music and singing. The rabbi came from a nearby town to

marry us and got so excited seeing so many people that he delivered an impromptu speech on the unity of the Jewish people.

I was born in Poland and Harry in Romania. Jews tended to marry each their own. Polish Jews married Polish Jews, and Romanian Jews married Romanian Jews. Each group felt more comfortable with their own. So, when two individuals from seemingly different backgrounds got together, it created a special occasion. The camp director, who was an Englishman, told Harry the next day that I looked just like an English bride, the only thing that was missing was a cross.

We had a twenty-four-hour honeymoon at an Italian villa in a resort. I don't remember, but Harry says that my mother paid for it. I do remember the room and the villa. Whatever my mother gave us it was more then she could afford. She saved every penny that our relatives from the U.S. sent. Whenever we received care packages with cans of food, she always sold the food and saved the money for us. Before we came to the States, she also gave us fifty dollars. That was a small fortune to us. From this money we bought medication for Harry's mother and sent it to her in Romania.

We were given our own blanketed little cubicle and started our home. Harry was resourceful at getting us a few boxes. We put them on top of each

other and they made fine dressers and cabinets. We didn't have much to put in them, but we hung little curtains on them. We bought some shelving paper with pretty flowers and hung it on the wall. Harry had a blanket he brought from home that was colorful and pretty. We used that for a wall hanging. When people came in, they always said how nice it looked, and they wondered how come they gave us such a nice place. Little did they know that when they gave us the place, it was very dirty. The people who lived there before us left a lot of dirt, including feces dried on the floor and wall. We'd washed the window and scrubbed the dried feces from the floor and wall.

When I'd told my family that I intended to marry Harry, my brother asked me how he would support me, since he had no profession or trade. I asked Harry that same question, and he told me that he would carry stones, if necessary, to provide for me.

I thought that we were happily married. Harry was working as an assistant to the chief of police in the camp. I didn't like his job too much, but I liked us being a couple. All my friends told me how cute we looked together. I liked to go walking together. Being with Harry gave me self-confidence—I felt complete.

Harry came home one day, very proud that he had beaten up someone bigger then himself. Even though it was part of his job, I told him that I never wanted to hear that again. We do not beat up anybody. A Jewish policeman can't beat up a Jewish camp survivor, even if that person gives him a hard time. We use patience and understanding. He promised never to get into a physical fight again, and he never did.

I can't figure out why Harry refused to go for walks with me. He said that I liked to show off. Well, maybe I did want to show off my handsome husband. I didn't see anything wrong with that.

Harry told me that I should not be so close with my girlfriends. Friends, he said, could cause problems in a family. I had complete faith in my husband, and I thought that he was much smarter than me. He was four years older. He said that we should stick to my family, but no friends. He gave up his friends, too. I missed my friends, and I even missed his friends, but I thought that Harry knew best. I knew that I had an inferiority complex, but I hid it well. I came across as self-confident and even a little charming. After I married I thought that I gained all the confidence that I needed. I expected that we would be best friends and help each other to achieve the most that we can achieve in life. I was so naïve.

I remember this woman that Harry introduced to me. I don't really know how he knew her. She was tall, well-built, in her thirties with red hair. She wore tight pants with high heels. Now even grandmothers dress this way, but forty years ago only women of ill repute dressed that way. I knew that she had an Italian lover who was married. Anyway, one day she showed up in our cubicle to visit Harry, who was in bed. Maybe he was sick. She was making suggestive jokes, and I wasn't paying any attention. Then she asked me if I was jealous of her. I laughed and said, "Of course not, my husband loves me and would not look at another woman. Besides, why would he look at a woman in her thirties [old] with admitted experience, when he has a pretty twenty-one year old wife [young], who is admittedly a nice girl?" Harry never said anything. I believed what I said.

She was so impressed with my naiveté and sincerity, that she insisted on giving me a manicure. That was the first time that I ever had a manicure. I never saw that woman again. Harry says that he doesn't remember her.

Harry came across as very self-assured. He was even aggressive. If I would have guessed how insecure he was, we might have had an easier life. Instead of confiding in me he chose to distrust me. I didn't know how to handle distrust, I was in shock. My parents trusted me completely. My

teachers, my friends trusted me. I should have guessed that something was wrong when he wanted us to give up all our friends. Instead of worrying, I was flattered that he loved me so much, he wanted to be only with me and my family.

When Harry and I dated, he lost a lot of weight. I didn't know it then, but he went hungry so he could have money for dating me. After we were married, he gained weight quick.

The first time that I tried to cook, I told Harry that I didn't know how to cook. As a matter of fact, I told him that when he asked me to marry him. I said that I didn't know anything about running a house, and he replied that he knew everything and would teach me.

So Harry says to me, "Let's go to the butcher, and I'll show you how to buy meat so we can cook a soup." There were no Jewish butchers We walked to the Italian village of Senigalia and found a meat-market. There were all kinds of meats hanging on hooks. I knew nothing about meat, couldn't tell the difference. All my life I hated the idea of eating meat or chicken, because a living thing had to be killed so we could eat its body. I remember when I was a little girl in Rokitno and carried chickens in a basket to the Shohet. They were alive and squawking. Then he killed them and we were eating their

bodies. To this day, I don't like to touch raw meat or fowl. After it is cooked, I eat it and try not to think about it.

Anyway, that day in the fall of 1948, Harry points to a piece of meat that was fat and pink and says like a maven; "Observe, this is good fresh meat. This will make a good soup for Shabbat. Always choose meat that is pink and fat like that." So we bought that meat and tried to cook it, back in our cubicle. We borrowed a primus from someone to cook on, put the meat in a pot in water. It kept boiling, smelled funny and the water was fat like oil. Finally, my mother looked in on our venture. She looked at the meat and said that we were boiling pork. We had to throw away the pot with its contents. I realized that my maven knew nothing about cooking. When I needed to know something, I asked my mother.

Chapter Seven—Harry's Story

Since I am writing these memories for my dear children and grandchildren, I think that I should write now about what I know about their father and grandfather, as told by him, before I continue writing about our life together.

Harry was born on October 15, 1923 in Galati, Romania. The northern border of Romania meets with the southern border of Poland. Close neighbors though they are, their languages and cultures were all different. Polish is a Slavic language, Romanian is a Latin language. Poland's climate is harsher, so were its people. Romanians were gentler and more fun-loving. They did not hate their Jews.

Galati is a port city with a population of about 100,000. It is an old city with a mixed architecture. In the 1920s the Jews comprised about ten percent of the city's inhabitants. They lived in all neighborhoods in harmony and friendship with their Christian neighbors. The river Danube gently bathed its banks and brought many ships to the Galati port. Harry remembers traveling the river with his father, accompanying him on his business trips. Most fondly, he remembers the river and his large family. They had a very extended

family, up to three-hundred people. His family had lived in Romania many generations. Some prospered and lived well.

His mother was Rebecca Friedman. Her family had money. Even though her father was killed in a train accident when very young, she received a good education in a French school. Her mother Tsili was a good businesswoman and made a nice living of a tavern. Her brother was an inventor and managed to make money off his talents. He built a factory and manufactured machines that he invented. He eventually moved to Bucharest, the capital city of Romania, and lived in a rich style.

