

Professor Lipman's speech in Görlitz

Memories of a lost childhood: the German occupation of Poland in World War II from the perspective of a Jewish child



**A speech made on February 15th, 2007 in the Apollo cinema
auditorium at Görlitz, Saxony, within the context of the
association of the Görlitz synagogue**

Memories of a lost childhood: the German occupation of Poland in World War II from the perspective of a Jewish child

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Ladies and gentlemen,

This is like a miracle. I can hardly believe it: - myself, who was threatened by the death sentence of the Germans for ever and ever I am sitting here now and in your company and I am going to tell you precisely how the Germans annihilated the people I stem from, the Jewish people. The Germans, the most cultured and sophisticated people of Europe at that time, were blinded by Hitler's ideology. Unfortunately they totally succeeded in doing these deadly deeds. These crimes were committed by normal people, such as us, normal fathers, brothers, husbands, uncles, nephews, brothers-in-law etc. Wearing the uniform they became brutalized murderers of innocent and defenceless children, old people, women and men.

Unfortunately, I am entitled to think and speak like that about this terrible time. These experiences caused a deep rift in my life. Flight and expulsion was quite bad for Germans. But we were being exterminated, the SHOAH... the holocaust of six million Jews!

I was a subhuman creature according to the Munich Agreement and the Final Solution of the Jews; nevertheless I fell in love with a German woman and got married to her. Despite my inhumane experiences during the German occupation I never stopped believing in the good of man and its victory over evil.

It is hard for me to talk about these terrible events in front of Germans, for, it might be that even your near-relatives were involved in genocide.

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You can easily say that the whole of Germany took part in this “infernally dance”. War broke out Sept. 1st, 1939. In July I had grown to be eight years old and had finished the first class of school. We had been preparing for the war for weeks. We painted all the rooms and all those spaces left in the house and had bought supplies: - two sacks of flour and a sack of groats. The most important thing however was to build an air raid shelter for us in the garden. That was an L-shaped trench, 3.5 metres deep and 10 metres long, covered with wooden beams and a layer of earth, one metre thick.

On the radio they said that the Germans would not get anything from us. We listened to soldier songs on the radio and learnt how to make a home-made gas mask. Within a few weeks we were already prepared for war!

The Germans marched into our town at the end of September having come from Slovakia. That was a stone's throw away from us; nobody had expected them to enter from this part of the country, i.e. from south-east.

The German troops only once marched down our street past our house.

The soldiers wore regular uniforms and well-tended horse-drawn carts pulled big cannons behind them. Two officers and an ADC (aide-de-camp) were housed with us. They were polite and no doubt knew that we were Jews.

The whole day long they were away and came back in a small military vehicle in the evening. They always had rolled-up maps or drawings with them.

The ADC guarded the officers' room on the first floor, he cleaned their car which was covered with mud despite the good weather. Father was of the opinion that they recorded the oil-wells, the refineries and further installations.

After ten days they tacitly departed in the evening.

Early in the morning Soviet reconnaissance tanks had already taken up position in our street. The Soviet soldiers were sitting on their armoured vehicles and were smiling happily at passers-by and children. They wore strange uniforms.

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Their clothing seemed to be sewn together from blankets; to our great surprise the belts and the shoes with high legs were made of canvas and not of leather. Their pointed caps were studded with two stars, one on top of the other. The bigger one was made of cloth and the other was a metal one. Both were red. On the metal one hammer and sickle were represented.

From that time onwards those stars of different sizes always accompanied us everywhere, on the street, at school, in the cinema, and on any other occasion. Additionally, portraits of Stalin, Lenin, Marx and Engels were added. As a civil engineer father had a construction firm and a sawmill. According to the understanding of the Soviet authorities our family belonged to the bourgeoisie. To this class also belonged the owner of the jeweller's shop, the owner of the clothing shop, the owner of the shoe shop and so on. Our whole possessions were nationalized and we were on the point of being banished to Siberia as was the saying then. Life was very hard. There was nothing at all, neither shops nor merchandise. The shops called "Konsum" were established in the villas and houses of the former owners who had been jailed or banished to the interior of the Soviet state. It was difficult to get basic food. One was queueing up for bread for hours. The hallmark of Soviet power was propaganda and canteen food, at school, at the working place; the smell of hot food stalls was everywhere. The foods mainly came from the vegetable gardens near the house. The nuisance with Soviet power lasted till June, 1941.

