

Partial Autobiography



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To my grandchildren

This book would not have been written were it not for my children and grandchildren's repeated questioning: "What happened 'back there'? What experiences did you have? How did you get out?" Teachers in their schools asked me to come and lecture, but I was hesitant – would I be able to stand up to such a task?

It was not an easy decision to break my code of silence. The painful memories had remained buried deep in my heart for 50 years. I found endless pretexts to avoid talking of my past – perhaps through a belief, however unjustified and naive, that by so doing I was protecting the tender souls of my offspring from any knowledge of the hell my family and I lived through. I rationalized my suppression of the past by claiming that the lives of our young generation here in Israel, notwithstanding the many obvious differences, are already filled with so many problems– wars, traumas, crises and a host of other difficulties - and it would be wrong to add to all that the burden of my own dark memories.

Yet as the years went by, I gradually came to feel exactly the opposite. I understood that in fact it is the duty and obligation of myself and others like me who lived through the horrors of the Holocaust, to pass on to the younger generation the knowledge of what really took place then, before it is too late.

In recent years I felt an increasingly strong need to commit my memories to paper. If I try to understand how this drastic mental change came about – from total suppression to a most powerful urge for disclosure – I can find no answer. It is enough that I feel I have made the right decision.

As for the actual physical task of writing my memoirs, I approached it in fear and trembling. Someone said that after the Holocaust it's hard to write poetry. It seems that prose is not much easier. The human vocabulary is inadequate to describe what happened "back there" and it is worrying to think that perhaps these words written down on paper will represent no more than a pale reflection of the true events. I forced myself to overcome this fear, although it is ever present and real – neither pen nor writer exists that can accurately describe the events we lived through.

Year 1939

After seven years' university study in Italy I returned to my home town of Drohobycz, proudly bearing a degree of Doctor of Medicine, graduating Summa cum Laude. I was in a pessimistic frame of mind. I missed the Italians (and one in particular). I had quite fallen in love with Italy – the beautiful countryside, its breathtaking scenery, the wonderful architecture of the cities, the riches of the museums, the cultural and musical treasures (especially opera at La Scala), and above all those warm, friendly people, guardians of one of Europe's most ancient cultures.

From an early age I was enthralled by the mythology that Prof. Blatt, our Latin teacher, so enthusiastically taught us. My thoughts kept returning to how I could get away once again into the big wide world. But with the Berlin-Rome Treaty already in force, returning to Italy was impossible. No Jewish students had been accepted at universities there for some years. An exception was made for those of us already enrolled, and we were allowed to complete our studies. The lecturers themselves had a positive attitude to us, as evidenced by their granting me, a Jew, "Summa cum Laude" status. Most Italians hated the Germans - I have considerable proof of this – and during the war they helped the Jews. Throughout my stay in Italy I was never confronted with Fascism. It was enough to obey the three "commandments" that were posted on walls in public places: 1) Non sputare (no spitting), 2) Non bestemiaré (no cursing), 3) Di politica non parlare (no talk of politics).

I had planned to go to Switzerland or France to complete my specialization. Yet in my heart I knew this was a pipe dream and my parents would not continue to finance my stay abroad. I was an attractive young woman of marriageable age with a doctor's degree (which so far had only decorative value, but perhaps it would be a good investment for the future) and a house to add to my dowry. From any viewpoint I was considered a "good match" and there was no shortage of suitors.

Rumors of a possible outbreak of war had already begun to spread, but, caught up in my own problems, I didn't take them seriously. This unforgettable Friday, September 1st, 1939, I went into town. It was a sunny day. Suddenly "big black birds" appeared in the blue sky – German bombers. This was the beginning of a tragic and macabre period unparalleled in world history. Concerned about my parents, I immediately ran home.

Together from the balcony, we watched Polmin, the government refinery, go up in flames. The streets of Drohobycz were filled with the retreating Polish army and with civilians escaping to the Romanian border in the south. I would gladly have joined them, but my parents never once considered escaping. All their assets were in real estate; they had no money or valuable possessions. How could they abandon everything they had worked so hard for over so many years? Who could have foreseen what the future would bring?

After some time, and for a short period, the German army appeared. The Ribbentrop-Molotov Treaty divided Poland in two. The eastern sector, where we lived, was conquered by Russia. The Russian regime seemed the lesser of two evils to me. I was pleased to be rid of the Germans. But I also understood that I would not be able to leave. The door had been closed and there was no more contact with other countries. My correspondence with Cesare came to an abrupt end.