When I met Rebecca, she was in her late sixties, less then five feet tall and as wide almost. Small features, gray hair, and a warm smile that would light up her face. I asked her once if she was beautiful when young, and she said, no, she was just a Jewish girl. However she was very proud of her education. She knew French, German, Romanian, and Yiddish well. She tried to learn Hebrew and English. She was intellectually inclined and never stopped learning.

Rebecca was twenty-nine when she married Joseph, who was twenty-three. The marriage was arranged through a matchmaker, as was the custom of the time. I don't know if Joseph knew that his bride was older, because they

kept it a family secret, saying that they were both the same age. Harry says that he never knew that his mother was Uncle Morris' twin sister, until I told him. When we were in Israel in 1965, we visited Nene (uncle) Morris and Tanti (auntie) Jenny. He was proud of his age, and told me that he and Rebecca were twins. She was dead by then. Even on her gravestone they put the date of her demise, but not the birth date. When Reta, Harry's sister, visited in Milwaukee, I asked her about that, and she said that nobody knew when her mother was born. I told her that I knew, that her twin brother told me. She was surprised, but admitted that she also knew if for a fact. I was fond of Rebecca and liked talking to her.

Joseph was about medium height, tall compared to his wife, slender and agile. At twenty-three he was very handsome—and a good dancer, outgoing, and he made a good living. He had very little formal education because he'd had to quit school when very young to go to work. His father Eliezer, a buggy-maker, had two sons and three daughters. Although Eliezer was basically a good-hearted man, he was very stern and ill-tempered. His wife Rose was a saint in comparison. Joseph, being the oldest son, had to work and help out. He was a bright young man and very gentlemanly with the ladies. He

was proud of his looks and success with the ladies, but was even more proud of his wife's education and background.

They were married during the first world war. He was drafted into the Romanian army and returned home after the war was over. He was decorated as a war hero.

When Joseph came home after the war, he found candles burning and got scared that his wife died. She was in bed, but she gave birth to their first son. Mondy, their first born, was their pride and joy. He grew up to be very handsome, six feet tall, straight back, blue eyes and straight sandy blond hair. He was good at everything that he tried. He wrote short novels, he played a musical instrument. He was very good in school and popular with his peers. He rode a bike, swam, skated. He was accepted into military officers' school where few Jews were allowed.

Reta (Henrietta) was born a couple of years later. She had a pretty face, but was always chubby and shy. She attended a German school for girls, where she did well. Knitting and embroidering kept her busy.

Harry was born two years later. He was small and skinny. Being the baby of the family, he was spoiled by his mother. He was a willful and temperamental child (like his grandfather Eliezer, he likes to say). He tells a

story, that one evening he decided he needed a new ball. It was late and the stores were closed, so his parents tried to get him to go to sleep. He kept screaming until they gave in. They dressed him and went into the night, knocking on store doors, trying to wake up the owners. They finally succeeded. One store owner came out of bed and sold him the ball that he wanted.

Harry hasn't changed. He still wants his way and right away, no matter what. School he recalls just as a matter of fact—he has no fond memories or bad ones. It was an all-boys' school. He thinks that in Romania all schools were either for girls or boys, and all required tuition. There was no free education, except for orphans, when the community paid. All the subjects were in Romanian. French and Latin were required as foreign languages. Regular bribes to the proper authorities allowed for a Hebrew teacher and rabbi for the Jewish children. School was hard work, a lot of homework. In the first three grades, Harry was a very good student. He received medals for excellence. But as time went on he didn't feel like concentrating and working hard. Even a tutor couldn't curb his dislike for school. He simply didn't want to work hard when he didn't enjoy it. At fourteen he quit completely. His father's threats and physical beatings didn't change his mind.

He went to work. I think that Harry tried to model himself after his father and grandfather. He figured if they did all right without much education, he could, too. To me, he seems proud of his temper, because it makes him like his grandpa. He remembers a mother who spoiled him, put on his socks and shoes for him so he wouldn't get cold, even when he was older. Grandma Tsili lived with them. When they were younger, she spoiled him too, but when he was growing up, she was sick in bed and needed assistance herself.

They had live-in help in the person of a young farm girl. Life was good, good was plentiful and rich. Mother and Father attended the theater often. They often visited open-air restaurants as a family. Wine was served with every meal. Their large family visited with each other often. Impromptu recitals were put on. Musical instruments were played, songs sung or recited. Harry has a permanent bump on his head from falling off a stool during his turn. He was so short, he had to stand on a stool while reciting, and fell off and received a big bump. Humorous stories were told, like the one about his nearsighted auntie. He remembers his aunties as elderly widows (his mother's sisters), but well-to-do. They all had money. One of them could hardly see. One day she went to the doctor's office for a visit. When she came in, she saw

a woman coming toward her, so she said hello. The woman just looked at her. She kept on asking her questions, and the woman only imitated everything she did but did not answer any of her questions. She got angry and started yelling, and that woman was yelling right back at her. The doctor came out to the waiting room to see what the commotion was about. He found only one woman in the room, and she was yelling at her reflection in the mirror.

Harry remembers going to temple with his parents on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. He remembers a kosher home and fasting on Yom Kippur. The holiday that he liked best was Purim, because he earned money. They were sending Shalach Mones (a plateful of baked goodies) to their relatives. The relatives reciprocated by sending goodies back. The boys who were the carriers received tips coming and going. So, beside eating all the goodies, they made money too.

When very young, Harry was a skinny little boy, always running, falling down, and skinning his knees.

It seems funny to me, that the two things that I wasn't good at in school were his favorites: geography and gym. He did well in both. Harry is not the kind of person who would admit if there were any problems. According to him, their life was perfect. He has respect and admiration for people who have

a good education, but is also insanely jealous and distrustful of them. He has a keen mind, knows a lot, is interested in almost everything. He can spell English almost better than anyone I know. Yet he quit school and refused to go to night school in the U.S.A. For a long time he spoke English without any regard to time, tense, or gender. He didn't care how he sounded. He is not articulate by nature, in any language, but he is intelligent and could easily learn. His refusal to learn and hatred for people who like to learn, makes me wonder if this is rooted in the difference of educational backgrounds in his parents and maybe confrontations that happened between them that he never told me about.

Harry likes to talk about his grandparents on his father's side. By the time he was a teenager, they lived in a small apartment in what could have been called a Jewish neighborhood. The big apartment buildings were getting dilapidated. The small apartments inside those big buildings housed mostly poor Jews, many elderly. Grandpa Eliezer was almost blind. Eventually some doctor operated on him, and he regained his vision completely. Harry used to walk over to visit them and eat Grandma's potato soup. He still likes potato soup. The people in that neighborhood spoke Yiddish. He could hear Jewish

curses being yelled out through the windows. He says that that's where he learned to curse in Yiddish.

He remembers his grandpa coming to their house and banging with his walking stick on the floor, yelling and demanding more money from his son. Joseph and his brother Izzie supported their parents. Both men were textile representatives and made a nice living. But the support of the parents fell mostly on Joseph, because Izzie had a wife who gambled away his earnings.