Outbreak of the war between the Soviet Union and Germany,

June 21st, 1941

The Russians, who had occupied our area, were hit by this war like a bolt from the blue! The Russian population precipitately fled the town, finally the military forces also fled the town - not without having destroyed the power station, the

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railway station and a part of the oil industry. Boryslaw was no man's land for some days. The Germans entered the town during the last days of June. Few military personnel could be seen but the town was swarming with all kinds of police (police force, mounted police, CID – officers (Criminal Investigation Department), Gestapo (secret state police), SS-commandos). Our area was called East-Galicia and allocated to the general government (Generalgouvernement).

The German authorities allowed the Ukrainians, already after a week, to commit the first pogrom against the Jews as a revenge for the massacre committed on the prisoners of the people's commissariat for interior affairs (NKWD). Roughly 240 men and some women had been murdered. The German authorities continued imposing more and more severe restrictions directed against the Jewish population. Frequent searches were carried out during which on some occasions valuable objects were stolen such as gold, silver, Kilims (woven carpets from Turkey) carpets, expensive furs, paintings and furniture. Numerous policemen were part of a gang and they were roaming through and stealing from Jewish houses night and day. It was ordered to immediately hand over all radios, cameras, bicycles, motorbikes and other vehicles, horses and livestock. It was also ordered that Jews were merely allowed to use the roadway and they had to greet the Germans as "gnejdige Herr" (gracious master) by taking off their caps. An order was given to wear an arm-band with the star of David on it. Shortly prior to that, a curfew was introduced lasting from 8 p.m. till 5 a.m. . This was taken extremely serious by everyone as even a slight violation of that time span ensued high sums of money as a fine or even capital punishment was imminent. The mounted police had distinguished themselves in this respect. At that time a Jewish council and a service of order convened. Still in July the Germans put two plans into action (2nd and 3rd pogrom). In the course of those pogroms 1500 children, women and old people were murdered. They were shot next to the

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slaughterhouse. At that time a new police unit was being built up, the "Ukrainian auxiliary police" whose way of proceeding was particularly brutal and bloody.

They formed a Jewish quarter at lightning speed out of two small and poor districts of Boryslaw, named Debry and Nowy Swiat. This part of the town was located between slag heaps being a follow-up product of ozokerite mining (paraffin wax) and in a huge inundation area formed by the mining mud. The houses there had no sewerage installations, no electricity and no gas for heating. They simply were hovels. You could freely move between the Jewish quarter and the Aryan quarters, there was one restriction however, you weren't allowed to enter Aryan Shops or enter buildings on which was written: - "Entrance for Jews forbidden". Being able to freely leave the Jewish quarter was a great advantage because one could buy a piece of bread, some potatoes, a piece of bacon or saccharin or you could exchange something for something else. Much sought-after was molasses, a by-product of sugar production. Buying by weight was no longer customary but only by piece or by litre. Cereal crop was in great demand as well as wheat and rye. Corn was ground in a coffee grinder to get flour, then cooked up to be a thick broth; on the plate this broth was covered by molasses or greaves were spread on it — that tasted delicious.

But these sort of 'treats' came to an end quickly, all this had only lasted for a short time. One morning, at about 5 a.m., we heard screams, weeping, shouting, calling ... orders and calling in German: - come on, quick, damned Jew, you bastard of a Jew! Just in case, we went to the hiding place which we had built directly after we had moved into the quarter. Father was an experienced construction expert and he easily found a suitable space. The action (4th pogrom) lasted a whole week. We stayed in the hiding place the whole time without drinking nor having food.

The worst thing was having nothing to drink. I chewed a handkerchief, later on I

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sucked on it. This replaced water. We didn't miss food at all. You didn't need it at all. About seven days later, there was complete silence, on the street and everywhere. This encouraged us to leave the hiding place.