I found work in the municipal hospital. The new regime recognized my degree and I needed no examinations, which I was pleased about. I enjoyed my work and had good relationships with my colleagues. Were it not for what fate had in store for me, I would have adjusted to these new conditions.

The new rulers decided that my bourgeois father was a “hostile element” and as such, did not have the right to live in the big city (the population of Drohobycz at that time was 30,000). My parents’ property was nationalized and we were issued with a deportation order. My parents moved temporarily to stay with my aunt in Boryslaw. I continued to try and fight back. I sent a written request to Krushchev’s office –he was then General Secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party. I told of my early flirtation with the Communist Party, which had resulted in time spent in jail. I attached signatures of known Communist witnesses. At that time, my parents had spent a considerable amount of money to extricate me from this situation, and I had been obliged to leave Poland. To cure me of Communism, my parents sent me to Fascist Italy. I awaited Krushchev’s return, but his reply was an unconditional refusal. I too had to leave Drohobycz.

While waiting to find a new job I went to Boryslaw, where I met my future husband Jozek. He was also from Drohobycz and we knew each other slightly. He had studied in France and, like me, used to come home to only for vacations. In Boryslaw he worked in the oil industry. Our chance meeting was a pleasant surprise for both of us. We knew hardly anyone in Boryslaw, since all our friends had remained in Drohobycz. We felt like two castaways on a desert island. The first meeting was followed by others, increasingly frequent, and in time we came to spend all our free time together. I awaited these meetings eagerly. When we reached a point where it was becoming harder and harder for us to part, we decided to make our relationship official. We held a civil marriage in the “Zacks” (the Russian official civil marriages office), followed by a ceremony conducted by a Rabbi, for my parents’ sake.

Meanwhile I had found work in nearby Schodnica and I brought my parents there too. Jozek remained in Boryslaw and we met only on weekends. There were three doctors in Schodnica and once every three weeks we put in a 24-hour shift. It was hard work but I didn’t complain. Hardest of all for me were the home visits to patients, which sometimes took place at night. Once, a Ukrainian called me to assist his wife in a difficult birth, a field which I knew only theoretically. We traveled at night through the forest in a horse-drawn cart. I was so afraid. What would happen if I was unable to save either the mother or the baby? My brain felt petrified. Arriving at the family’s hut, I jumped down from the cart and suddenly heard the cry of the baby, who had managed to enter the world on his own initiative. For me this was the most beautiful music I ever heard.

In spite of the day-to-day difficulties – living in a small, one-room attic with my salary as our only income – this was a happy time for me. The strong emotional bond between us made up for all the rest. Jozek was a wonderful friend and we had much in common – a similar approach to life and people, similar interests, such as literature. We used to discuss books we had both read in the past. We both enjoyed books with a historical background, or biographies of interesting figures, in the lifestyle of the Bohemians who lived in the first half of the 20th century. We never spoke of the past. I knew from mutual friends that Jozek had been married before, to a Frenchwoman named Giselle. He told me nothing about her and I didn’t ask. Nor did I mention my former Italian love, Cesare. We lived only for and in the present; the past was unimportant to us.

Jozek was not a great talker. I don't recall ever hearing the words "I love you". They were unnecessary. With him I came to understand the difference between being *in love*, and true love. I would have been willing to go and live in a desert with Cesare, but only for Jozek was I ready to sacrifice myself. I had no doubt that he felt the same about me and that I would always be able to depend on him. Under the Nazi regime we both had an opportunity to prove this.

The First Pogrom in Schodnica

Once again we were taken by surprise by the outbreak of war and Nazi Germany's attack on Russia. Achieving what he had wanted in Western Europe merely whetted crafty Hitler's appetite for the east too. The Russians retreated in dismay. The Russian authorities had already conscripted Jozek into the Red Army.

The first pogrom in Schodnica was organized by Ukrainians who had been armed by the Germans. The Ukrainians truly believed that Germany would help them establish an independent state, so they sought to please the Germans and prove their absolute loyalty, though their traditional envy and hatred of Jews provided an additional incentive.

Rumors spread that Ukrainian gangs were taking Jewish men from their homes. From my window, I saw my Jewish neighbors hiding in the nearby granary. I implored my father to join them, but he wanted to stay with us. Only when my mother added her efforts at persuasion to my own did he agree, though still reluctantly. Very slowly he prepared to leave the house. I followed him, tense, afraid and nagging him to hurry. My father turned his head towards me and wordlessly, his kind, intelligent eyes rested on me as though begging to be allowed to return home – one farewell look. I gave him a gentle push to speed his departure. I pushed him to meet his death. To this day the wound in my heart remains open, nor will it ever heal. The Ukrainians took all the Jews from the granary. Not one of them even glanced at our house.