Harry remembers carrying goose and chicken fat to his grandparents for the winter. The buildings were somewhat on a hill and were called Der Barg—The Hill. It seemed that living there was a sign of less education, less manners, and more poverty. The name was meant as a derogatory term.

He did not discover girls until age fourteen. Most of the year was spent in school working hard (there were no girls in his school), and summers Harry spent playing ball with his boyfriends, Carl and Borris. He remembers sometimes jogging to the Jewish center. Many times his father took him along on his travels. Joseph was a factory representative. He traveled a lot, selling dry goods to stores. Harry loved the boat rides on the Danube River, going from town to town on selling missions. At fourteen he got his first job as a stock boy in a store.

He had more freedom than attending school. He also had some money, and with his friends he walked to the park, met girls, got to know them, and started dating. The year was 1937, and his first girlfriend was Rosica Yancu. They went to movies with the other two couples or walked in the park and talked. Sometimes they all went to an open-air restaurant, where for the price of a dessert and coffee they could also dance. Rosica was learning to be a seamstress. She had brown eyes, brown hair, dark complexion—she was a rather serious girl. She got to know his sister Reta and started coming over to the house. The family liked her.

After working one year as a stock-boy, Harry joined his father in being a factory representative. He enjoyed doing that. Summers he sometimes went for vacation by himself to a resort in the mountains. Harry speaks fondly of good meals, good walks, beautiful scenery, and meeting girls.

The family moved a few times, changing houses. Since they rented their houses, that wasn't difficult. Harry doesn't remember the reasons for moving or the places themselves. He assumes that as his father prospered they moved to bigger houses.

In 1940 their world started changing. First Grandma Tsili died. She was old, in her nineties, but they were used to her always being there, even when

she was paralyzed in bed, so they missed her. Then Romania chose to join Hitler as his ally. The first thing that the Jews were asked to do was display the Star of David on their businesses or offices, so everyone would know who was a Jew.

Mondy, who was in officer's school, was thrown out. All Jews were thrown out of the Romanian army. Mondy, who ran around with a popular crowd, fell in love with Lidia Strulovici. She was popular, but his parents didn't think her special enough for their special son. She was small and skinny, not very pretty, but her family was well connected, so they didn't object to that friendship.

Before the Nazis entered Romania, Lidia's family obtained papers that claimed they are all from Besarabia. Besarabia, on the northern side of Romania, was freed by the Russians—like my part of Poland, it was annexed. The papers made them Russian citizens, and they were allowed to leave Romania and go to Besarabia, which was under Russian control. Mondy wanted to go with them, so his parents helped him to obtain false papers that said he too was born in Besarabia. Mondy left with Lidia's family and was never heard from again. After the war they found out that Mondy and Lidia were married in Bersarabia. Mondy and Lidia were taken and sent to a

concentration camp. He was killed there. She was smuggled out by her family, out of there. She survived the war and is in Romania, now married to a Jewish communist.

Meanwhile in Galati, the Jewish children were being thrown out of school. All the Jewish men were rounded up and locked up in these empty schools. Harry and his father were taken. Harry was seventeen years old. They were kept there for many months, sleeping on the floor and doing all kinds of jobs for the Romanian government, menial tasks.

Just before his eighteenth birthday Harry was let out to go home to sleep and report for work daily. His father bribed the guards. All businesses had to have a non-Jewish owner. By posting bribes in the right places, they managed to acquire Romanian partners who helped conduct the business. Rebecca and Reta brought them food and clean clothes. The women were allowed to stay home all through the war.

When Harry turned eighteen, they took him to a working camp in another city. Only single men were taken there. Married men stayed in the city and worked for the army without pay. Joseph was cleaning airplanes in the airport of Galati.

As Reta turned nineteen, her parents arranged through a matchmaker to get her a husband. He was twelve years older, a businessman from a small town. He was a tall big-boned man and a nice man. Harry was in the working camp and he did not see her wedding. He didn't see his brother's nor his sister's weddings.

Costica Iticsohn, Reta's new husband, was also taken to clean and maintain airplanes. In the labor camp where Harry was, they built roads. They slept on the floor in big basement-like rooms, about fifty to a room. The food they received was good. The guards did not badger them. The only bad guard that Harry remembers was a short guy named Lupescu. He liked to swear and yell, and Harry disliked him. Otherwise he does not remember beatings or mistreatment. The parents of the boys in the camp bribed those in charge, and they sometimes let them go home for a couple of days. Supposedly, they were sent on official business, carrying sealed envelopes, back and forth to Galati army headquarters and back to the work camp.

Harry's father knew many of the fathers in the small towns because he did business with them before the war. Now, he bribed them to get food to Harry. One man stands out in his memory: Albulet. Whenever Harry's brigade walked by on their way to work, Albulet would be there, throwing salt pork

and other foods to him. Harry was interned in the work camp 'til the end of the war. They changed locations a few times. Toward the end of the war they put them in farmers' homes. In exchange for the lodging, they were supposed to help the farmers with the work on the farm whenever they were off from the camp work. They did that, and even received a Sunday meal with the farmer's family.

When Harry was nineteen he got sciatica, a constant pain in the back. They sent him to the hospital in Galati for tests. There was a Jewish nurse there, who had a cousin named Zica Greenberg. Zica came to visit often, and before Harry left the hospital, he and Zica were an item. Harry—who was a skinny little kid, always falling down—grew up to be a very handsome young man. He liked girls and they liked him. Zica was a flirtatious and sophisticated young woman. She made Harry forget Rosica.

Harry said that the Nazis tried time and again, to take the Jews out of Romania and send them to Germany and Poland into concentration camps, but the Romanians refused to give up their Jews. Marshal Antonescu, who was prime minister of Romania and an ally of Germany, told them that he needed his Jews for work in Romania. Harry says that when his brigade was building roads, they often were made to break up their work and start all over again. He

figured that a lot of it was "make work," so the Nazis could not take them away. He says that after the war, the Jews of Romania signed a petition to the Russians, to try and save Antonescu's life. The Russians hanged him anyway, saying that maybe he was kind to Jews, but he was their enemy.

One day after a day's work, Harry and his brigade were resting. It was in the middle of the summer of 1944. Suddenly they heard noises and singing in Russian. They thought that the guards were drunk and imitating Russians. As the noise and singing came closer, they also heard their steps, young Russian female soldiers carrying Katushas and in full view now. They couldn't believe their eyes. Soon they were told that they could go home, they were free. All the Russians wanted from them was their watches, for which they gave them a stack of rubles.

Janca, where the last working camp was located, was about thirty miles from Galati. The men stayed there overnight and in the morning were allowed to follow the Russian army that was advancing toward Galati. There was little fighting—the Romanian and German armies were running away faster then the advancing Russian army.

They started their walk to Galati at five o'clock in the morning, and by evening they'd reached home. When Harry reached his house, the whole

family was there to greet him and rejoice that they were all free. Harry and his father went back to the business of selling dry goods. The war lasted another year yet. Many buildings were bombed.