In the ghetto

On the streets you could only see individual people walking by themselves, unlike what it used to be. On the street, in a distance, there was a barrier with a little house at the side. Some Germans and Ukrainian policemen were standing there. Our house was the second one after the barrier. We realised straight away that a ghetto had come into existence. Now we were encircled and no contact with the Aryan quarter nor with Aryans was allowed. When leaving the ghetto to get to work it was only possible to leave in a group and when being an individual person only with the help of special papers. Those people working on the Aryan side kept supplying the ghetto with all the necessary things. My father was one of those suppliers. We lived in two small rooms with a kitchen whose terrible smoke filled the whole lodging. The chimney had no opening at all. Father noticed that the previous tenant, an Aryan, had played a trick on us by putting some buckets full of earth and building rubble into the chimneystack. No doubt he was no friend of the Jews!

Apart from the three of us some other persons lived in the flat: my father's brother, a dentist, with his wife and their six-year-old son. My father's brother ran a dentist's office. As long as Aryan patients could come he was quite well off. They mostly paid in kind, i.e. in food stuff. That came to an end when the ghetto was established. I remember a German patient coming to the dentist's; he was a policeman employed at the mounted police. My uncle gave him some dental treatment. In the end the German demanded that on top of his free treatment, he was also sown some horse riding pants with leather trimmings. His wish had to be fulfilled without any compensation.

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Life in the ghetto slowly became hell. When autumn and winter came, rain and frost arrived, and temperatures dropped to minus 15 degrees and even to minus 25 degrees all of which created a devastating and gaping void. Foods and fuel for heating were almost completely missing. Everything eatable or combustible had been eaten or burnt. Tuberculosis, typhus fever and starvation were rampant. On buildings in which people infected with typhus fever lived, a notice of warning could be seen saying "Fleckfieber". When you watched such a house from the outside, it seemed as if the house itself had fallen ill as well: dark windows, closed doors, silence all around and a terrible emptiness. From such a house death was emanating into the outside world. Gravediggers pushed the hearses with their own hands, sometimes a whole family was carried by them. They pushed their hearses down our street several times a day. The most terrible sight however were the children, being on the fringe of society they were begging with subdued voices in their Yiddish language: - lady, give me something to eat, I surely will pray for you. I will never forget this pleading to the day I die.

Illnesses , hunger, and death were the order of the day. Additionally, there were raids on the streets, in the houses, pogroms and the transporting away of hundreds of people. Those Jews who had been caught were herded together in a former cinema until a considerable number of them had come together. Then, the whole group was taken to Belzec or to the Branicki-forests to be exterminated. My family became smaller.

The first one to be murdered was my uncle, my father's brother-in-law. He didn't want to hide out because he had served in the German army during World War I and had been decorated with the medal of the Iron Cross. He showed this Cross to the Germans and addressed them as "comrades". They threw the Cross on the ground and gave him a hard kick. They said that they had lost World War I because of such Jews like him. They put him on a truck. He died near the

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slaughterhouse. The next to be murdered was aunt Eścia, my mother's sister, and both of her daughters. Other victims, one after the other, were my father's mother, grandma Rebeka, Aunt Lusia, my uncle's wife (the uncle who was a dentist) and her son Tusiek lost their lives almost at the same time. Now the deadly rampage picked up speed. In Lwów (Lemberg), my mother's two brothers died, Leon and Mojżesz, together with their wives and cousin Mirka, being a pupil at grammar school. In Starzawa, my mother's mother, our grandma, was killed as well as uncle Jakub, my mother's brother, his wife and their three children: Manek, Zosia and Lola. Manek had passed his Abitur just before the war broke out. This family was shot on the ground of their own quarry. Not far from the town of Turka another brother of my mother's, Lejzor, was shot, together with his wife and two daughters. And so the whole of my mother's close family, named Gottlieb, was obliterated. My father's family was also heavily decimated during numerous pogroms which occurred more and more frequently and lasted longer and longer. SS-commandos from Lwow and Drohobycz came in support of those pogroms.

In the ghetto, fewer and fewer people could be found and the whole situation became very dangerous. The uncle, the dentist, moved out because a flat was unoccupied on the opposite side of the street. Some days later his wife and son paid for this move with their lives, they were beaten to death. Immediately after the marching in of the Germans, father was sent to work at the sawmill that he had owned before the war. The sawmill was nationalized (state-owned sawmill) and he worked in three shifts. Much wood was sent to Germany. A certain Felsmann was the sawmill's boss, a German from Danzig (Gdansk). But in principle, my father, as the one responsible for cutting wood, he ran the whole production of the mill. Jews were not paid in cash. They got their wages in kind, i.e. natural produce: bread, oil, groats, etc. Father ran the sawmill in such a

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way that a part of the profits was pocketed by the boss. The boss gave father much free play, also with the choice of workers. So father employed many Jews and I was one of them. That was a true relief for me. I didn't have to sit in the ghetto and await death. I didn't return to the ghetto at night where they kept hunting for children, women and old people. I slept in the carpentry in a big box, on wood shavings and sawdust. Me staying overnight was allowed by the boss himself. My father thanked the boss by giving him expensive paintings from his collection which he had given to an ukrainian family with whom we were friends for safekeeping.

This fortunate situation kept going on for one year. But then Felsmann was recalled from the sawmill and conscripted. They said that he was employing too many Jews, for the Gestapo kept asking for Jewish workers but Felsmann told them they were indispensable experts to him.

The next boss of the sawmill was a true Bavarian who was also very much dependent on my father's help. He handed over a part of the Jewish workers to the Gestapo and had a clear conscience in doing so. He kept running around carrying a double-barrelled gun and a whip and dispersed the cigarette-smoking workers by using his whip or he shot at crows because these birds dirtied boards and beams. Myself and an elderly Jew worked on the cleaning and tidying up of the space on which the finished products were stored. We had to get rid of all the birds shot by him. My working mate had doubts about the question whether it was alright to bury the birds instead of cooking and eating them. As quickly as the boss had come to us, just as quickly had he disappeared again. He took everything he could carry from the flat with him. Father had built the flat together with the office building on the premises of the sawmill. Before the war, the book-keeper and his wife had lived there. The flat was comfortably furnished.

Now a professional officer became boss; he had the rank of a captain. He was an

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invalid. His forearm up to the elbow was missing. He was tall and slender. He treated everybody objectively and coolly. Father was eavesdropping on him when he frequently talked with the Gestapo and the police. It was always about Jewish affairs. At any rate, I left the sawmill and turned up in the ghetto again and found myself more and more often in the hiding place with my mother. When someone knocked on the door we hid at once. Finally my uncle, the dentist, who worked exclusively for the Germans, suggested that we should hide in his cellar. That was quite a safe place as German patients were constantly present there. This uncle must have known something, for, towards morning, a terrible "Aktion" started which emptied the ghetto. We hid in a small dark cellar without windows except for one which was filled in. We were 13 persons. When you lighted candles, they went out shortly after because the air contained too much carbon dioxide. Some persons got a fit of madness. On top of this, uncle's dog returned which he had given to an Aryan family. It started to dig out the camouflaged window and kept running to the street and back again as if it wanted to show that somebody was in the cellar. The dog had come to a bad and tragic end. It was lured to a different window in a different room and was strangled by two men. I will never forget the return back home after this pogrom. We had to cross the whole ghetto. It was late autumn, dark and very windy. We didn't encounter any living soul. All around there was only the creaking of open doors and windows out of which the panes broke into pieces when falling on the ground. This emptiness and the noise were like a yawning abyss. Not only were we tired by this action but probably so were the Germans, for, in the ghetto, there reigned silence.

That was indeed the calm before the last storm. Those men belonging to the oil industry and those in the timber production and the so-called other experts were quartered in barracks. So was my father, in a labour camp for Jews. Once or

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twice a week he came into the ghetto. He brought some portions of saved bread with him, some potatoes, some margarine or linseed oil. At that moment I was always glad to have been given all this. There was quite a real joy at home. But I can't remember these joyful moments. It seems to me as if I can't remember whether there was sunshine, at least once, no doubt there was none, never!