Many of Joseph's former customers were afraid to come to Galati to buy, and they turned to Bucharest for buying. When Joseph realized that his business was dying in Galati, he moved his family to Bucharest. The war had ended by then. The family rented a nice home in a business district and moved in. Reta and her husband came with them. Business was good, and they enjoyed living in Bucharest.

Bucharest is a old city with many interesting buildings and beautiful gardens. Harry decided to branch out on his own. He opened a shipping office. He was doing well. His brother-in-law came along as a partner. Harry remembers this time fondly. He had money and dated many girls. Zica and Rosica both used to come in from Galati to see him. He dated them both but was not ready to settle down and get married yet.

Even though he was enjoying life, Harry got restless. There were representatives from Zionist organizations who talked to the young people and tried to get them to leave Romania, go to Vienna, and join all the other Jews who were trying to get to Israel, which was still Palestine. Harry came from a

Zionist background. As a young boy he belonged to Hanoar Hazioni—Zionist Youth. He also remembers stories about an uncle, his mother's brother who went to Israel in the 1920s. He went as a Chalutz—pioneer with a kibbutz—but did not survive the difficulties that the Chalutzim encountered then in Palestine. He got sick and died. Harry doesn't know his name or much about him, but the family was always proud of their Chalutz. So, when people talked, Harry listened.

Reta's son Zvy was a baby when Harry announced one day that he was going to Vienna. It was the end of 1947. He packed some clothes. His father gave him a ring which he was to sell and use in an emergency. He got on a train and was to travel to Timisuara, where the border with Hungary was. His father gave him name of a person who would help him cross the border. The route to Vienna, Austria was through Budapest, Hungary.

When Harry arrived at that person's house, he found a whole group of Jewish young men who were getting ready to cross the border. They all stayed there a couple of days, and then on a dark night they went to the border. He thinks that the Bricha, the same Israeli organization Yitzchak joined that helped Jews cross borders and escape, was involved there somehow because

they were stopped by the Russian sentry and let go when their guide explained that they are passing through on their way to Palestine.

Harry gave his ring to the guide. He is not sure who kept it. In Hungary they took a train to Budapest. On that train Harry met a lot of young people who were heading in the same direction that he was. One young woman in particular aroused his interest. Her name was Eva. He doesn't remember her last name or what she looked like, except that she seemed very delicate and very special. She stood out with her genteel ways, education and background. He'd never met anyone like Eva before. The Jewish girls he knew were nice provincial Jewish girls and would never dream of using sex as an inducement to win him over.

Eve seduced him as soon as she met him on the train. Even though he claims that he had experience (in Romania, brothels were legal, the girls were checked by doctors, and any boy who had money could go there), he was an amateur compared to Eva. He thought that he was in love, and was going to marry Eva. They arrived in Budapest together and spent three or four days there. Then, along with the other young people, they were put on a train for Vienna.

In Vienna they were lodged in the Rothchild hospital. People in transit were coming through that hospital by the thousands. Most people got a bed in a room with a lot of other people, because room was scarce. Eva said that she had a cousin there, and she was assigned a comfortable room, all to herself. Harry shared the room with her. They had a couple of blissful weeks. Then Harry started to notice that Eva had cousins everywhere. She also knew a lot about lovemaking. He asked her about that, and she told him that she had a boyfriend before with whom she was intimate. He started to worry about that, and decided to give her up.

He packed his bag, told her that he was leaving, and joined a kibbutz in Vienna. It was a Hanoar Hazioni kibbutz. He stayed there a few weeks. They treated him nice, made him Mazkir—secretary. They sent him to seminars to learn more about the movement and to indoctrinate him.

One evening, the canvas-covered trucks came, loaded up the kibbutz people, and drove them to the Italian border. They got out of the trucks and walked across the mountainous border into Italy. The night was dark, but it was summer and the crossing was uneventful. They were brought to Milano, where they joined with another kibbutz. Milano is a beautiful Italian city. His

stay there was short. Harry didn't really like kibbutz life, so when they came to look for volunteers to the Hagana—defense—he enlisted.

A train took him to the south of Italy, where the young people were being trained to be soldiers. They were taught Hebrew and defense. Since they had no rifles, they were learning how to defend themselves with sticks. Harry had a sensitive stomach since his childhood. Now, it blossomed into a full grown ulcer. He was in much pain, and they released him from the Hagana.

He went back to Milano but did not enter a kibbutz. Instead he went into the D.P. (displaced people) camp as a private person. He was very lonely and tried to find Eva. He sent a letter to Vienna but never received an answer. He says that he wrote the letter, looking for her because he thought, or heard, that she might be pregnant. He was trying to accept responsibility for his actions, but never heard from her again.

A short time after that, many people were being moved from different camps to Senigalia. Harry was one of them. He had one more girlfriend. She was Hungarian and very pretty, blond (I saw her). She married some guy who had some money. Harry had nothing. The month was June, and I and my family arrived in Senigalia. Our stories join. He was very clean, smelled nice, had nice manners, and was very well liked.

I guess I can see why Harry was always jealous and possessive of me. He lost one girlfriend to money, and the other was promiscuous. He still worries about losing me forty years into our marriage. Well, maybe he can stop worrying now. Life could be easier on both of us. I never gave him any reason to worry about losing me.

Chapter Eight—Chana And Harry's Stories Join

... I haven't written anything in a while. I am bothered and not sure how to continue. I would like to make my life with Harry sound idyllic, for the sake of our grandchildren who love their Papa and Nana. Harry loves his children and grandchildren very much, and he is happy when he can do something for any one of them. He is trying hard to be a better person, but he has to constantly fight his own bad temper, anger, and insecurities.

When he was young, he was not very articulate. He talked a lot, but never knew how to express his feelings. Maybe he didn't even understand his feelings. He was driven by his insecurity and took it out on me. I didn't understand him, either. I always believed that if I was a good little girl, everyone would treat me nice. I didn't know that many factors influence life and people. I didn't know that each person sees life and other people through their own vision, which is influenced by their own experiences and fears. If I would have understood, I might have tried to make Harry see me as I really am, rather than as a fiction that came out of his own imagination. Instead, I got insulted, was proud, felt hurt, and wracked my brains trying to figure out what it was that I was doing wrong. I didn't find anything to blame for causing me the trouble, so I just suffered in the name of love and marriage.

When I ask Harry now, what should I write, what he felt when he first met me, he said, "When I first saw you, I wanted to meet you. When I met you, I wanted to spend all my time with you. So I figured that I should marry you."

He said that he wanted to be with me all the time, but as soon as we married he tried to find fault with me. He assumed that everyone lies and has something to hide and cover up. I never lied and had nothing to cover up. Every time that I proved to him my honesty, he didn't stop, he looked for something.

When we first arrived in Italy, there was a package and fifty dollars waiting for us in the post office. It seemed that our auntie Ida Piwoz from America was in touch with a cousin we had in common. His name was David Gendelman, and he was well-to-do. He was helping her to look for us. Needless to say, we were very surprised. We never even heard of him. Then my mother remembered that he was a younger cousin of my father's. He left Russia many years ago and did well in America. We wrote and thanked him, of course.