At that time I was once outside on the street with my mother, near the house. Suddenly, people started running and in doing so shouted: - the Germans will catch you, they will catch you... . We ran into our yard and towards the entrance door. But it was locked from the inside which had never happened before. Who had locked it, when and why? Fortunately, there was also a key for the wooden shed which had been fixed to the bunch of keys belonging to the flat. I opened the door of the shed as fast as I could and pushed mother in, shut the door behind her using a lock and swiftly ran to the backside of the house and then further along the spots and corners I knew well until I turned up again at the outskirts of the Aryan quarter. And here, all of a sudden, something like a huge memorial materialized in front of me, it was someone of the mounted police. He drove me towards the ghetto using his horse for this purpose. I was so alarmed and shocked that I reacted to the shouts of the policeman by shouting myself. – 'I am not a Jew!' 'I am not a Jew!' At that moment, Ukrainian boys came to help me, they were tending cows near us, they shouted in Ukrainian: - 'He is no Jew.' 'Come to us!' After these calls the German slowly went away from me. The Lord himself had sent these boys! After a while I ran to my father in the sawmill without being bothered any further by anyone. But what had happened to my mother? The next evening, when everything had calmed down, father sneaked into the ghetto. When he saw that our shed had been untouched – the locks of all the other sheds had been forced open and the doors were open - he at once let mother out of it. She was safe and sound and so were another three persons, too, who had

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slipped in at that time when I had opened the shed. In the heat of the moment, this had completely escaped my attention. I did not remember anything. Mother told father how lucky she had been. The Germans opened one shed after the other. When they got to ours, someone shouted in one of the other sheds: - 'Franz, where is the lamp?' And the one near our shed went away, returned after a while, once knocked upon our lock and were going to open the next and last shed. Isn't your fate in God's hands or is it pure luck? After this incidence with the police, I stayed with father in the camp. Mother stayed alone in the house in the ghetto. One evening two officers of the police force arrived at the house. They wanted to take her to the assembly point. Mother asked them to release her and she offered them valuable objects which she had hidden outside; but first she wanted to make tea for them. She went into the kitchen and started bustling about. She opened the barred window, squeezed quite miraculously through the bars and jumped out of the window. That was a small miracle. Mother escaped from the house running towards the Aryan side. She knew the secret crossing and the exits out of the ghetto. She found a hiding place with our pre-war neighbours, a Ukrainian family who had then been our last hope of salvation during the first pogroms and on whom we could count at any time!

Labor camp for Jews and hiding places

In June 1943, the ghetto was closed for good. Now the Germans constantly searched the camp. They were looking for families of officially working Jews hiding in the camp and arrested them. Father secretly took me to my mother who hid with our Ukrainian friends. The hiding place was behind a haystack, in the attic of the cowshed. There was another hiding place in the entrance area of this stable where the chaff-cutter was stored. There was a small cellar for turnips into which led a trapdoor which had to be lifted. Someone had to let us into the cellar by closing the trapdoor behind us. The cellar was so low and small

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that you had to crawl into it on your belly or on your back. You had to remain in this position the whole time, from 5 a.m. to 5 p.m., for at this time the farmer's wife came in to milk the cows. She let us get out from the cellar and gave us something to eat. We could wash our hands and faces and off we went back into the small cellar, once on our backs, the other time on our bellies. We stayed in the cellar during winter time because it was warmer there. During summer we were in the loft. The cowshed had a tin roof. On sunny days it was as hot as in the Sahara. On such days we soaked a sheet in a bucket full of water, wrung the water out of it and wrapped ourselves up. The stay in the loft was much better. I watched birds which flew onto the roof and at the slightest move flew off. I wanted to be a bird and dreamt of flying around outside. I had some more distraction. I watched spiders making their cobwebs, how they caught flies, sucked them dry and threw the remainder out of the webs. Me too, I caught flies and threw them into the spider's web. The spiders were interested in those flies and ate them. Sometimes the fly was catapulted out of the web and escaped. I prevented their flying away and tore off their wings and sometimes their legs. Then I watched the birth of mice and observed their childhood.

Thus, seven months had passed. During that time father came to see us several times. As Jews had been caught, not far from our hiding place, our benefactors moved us to a barn in the field. That was safer for our landlord and landlady because we could have taken refuge there ourselves without them knowing it.