As soon as I received my wedding pictures, I wrote to this cousin and sent him pictures. He wrote thanking us for the pictures and asked what we

wanted for a wedding present. I answered, papers. By then Mother had convinced me that we should all go to the U.S. Cousin David Gendelman sent papers for Harry and me to come to the U.S., as our wedding gift. He was recruiting us for work, Harry as a truck driver and me as an office girl. Eventually we also received papers from a cousin on my mother's side, from Sarah Bregman. She managed to send papers to all seven of us.

However, we received David Gendelman's papers first, and we acted on them. Harry wanted to come to Milwaukee, because he figured that a rich cousin would find it easier to help us then a poor cousin. Sarah Bregman lived in Boston and was of rather modest means. We didn't want to be a burden to anyone. So, we applied for immigration to the U.S. Meanwhile I found out that I was pregnant. We were being cautious not to have a baby yet. We were not ready. We wanted to wait until circumstances were right for us. Now I am of a different mentality, and I don't think that I would have aborted a baby of mine unless it was absolutely necessary. Well, then we were afraid that being pregnant might prevent me from being accepted to come to the U.S.

We both wanted to work and save something for the future, because we had nothing. Everyone we knew seemed to be having abortions. We were of the mentality that children should not be brought into the world when the

parents are completely unprepared. A good friend took me to the doctor that did her abortion. It was a very unpleasant experience. I was sick a few days afterward. I didn't think much about it then, but over the years I have often wondered what my first baby would have been like. I can still fell the loss. At the time it seemed the right thing to do.

Sometime in 1949 we were called in about our papers. Harry and I were among the first from our camp to come to the U.S. They moved us to Cinecita near Rome. We were young, healthy, childless, and had papers with jobs for both of us. While the papers were being processed, the doctors made sure that we were in perfect health by giving us all kinds of tests. In our spare time we visited Cinecita and Rome. Cinecita was like the Italian Hollywood: movies were being made, there was a camp for refugees. We spent a few weeks there. Rome is a beautiful, ancient city, and there was a lot to see. We also visited the Vatican. We even took pictures right on top of the Vatican.

Mother saved every penny that she could. When we received care packages from the relatives, she sold every can, and saved the money. We only ate from the camp kitchen. She managed to save up two-hundred and fifty dollars. This she divided evenly fifty dollars per person. Before leaving

the camp, mother gave us our fifty dollars. So we had some money to go sightseeing.

When Harry proposed to me, I told him that I wanted his parents' blessing. So we wrote to them (I figured that if there was a wife somewhere that Harry forgot to tell me about, his parents would tell me).

We received a nice letter in Yiddish from his mother. His father added his blessings in Romanian. So we kept corresponding with his parents. At this time Harry's mother wrote that she needed medication for her heart, and it was not available in Romania. So we bought it in Rome and mailed it to her. By the time we went on the boat we had seven dollars left. I remember wondering:

"Where will we get a bed? Table? Chairs? Food? Clothes? Dishes? We only have seven dollars." I was scared. I was leaving my mother, sisters, and brother in Italy. I was going with my husband, who still seemed a stranger to me, to relatives who are strangers. For the first time in my life I was going without my family to a strange country across the ocean.

Italy I remember fondly: golden suns, huge silver moons, warm people, beautiful sights. The crossing, that was something else.

Chapter Nine—Our Life In America

We came on a big army boat, the *S.S. Marina Jumper*. It was very kind of President Truman to provide for us free transportation and food. We had papers, but no money to pay for anything. I remember when we came on the boat, they gave every person one dollar bill for spending. I was wondering what to buy with mine. I think that I opted for "twenty Hershey bars. They were five cents apiece then. I don't remember eating them. It was a beautiful day at the end of October. The Mediterranean Sea was calm, tiny little waves caressing the ship. The sun casting a golden shine on the ripples. We enjoyed the sight from the deck, then went down to our cabins.

They separated the men from the women. I shared a cabin with seven other women. We slept four high, like bunk beds.

After checking out our cabins, we went to the dining room. I remember going up red-carpeted stairs. The dining room also had red carpeting and chandeliers. I thought the room was beautiful. We were served a scrumptious meal, with meat and fresh fruits. I hadn't seen food like that in years. I ate heartily. When we started to leave the dining room I began to feel the motion of the boat.

The ship was approaching the Straits of Gibraltar, where the Atlantic Ocean begins. As soon as the ship was out on the ocean, it was rocking and jumping. As for me, I gave my supper back before I left the dining room. I remember thinking: "That beautiful red carpet." but I was too sick to clean up my mess. Harry took me to the cabin.

The rest of the trip I spent on my back. I never went to the dining-room again. The nights I spent in the cabin, and in the morning Harry came and dragged me out of bed. Sometimes he made my bed, then took me up to the deck. There I laid on a blanket all day. I was too sick to stand up, too sick to eat. I wanted to stay in bed, but we had to observe army rules. We had to get out of bed, make it and leave the cabin. Up on the deck I stayed sick and nauseated during the whole trip. I remember feeling so sick and being so tired of being sick that it probably was the worst time of my life. Harry walked around and helped in the kitchen a little. Sometimes he went to watch movies. A young man I knew from camp was working in the kitchen. When he saw me so sick, he tried to give Harry a lemon or a baked potato for me. Most of the time I ate nothing. In fourteen days I lost so much weight that I looked like a skeleton. My clothes hung on me. There was no end to my misery.

Then one day I overheard some of the passengers talking. They kept saying, "You can see her from here—look, there is the Statue of Liberty!" I pulled myself over to where I could see, and there she was glowing in the morning sun. It felt like a magical feeling suddenly sweeping over me, making me feel good. Gone was the nausea, the sickness, the fear. I stood up and went to the showers. I bathed and washed my hair, and dressed in clean clothes. I felt good and was clean, but the trip made me look so skinny, like my clothes were hanging on bones. I looked so pitiful, like I just came out of a Nazi concentration camp. My relatives felt sorry for me.

Two relatives were waiting for us in the New York harbor station. My Auntie Ida from Philadelphia came to welcome us. So did my mother's cousin, Ray Bregman-Rosenberg, who lived in New York. They did not know each other. They were surprised to find out that they both came to meet us. They met at the desk where we were being paged for them. I'd never met them, either, but of course I knew of them from Mother's stories, and I'd corresponded with both of them. I was under the impression that in America the ladies always dressed up with hats. They were dressed rather casual. In Poland, if a person could afford it, one dressed in hats and fancy clothes. My mother always wore hats—that is, before the war. I had yet to find out that

most people here prefer to dress causally; I still think that it is nice to dress up once in a while. I like to see people dressed up, and it makes me feel good.

All of our paper processing was done in Italy. When we arrived in New York we were free to go with our relatives. They had a short discussion on where we should go. It was decided that we should go with Cousin Ray for one week's stay in New York, after which we would go to Philadelphia and spend a week there. After that we could continue to our destination to Milwaukee.