Father took me with him "for relaxation" when it was relatively quiet in the camp. On the area of the camp there was a manufacturing facility for the production of shovels. The works manager of this company was one of my father's acquaintances and at his request he employed me to do the job of

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sharpening the shovels. The worst thing to do was walking around in the camp without working on anything, the more so when being a child whose destiny was endangered. I slept in the upper plank bed together with my father. The camp was plagued by bugs and lice. In the camp there was a room for bathing and delousing which I loved using. Father developed a method of getting rid of at least a part of the lice by putting a freshly laundered handkerchief under the shirt on the shoulder. After about 20 minutes, the handkerchief was full of lice. Now you had to take it out and shake it, it would be best if it were over a blazing flame. I had a method of my own to rid my plank bed from lice. I put a burning candle near the joints of the bed and the scorched lice dropped down like water from the tap.

Once a whole detachment of Gestapo men caught me on their night round. I hadn't noticed how they had come in. Father petrified and was totally horror-stricken. They were watching me for a while and then they said: - 'You do it quite well, go on'. After work, we had a soup of swede turnips with cabbage and one eighth of a bread of 2 kilogrammes, i.e. exactly 250 grammes.

Autumn was setting in. Some Ukrainian gendarmes came to the workshop to select some boys, including me. After nearly an hour of waiting during which time different things went through my mind, we got to know that we had been planned out for putting up potato clamps. The ditches for them had already been dug out, roughly 20 metres long, 3 metres wide and 1 metre deep. We covered the soil and the side walls with straw to such an extent as the ditch was filled with potatoes. Then the whole of it was covered with straw and on top of it we spread the dug out earth. An end to this work was nowhere to be seen. New horses and carts kept coming to us. Work lasted till dusk came and went on for the duration of several weeks. In the meantime we started pinching potatoes by putting them in the trouser legs which we had tied up with a string. We dropped

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the potatoes through holes in the trouser pockets. In each leg of the trousers fitted 8 to 10 potatoes. After work, the Ukrainian watchman forced us to walk to the guard house the act of which was hardly possible. We had to pull down our pants, take out the potatoes and had to go with trousers around our ankles to the guard house where we got 25 lashes of a whip being stretched out on a bench, one after the other. I did not let out a scream, that was probably the reason why I got less lashes. One comrade, who cried at the top of his voice, got a lot more lashes. His screaming clearly increased their pleasure. Potatoes were of great importance to us, both in the ghetto and in the camp. In the ghetto, mother cooked one potato only for me or she baked the potato on the hotplate beside the pot. In the camp, grated potatoes in a thick layer of 15 to 20 millimetres, called gerybenyk, were cooked in a big baking tin. This was a substitute for bread.

The camp was located on the premises of former barracks; about 400 persons had been accommodated there. Most people worked outside the camp, left the camp at 5 a.m. and returned at 5 p.m. All the buildings as well as the stables were occupied. We lived in a huge stable containing about 40 plank beds and a giant stove with a big hotplate, fuelled with wood. In the evenings the stove was permanently used – for cooking, for baking, for drying the wet washing, clothes and shoes etc. There was constant crowding at the stove. I earned money in the camp by manufacturing armbands with the star of David on them. For this purpose my father brought along drawing cardboard and carbon paper. I got hooks and eyes as well as shoelaces from those shoemakers working in the camp. With the help of a stencil I cut out the star of David from Bristol board, put blueprint paper underneath it and a flexible cardboard or Bristol board. All this was covered by colourless celluloid, the emulsion of which had been washed off. All the layers got clipped together by two hooks and finished was the armband. I sold it when walking through all kinds of rooms in the evening. These earnings

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enabled me to buy a sweet bun or a glass of warm milk which I drank on the spot.

Three weeks went by, perhaps a little more. I felt more adult now, but I hadn't grown much, for, all the clothes, shirt, jacket and trousers were still fitting me. Merely the pullover had shrunk a bit and had been singed during delousing. There were only the shoes with which I had difficulties from the first day on after having moved into the Jewish quarter. The first night we were robbed. The bandits did not have much trouble, for almost everything was still wrapped in. We pretended to be sleeping, thus preventing the bandits from attacking us personally. During that incident I lost my only pair of shoes which had space enough to grow into. When working at the sawmill I was allotted wooden shoes. Unfortunately, they were much too big. The joiners stuffed them with chips of wood which were covered with news-papers. It was only then that I livened up again. These shoes were advantageous to me in two respects:

- I had very warm feet in them and they served another very important purpose:
- I was taller. I still wore them for some weeks after the liberation of oppression.

A bad thing happened to my father in the summer of 1943. In the office he overheard a conversation of the sawmill's boss (a captain of the Wehrmacht) with the Gestapo revealing that he, the boss, was inclined to hand over to them all the Jews working in the sawmill. Shortly after that, father went to the boss, his notice in his hands, the reason for it was that he wanted to work in his original profession, i.e. in the construction business. The boss approached my father and gave him a fierce kick in the crotch. Father was knocked down for a moment. The boss was foaming with rage and yelled that he was going to call the police in order to hand him over to them. Father did not think about it any longer, he ran out of the office taking the sawmill's backdoor. He hid with his brother-in-law, a dentist. He stayed in the hiding place for about a week observing whether they

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were looking for him and he tried to get a new job in the oil industry. The uncle procured him all this and after having convinced himself that he wasn't pursued by anyone, my father took up work with the Carpathian oil company whose boss was Berthold Beitz. He always gave a helping hand to the Jewish employees. He prevented the Jews of Boryslaw from being completely exterminated by putting forward the necessity of keeping the oil experts. That was the reason why he was decorated with the medal "Yad Vashem" after the war. From August 1943 onwards, my father was working again.

In late autumn, my mother appeared in the camp. She was quite exhausted by the hiding place in the stable. After some days of relaxation, after delousing and some baths, she got herself back on her feet again. She got work in the camp's kitchen. We were together again, what a stroke of luck! At that time there were no longer any intact families. In the camp, children and women were hardly to be seen.

At the beginning of 1944, Gestapo and the SS-people came into the camp more and more often. The inhabitants felt purely horrified. Now, even the slightest offences ensued corporal punishment, sometimes publicly or by revocation of food rations etc. . The uncle, father's brother, also lived in the barracks and after his wife's death worked in the winter service in a distant district of Boryslaw. When he went to work he took his drill and the necessary instruments for dental treatment with him. He carried all this in a rucksack with him. He gave a part of the earnings or the received food to the watchmen. In exchange for that, they allowed him to rent a room in the Aryan houses and to receive patients. As he encountered different people in this way, he organised a hiding place for all of us.

The situation in the camp became more and more dangerous. It started with the fact that single workers disappeared and then small groups of workers. They

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did not come back to the camp and vanished without leaving a trace. Father sold the last valuable object left to us, a diamond ring of several carats belonging to mother, for about 140 000. That was a considerable sum of money at that time. In March, 1944, we fled the camp by joining a group of Jews who were taken to work to the Aryan side. Late in the evening we entered the house of a Ukrainian family that was willing to grant us shelter for money. Father's brother had obtained this hiding place for us, he was supposed to join us later. After several days in the flat, father built in a "blind" wall in the shed against which he put up rabbit hutches, from the bottom to the ceiling. You got into the hiding place by opening the rear wall which could be folded and which was fixed to the hinges of a rabbit hutch standing on the floor. The hiding place was ideal and well-camouflaged. The inside was comfortable, there were two palliasses on the floor, bedding, and there was free space of about 3 times 1 metre where you were able to "walk" properly. In the hiding place itself it was half-dark. An oil lamp was burning for some hours a day and I was able to study a little. This house was extraordinarily well-equipped with schoolbooks and books for reading. The greatest part of them were those for 5 groschen. Father went outside from time to time, pretendedly to fetch money he had got from someone and with which the hiding place could be paid. We were afraid of telling someone that we had the money on ourselves, for there were cases when those accommodated were robbed and delivered to the Germans or at best they risked being evicted. From time to time our landlady paid a visit to our uncle at the place where he received patients and urged him to join us in the hiding place. He showed persistent hesitancy and put off the moment from one week to the other, in three days he said, and so on. At the end of May or beginning of June, 1944, one day the camp was suddenly liquidated. All those being there were taken to Kraków — Plaszów (Cracow, concentration camp Plaschow). Father's dear brother also came to

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Plaszów and lost his life there. All those who had been taken there were murdered!