Ray lived in Brooklyn with her husband Bob and four children: Helen, Fay, Ray, and Aaron. Their apartment was not very big. In order to accommodate us, they parceled their two boys out to sleep at a friend's house. We slept in their bedroom. I was surprised at that, too. Mother told me that Ray was a beauty who married an older man who was wealthy. They weren't poor, either. They had a nice summer home thirty minutes from New York. Ray and Bob and their children were very nice to us. Bob went to buy food for us. Helen, the oldest, opened her closet and told me to pick out anything that I wanted. I had fun trying on her fancy dresses. We were both twenty-two years old, but she was very tall—and I'm five feet, two inches—so most of her clothes were falling off me. Finally I found a beautiful gray wool suit, belted

jacket and buttoned-down-front skirt. It looked very expensive and lovely on me. So I took it and thanked her.

Roy, the oldest of the boys, took us sightseeing. It was the first time that we'd seen a big department stores. Being just a boy, he thought it funny to have me step on an escalator at Macy's. I almost fell off when it started moving by itself. Going down was even worse. I had never seen an escalator before. It shook me up, but he was laughing his head off. It took me a few years before I ventured on escalators again. I still don't like them and prefer stairs or elevators. We watched ice skating at the Rockefeller Center. We went to Radio City and saw an opera. The Rockettes performed during the evening. The casual look surprised me there, too. On one side of us people were sitting in evening clothes with fancy hats, and on the other side were people in plain clothes—shirts, no jackets. They all seemed comfortable with their dress, and seemed to enjoy the evening.

Ray and her family did their best to help us enjoy the stay in their house. Except one thing: I came from a small-town background. By us, when someone asked you to the table to eat, you politely refused. They kept on asking, and after a few refusals you would agree to come to the table and eat. That was considered good manners and good upbringing. However in the

U.S., most women are on a diet or not hungry, and hostesses ask them to the table … only once. If they refuse, the hostess assumes that that person is either on a diet or not hungry.

Well, I was very hungry, and after that horrible sea crossing, I was very skinny. Ray would ask me if I wanted breakfast, and I would say "No thank you" waiting for her to insist. Well, she didn't. At lunchtime she asked me if she should make me some lunch, and I said not to bother just for me. I waited for the family to sit down to eat, but everyone had different schedules, and I had no idea when they ate. They did sit down to supper. By then I was starving. On the table was hardly any bread, a little piece of butter, few potatoes. Maybe there was meat, but I am not a meat eater. I looked at the bread and butter and thought that I could eat the whole thing by myself, but that would leave nothing for them. I was shy, and I wanted not to burden them, so I said nothing. I stayed hungry.

The only time I ate was on Thanksgiving. I never heard of dieting before. My mother always begged me and paid me to eat. During the war we were starving. I didn't know that the girls wanted to be slender, and ate little bread, butter or potatoes. I didn't know what to think, so I asked Ray if bread was expensive. She said, "Expensive." An apple? "Expensive." I asked her

what food was not expensive. She said that everything was expensive. If she had known how hungry I was and that I was asking these questions because I was trying to figure out what I could possibly eat, she might have told me differently. As it was I was scared that if everything was so expensive, how were we going to feed ourselves?

Daughter Fay was engaged to Sam, and for Thanksgiving they invited the future in-laws. That was our first Thanksgiving experience. They washed the good china and prepared a feast. There was so much food on the table—and everyone was eating—that I ate, too. There was turkey with stuffing, candied sweet potatoes, mashed potatoes, cauliflower, broccoli, all kinds of breads, rolls, pies, cakes. It was a beautiful evening, and I remember it fondly each time Thanksgiving comes around.

Ray's mother, Sara Bregman, was Mother's first cousin. She is the one who sent papers for all seven or us. She lived in Boston. Ray gave us twenty dollars and told us that we can use the money to go to Boston to see her mother or just keep it and go to Milwaukee. Harry didn't feel like traveling anymore and said no to Boston. I remembered that my mother told me that Sara was poor. Well, I thought if Ray is supposed to be rich and she couldn't afford to feed us, it would certainly be a burden for her mother, who was poor.

I didn't want to be a burden to anyone, so we took the twenty dollars and didn't go. As I remember it now, Ray convinced me that I was right, that having us would be too much of a burden for her elderly mother. Nobody told me that she would be insulted and never forgive us.

I felt very comfortable in my auntie's house. Auntie Ida, her husband, and two sons worked hard and lived modestly. They took us around Philadelphia, the Liberty Bell, the historical sites. Auntie gave me a dress and a coat. At their house regular meals were served. There was food on the table. When Auntie served sour cream, she gave everyone a little bowl of it. I always loved sour cream, but even back home, mom would spread it on bread or challah. There never seemed to be enough of it. I was so impressed, a bowl of sour cream all for myself.

At suppertime there were plenty of potatoes on the table. I still was shy about eating. It is hard to change a lifetime habit. When they started taking away the leftover potatoes from the table, I asked Harry in Romanian, what he thought they would do with them. He thought that they might throw them out. So, I asked Auntie what she would do with the potatoes. She wanted to know why I was asking. So I told her that I understood that potatoes are expensive, and if she had no plans for those potatoes, I would like to eat them. Then I

told her about how hungry I was in New York. She made sure to feed me plenty, and she laughed and said that food is not expensive. She took us to the food market and bought a few fruits. I think the fruits were sold off carts right in front of the house. Auntie was involved with Jewish organizations, and she took us to meetings.

Well, the week was over, and it was time to go to Milwaukee. My father's first cousin, Dave Gendelman, who sent us the papers, sent 150 dollars to Auntie for us to take the train to Milwaukee. I seem to remember being picked up in Chicago. Maybe there wasn't a train from Philadelphia to Milwaukee. I have no memories of the train ride. I remember riding in a fancy car from Chicago to Milwaukee. It was a gold-colored Cadillac. Cousin Dave picked us up.

I remember thinking, *ice cream in the winter*? Now I eat ice cream all year round, but then I thought that it was for summer only. Our cousin Dave was very good to us, so was his wife Feigel. I count those months that we stayed at their house among the best times of my life. Dave and Feigel Gendelman had built a big spacious stone duplex in the then-prosperous Jewish neighborhood. They occupied the downstairs and rented the upstairs. Their home was comfortable and elegantly furnished. They put us in their den,

which had a couch that opened up into a double bed. All their friends and relatives came over to meet us. Their house was always filled with company, homemade baked goods and coffee served 'til late in the evening. They had prepared boxes of clothes for us. Everyone was friendly.

They couldn't have been nicer. Feigel acted like a mother to us, making sure that we ate. She also worried about our feelings, always complimenting and encouraging us. Dave too looked out for us, gave us advice. One day we went to a nearby movie, and it was raining when we came out. We thought that we would get wet walking the few blocks home. There was honk from a horn, and when we looked over, there was Dave in his Cadillac. He'd come to pick us up so we wouldn't get wet. We both got jobs with the relatives. Harry started working in Dave's wholesale hardware and home-building business called Century Hardware. He unloaded boxes in the warehouse. I worked as a cashier in Feigel's brother's grocery. I wanted to move into an apartment of our own, but Dave insisted that we stay in their home. He wanted us to save up some money since he took care of all the expenses. We did save up a few hundred dollars. I was comfortable there, but I thought that maybe having longtime company was hard on Feigel.