Sometime mid-July, our landlady came running to us in broad daylight and was shouting 'utikaj ty nimci idut' which roughly meant 'run away, the Germans are coming'. Without further thinking about it we at once ran outside and were totally blinded by the brightness of the daylight and by the sunlight. After five months that we had passed in almost total darkness, we didn't see anything. After quite a while I first saw a cornfield in the distance and pulled my parents forward in this direction. There we hid until nightfall. It was only later that we realized that we were almost naked. I hadn't managed to put on my wooden shoes. At night, we returned near the house where our hiding place was, we were observing it and its surrounding area. Mother went straight to the house and knocked on a window. The landlady came out and had a sack with our belongings in her hand. Another stay there was out of the question for her. She had bought a plot of land and two cows and had arranged her son's wedding reception in the bride's house. All this she had paid with the money she had received for our accommodation in her house. She didn't need any further money. She was not avaricious; she had fulfilled herself a wish and at the same time had saved our lives. For this reason she should highly be praised. The most important thing is that we are alive. Isn't that a weird experience my father used to say.

On the same night we got to our residential district at Gorny Potok almost running. Somehow we felt at home here. We were sitting in densely grown shrubs, which were in a deep defile between two hills, approximately 3 kilometres away from the next buildings. The following night, mother went to our neighbour in whose house we had hidden. She couldn't make up her mind whether she should take us in or whether she shouldn't. She neither said yes nor

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no. On the same night, mother came back and brought along something to eat and a small pot. Water could be found abundantly as there was a brook at the bottom of the gorge. About two or three weeks passed in this way. We felt good here. The birds were singing. The brook was babbling . It was warm night and day. After a certain time, we heard a strange rumble in the distance and we saw unusual flashes of lightning. Father said that this could be the artillery. The front was approaching. And suddenly, to make matters worse, three German soldiers passed by on the other side, above the gorge, roughly 250 metres away from us. They had shouldered rifles. They were slowly going uphill and were looking in front of their feet without looking back. We were sitting in a dense shrubbery, however the devil is not asleep. After a certain time a shot was fired as if it was on top of the ravine, just above our heads. Luckily this did not happen again so often. In the afternoon again, a German passed by, wearing a metal knapsack. This was recurring for two days. Then there was silence. We still kept quiet. Without food, without having something to drink, we hardly moved and did not know what was happening around us and whether these German soldiers were still near us. After two days of silence, we decided to creep up to the buildings during twilight. We noticed that it was quiet here as it used to be. The blackout was still effective. From time to time some light flashed in the front doors when being opened by someone who came out. Finally, mother dared to go to the neighbour and after quite a while she came back shouting at the top of her voice that we should come nearer, the Soviets were already there! The sowjets had already arrived two days ago. Still on the same evening, we got back to our house. As it turned out, two tenants lived on the ground floor. The first floor was vacant and empty. There were only walls and floors. We were together again in our house, alive and unscathed. We created a sleeping spot out of our personal belongings, but nobody of us was able to fall asleep. Our

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joy left us completely confused, thank heavens the worst thing was over now, we were really free! We still couldn't believe it. But it was true. I always had to convince myself that all this had come true. Only the following morning, after having stayed awake all night and when I went outside, did I start to believe this miracle. This nightmare had taken three years and two months. To us, it seemed like everlastingness. The following days, when I went past my grandma's house, past my uncle's or my aunt's house, which were standing near one another in the same street as ours, I felt a limitless emptiness and a stabbing pain in my heart.

From 18000 Jews, who lived in Boryslaw before the war, about 150 persons survived the persecutions. During the German occupation 38 of our near relatives died and taken into account all the distant relatives, 70 persons died.

The Soviet troops liberated us on August 17th, 1944.

In March 1946 we left Boryslaw. We reached our destination, Lower Silesia, then Friedland (a camp for evacuees). Father said that Moses had led us out of captivity a second time.

At the end of my speech, I'll give you an incomplete list of those German criminals who were active in Boryslaw and whose names I'll keep in my mind forever. They shall be damned for all time:

- Hildebrand of the Gestapo
- Mitas, Gulden, Pell, Nemec of the police force,
- Perec of the Ukrainian auxiliary police.

End of speech

Translated by Gerd-Volker Heym

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