Meanwhile, my mother, my brother, and both sisters arrived in Boston on their papers. I missed them and cried. Harry promised me that we would save up money and go out once every year to see them. Cousin Dave suggested that they come to Milwaukee to live. He said that he loved family, the more the merrier. He sent money for some of their train tickets, and Harry and I sent some. They all came here. They were not happy in Boston. Cousin Sara had good intentions when she brought them, but she couldn't do much for them. My brother wrote to me that if he ever met Columbus in person, he would punch him in the mouth.

We lived in Dave's and Feigel's beautiful home, and were treated like treasured relatives. Yitzchak came to live with us in the spare bedroom. Riva stayed with cousins Rita and Sam Feldman. They treated her good, too. Mother, Malka—pregnant with child, her husband, and daughter Michelle were put with Dave's sister Chaika. She was married to a very mean man. They lived in an old house in the black neighborhood. He charged my relatives rent for being in his house and then refused to give them heat. He gave them nothing but grief. They were freezing that first winter in Milwaukee. No one bought them anything. They decided that because Malka was only eighteen and pregnant with her second child, they would not help

her. They liked the fact that Harry and I had no children. We talked over the situation and decided to try and rent a big flat so we could all live together and share in the expenses.

In 1950 it was hard to find a job or a place to rent. No one would rent us a place because of Malka's children. Finally Dave decided that we should buy a house. He found a big old duplex on 1634 West Wright Street and bought it. He wrote a check for the down payment and guaranteed the mortgage payments. He put the title to the house in Yitzchak's and future spouse's, and Harry's and my names. I thought that he should have put Malka's and Riva's names also on the title. Dave explained that it was not an inheritance. He wanted us to be responsible for maintaining the duplex and paying the mortgage, also to pay him back his down payment. The down payment was 1,800 dollars, so Harry's and my share was 900 dollars. I remember at the time I was very worried: First, where would we get money to pay back the down payment? And second, I thought that we were not being fair to Riva and Malka. Who would help them to buy a house?

Dave yelled at me and told me to keep my thoughts to myself because I didn't understand business. I guess he thought that we were more likely to pay him his money back, and he was afraid to take a chance on the others. When I

think about it now, I am sorry that we didn't put mother's name on it, and us just be co-signers. We all had nothing then, and this house seemed like a big deal. Mother wanted a house of her own, but I didn't see how I could help her. I had nothing and was afraid of being responsible for bills.

While living in Dave's house, Harry and I saved up some money, and soon we gave him our share of the down payment. He took the money and used it to remodel the downstairs apartment of our duplex into two apartments, adding a full bathroom. I remember worrying again that we owed him money. Well, we rented the two downstairs apartments, and the whole family moved into the upstairs apartment. The biggest sunniest bedroom we gave to Malka, Sammy, and their two children. Harry and I had one bedroom, Yitzchak one, and mother shared one with Riva. There was a big kitchen, dining room, living room, and a porch. To pay the mortgage we decided that Malka should pay thirty dollars a month, Yitzchak forty, and Harry and I forty. We figured we should pay more because the house would be ours. I remember Dave yelled at me again. He maintained that we should charge Malka more because they are renters and there are four of them. I refused to charge her more, and I felt guilty that she was not a full owner like us. My mother was a very idealistic person, and she promised Malka before they

came to the U.S. that she will get the most help because she has small children. But it didn't turn out that way, and I could do nothing to change it except feel bad.

Malka was very bitter—she was nineteen years old with a husband and two little kids, and instead of helping her I criticized her. She blamed me because they all treated me so nice, and she picked fights with me. I am not really sure if I was a little selfish and self-centered. I think to survive in this world we are born a little selfish. All I know is that I honestly tried to be a good sister and a good daughter to the best of my ability. If I failed on both counts, it's because I didn't know better in spite of constantly trying.

Harry was working for Dave Gendelman, I still worked in the grocery. Yitzchak got a job as a Hebrew teacher, Sammy, Malka's husband, got a job as a bookkeeper. Riva went to Philadelphia to stay with Auntie Ida. Mother stayed home and helped all of us, and Malka took care of her children. We fought a lot, but I remember those times fondly: all of us together on the porch, or outside on a blanket in the shade of the big tree in the backyard. We went to the park and to the beach together.

Harry and I decided to have a baby, and on March 11, 1951, our Rosie was born. We all felt cramped in that one apartment. Malka and Sammy saved

up enough money and bought a duplex of their own. Soon after that, Harry and I gave notice to one of the tenants in the downstairs apartments and we moved in. We bought a carpet and new living-room furniture. The kitchen set was second-hand and so was the bedroom furniture. We bought a new refrigerator, washing machine, and dryer. When I worked, we saved my money separately, and that money went for the labor-saving appliances.

Rosie was a gorgeous, blond, pink-cheeked baby. For her first birthday we made a big party and invited all the relatives and friends. Riva met her husband Jack Estreicher in Philadelphia. She returned briefly to be married in Milwaukee and went to live in Philadelphia. Yitzchak married Rose, whom he knew from camp. She lived in New York. After Malka and I moved out of the upstairs apartment, Riva and Jack returned to Milwaukee and moved in with Yitzchak and Mother. Eventually Yitzchak moved downstairs into the other apartment, so that the whole house was occupied by family.

Harry was not happy with the job that he had. He worked in the warehouse, heavy lifting, freezing in winter and boiling in the summer. When he asked for a job inside the store or office, he was told that the job he was doing was the only available job. Seeing no chance for advancement, Harry quit his job at Dave's. When the Korean War came in 1951, Cousin Dave

raised Harry's wages to 100 dollars a week. That was a nice wage at that time. Harry was previously making only about 45 dollars a week. Dave was worried that wages would be frozen and he would not be able to give Harry a raise, that's why he doubled his wages. Dave was surprised when I was not elated with the raise. I guess that I never cared that much about money, as long as we had enough to pay our bills, I always managed to live on whatever we made, and saved a little, too.

Dave was shocked when Harry quit and he sent people to me to try and convince him to go back. But Harry never went back. He got himself a job in a factory that very same day. I didn't try to persuade him otherwise. Harry wasn't happy in that factory. The coworkers made too many anti-Semitic cracks. He had an accident and burned his hand. So, he quit that job and got a job in a box factory. Meanwhile Jack and Riva opened up a small grocery, Harry decided that he wanted a grocery, too.

His stomach ulcers gave him trouble, he was sick and in pain a lot of the time. He figured that if we bought a grocery, I could run it when he wasn't feeling well, and he could lie down. Well, we bought a small grocery on 10th and Meinecke. There were a couple of rooms behind it, and we moved in. We tried hard to save our money, and saved up 1,600 dollars. When we first

negotiated to buy the grocery, the owners told us that our money was enough. After we moved in and took the inventory, we found that we needed 4,500 dollars. We called Cousin Dave and told him that we had to move back out because we didn't have the money to buy that store. He came right over and talked with the sellers. He gave them a check for 1,000 dollars of his money plus our 1,600, and the rest he arranged for us to pay out at 150 dollars a month. We worked hard, and before long we paid all the money back, including Dave's 1,000 dollars.

When we bought the store, I was pregnant with our dear Lisa. I was big with child while waiting on customers. I could not reach the high shelves, but the customers were always helpful. Most of the customers were black. They were very nice and friendly people. Our store was a little corner store, shelves from floor to ceiling. It was not self-service, I had to give them each item. Had to bend low for some, or reach high with a stick with a handle on it. I often asked some big tall black customer to reach something for me and they were happy to oblige. I was never afraid when I was alone in the store, I trusted them completely. Lisa was born on April 20, 1954, a big beautiful baby at eight pounds and twelve ounces and twenty-one inches long. She also had perfect features. People who came into the store told me that I should send my

children's pictures to advertising agencies, that they were cuter then the Gerber babies. Both girls were very pretty, but I had no time to make models out of them. I was busy in the store, and Harry was sick a lot.

After we paid back all the money that we owed, Harry wanted to buy a car. At first we considered buying a used car, but when we told Dave, he didn't let us. He came over again and wrote a check for a down payment on a new car. Then he cosigned for the payments on the car. We bought a green 1954 new Chevrolet. By the way, speaking of Cousin Dave, when we moved from one place to another, he provided us with trucks and men to help us. Feigel, his wife, came first and hung curtains. Dave made sure to put together the beds, so we would have a place to sleep. Because Dave and Feigel cared for and protected us, we never bought a house or business alone. When Lisa was a few months old, I learned how to drive.

* * *

I am writing after an interruption. It has been quite a few years since I wrote last. We were very proud of that old green car. I am seventy years old now in two months, and what I remember is the young man (eighteen) who taught me to drive. I had trouble driving in the city, so he took me out among

trees in the country. The beautiful scenery relaxed me, and I enjoyed my driving. I got my license on the third try.

When my mother babysat with my children, I liked to go shopping on 3rd Street. There were little shops with many sales on nice clothing. They are all gone now. Life in the store was very hard. Harry was sick a lot. Hospitalized a few times with bleeding ulcers. When he felt better, he liked to go visiting his friend (the grocer) a block away. Meanwhile I was left alone in the store with two small children. Sometimes they were not fed or bathed on time. I had a schoolgirl play with them when she could come. My mother came often to help. I had to wait on the customers in the store and could not worry about meals for us. Mother would come in the afternoon and see me being dizzy. When she asked me if I'd eaten, I realized that I hadn't eaten at all. I was dizzy and skinny. Mother cooked and we ate.

The furnace in that store was a coal furnace. Someone had to get up early in the morning and fill it with coal and get it going. With Harry sick and me doing the other things, we were cold a lot. In the summer we melted. I remember being soaking wet from sweat while waiting on customers. The place was overrun with mice and rats of all sizes. When we sat down in the kitchen to eat, they were running under the table. Every night we set out traps

for the rats, and in the morning I scooped them up and threw them in the garbage. We tried buying a cat, but the cats died on us. After three tries, we gave up on cats. Next door to us lived a white woman in a little house with eighteen children. Rosie played with them, and one day she told me that she wants to go to live with them. She must have felt neglected. What could I do? I also had cleaning and laundry. I was worried about the Korean War. We were citizens by then, and I was afraid that they would call Harry into the army, and he might get killed, and then I would be permanently alone. My mother tried to help, but it was very hard. And I cried a lot.

Across the street from us was Lee School. Every day the children would line up in front of the building to go into school. One day Rosie ran away from home (she wasn't allowed to cross the street by herself) to school. She lined up with the kids to go in. They sent her home. Children age four and older could start kindergarten. I managed to enroll her in kindergarten—she was still only three. I bought her a cute little skirt, sweater, red jumper with a white blouse. She looked like a little doll with her golden curls. She didn't like school at first, but I told her that if she didn't go to school I would take the cute clothes back. She loved the clothes, so she stayed. She was too young and her little fingers could not handle scissors, buttons, etc.

The majority of the children were black. There were only two white children in that class. The black majority discriminated against the two little white girls. I tried to be nice to them so they would be nice to my little girl. The teacher told me that I should move so my children could go to a school with white children, where they would get better treatment. We started to think about moving.

One day Harry told me that he was bringing his parents from Israel. They were already on the boat and coming to Milwaukee. I didn't know my in-laws and worried if they would like me, if they were troublemakers. What they expected from us. We worked hard and had very little. I resented the fact that he didn't ask my opinion before he made papers for them. I didn't sleep the remaining nights until they came. I wanted them to like me. When they arrived, I wanted to close the store for a few hours and go with Harry and the children to bring them, but he said I should stay in the store and keep it open. He went by himself to welcome them. As it turned out, I need not have worried—they were nice people, and I think that they liked me. They believed in me more then I believed in myself. At about that time my sister Malka and her husband bought a duplex on Villard Street. They liked their home and persuaded us to buy a house close to them. They even made the deal for us.

I am glad that they came and that I had a chance to know them. I became fond of Harry's mother—she was cultured and pleasant to talk to. The children didn't get too attached because they could not communicate without language. When they left, we had a farewell party and a birthday party. Lisa was four years old and Rosie was seven. We made movies of the occasion, but the film didn't hold up. Harry's parents loved the girls but only showed it with gestures.

We moved to 81st and Villard, three houses away from Malka, and Riva bought a duplex across the street from us. Yitzchak bought a four-family brick building on 84th and Capital Drive, and Mother married an older man and moved into his house on 49th and Locust. By this time we each had two children. Yitzchak and Rose had Phillip and David. Harry and I had Rosie and Lisa, Riva and Jack had Blossom and Michael, and Malka and Sammy had Michele and Charles. We had some good times, we visited each other. We went to dances together, night clubs, to the beach. Malka and I had tanning contests to see who could get more tan, soonest. Malka was blossoming. She was very pretty in her twenties and lots of fun. I couldn't keep up with her energy. The kids went to Grantosa School and played together. Rosie and Lisa were so pretty, like two dolls.

Like I said, I started writing my story so my children and grandchildren would know what our life was like. I see no point in continuing. I tried to write mostly about me. My brother and my sisters have their stories.

—end of story

It was a new house just built. We rented it to nice people for the time being. Then considering all the circumstances, we decided to give notice to the downstairs tenants and move in there. We put in new carpeting and new furniture and moved in. We gave the grocery store to Harry's parents and they moved into the apartment that came with it. We bought another little grocery on 9th and North Avenue for ourselves. Harry's parents didn't like it here. They were too old to learn English. They couldn't take care of the store. They wanted us to buy a bigger store and bring his sister and family from Israel. They expected their son-in-law, Harry's father, Harry, and me to run the store. I had two little girls to raise and said so. They thought that Harry's mother could raise the kids. She was 70 years old and didn't speak a word of English. I said no.

They didn't want to consider that their daughter and her husband run a small store like we did. They said that this was no life for her. They were surprised that we were not rich. I had written to them and told them how hard life was for us, but they said that they didn't believe me. Well, now they did believe me. They stayed two years and went back to Israel. The store was run out of business a few months before they left.