We waited at home for my father to return, not suspecting for a moment that his life was in danger. Perhaps the Ukrainians were looking for Communists, or perhaps they had personal reasons to send them to trial. My father, who had never harmed a soul, had no enemies. He was respected, admired and utterly harmless. After what seemed to us like a very long time, I decided to go down and see what was happening. The streets were deserted – not a soul to be seen. In a side street I spotted a Ukrainian policeman whom I knew (his children were my patients).

"Doctor!" he called out to me in Ukrainian, "What are you doing here now?"

"I'm looking for my father," I replied, "To take him back home."

Then he gave me a strange look and whispered, "Your father was killed along with all the others. None of them was left alive."

Pointing towards a wooded hill, he added, "They are all lying there, dead. I saw them with my own eyes."

I persisted, unable to believe what I heard - that my father could be dead. "There must be some mistake. I'm going to look there myself."

“You can’t go there,” the policeman warned, “it’s too dangerous. They might still be rioting. I wouldn’t want anything to happen to you. I think of you as a friend and am grateful to you for looking after my children so well.”

Still I wouldn’t give in. “If you are really my friend, as you say, then come with me.”

He hesitated a moment, then agreed. “All right, I’ll accompany you. You’ll be safer with me.”

We entered the forest. There was a deathly silence all around. Bodies lay everywhere in groups. I passed from group to group, recognizing friends and acquaintances. Most were men, but there were also a few women who had refused to leave their husbands’ sides. My father lay on the top of the last group – stretched out straight, as though sleeping, with a small pool of blood beneath his right cheek. His shoes and overcoat had been removed. There he lay, dressed in gray trousers and a light blue shirt. He was always fastidious about matching colors and a neat appearance.

I shed no tears. The pain was unbearable and my legs turned to lead. Unable to tear myself away, I stood looking at my wonderful father’s dead body. How little I knew him, how little time I had spent with him. Bending over, I kissed his cold cheek. How few times I had kissed him in his life. I must be strong and go home to break the dreadful news my mother. Where would I find such strength?

I’ll go to my grandfather, I thought. Only he can strengthen and comfort me. We were very close – I adored him and was his favorite granddaughter. In the modest apartment where he and my grandmother lived our eyes met – and instinctively he knew what had happened. He drew me to him and embraced me. Struggling for words, I produced a strangled whisper: “They killed Father.” Only then did the tears come. My grandfather held me close and said nothing. I felt him shudder. My father had been his favorite son-in-law and he had really loved him. He admired his character, his wisdom, his talents and his family loyalty. My grandfather was a deeply religious man, and in that too he had found an affinity with my father.

For a long moment we remained still, embracing. Then slowly I released myself from his arms and returned home to my mother, who had waited so long alone at home with no idea of what had happened to my father and me.

On the way home I met a young Ukrainian neighbor. He stopped me in order to tell me that he had been in the army together with Jozek and with his own eyes had seen him killed at the front. Emotionally paralyzed, I was unable to react. I entered our house like a robot and have no recollection of the words I used to tell my mother the bitter news. I saw her knees crumple and ran to support her – two widows comforting each other.

The Ukrainians killed some 300 Jews in that pogrom. One of the “reasons” was that they held Jews responsible for the death of a man – a Jew - almost 2000 years ago. This was the man who declared: “Love thy neighbor as thyself.” Jesus would not have forgiven them for acting so contrary to his precepts.

My wonderful father was the first victim of our family. How cruel fate had been to him! He had lost his own father at the age of 12 and worked in hard manual labor in a logging warehouse in order that his family – mother, sister and two younger brothers – should not go hungry. Talented, energetic and popular, he advanced quickly. At 25

he married my mother, who came from a well-to-do home. With her help and her dowry, my father was able to establish his own logging warehouse. With hard work and honest, fair working relations, hurting no-one, the business soon became successful. But the Russians declared him a parasite, nationalized his property and forced him to leave the town where he had so many friends and was popular and respected. He was killed strangers in a strange town.

After some time I left Schodnica for good. My mother, afraid that my past links with Communism would be discovered, bribed a Ukrainian acquaintance to escort me on foot through the forest to Boryslaw. I lived with my Uncle Marcus. Then a miracle saved me from the hopeless apathy I had sunk into – Jozek returned! What my wicked Ukrainian neighbor had told me was nothing but a malicious lie. Jozek was alive and came home to me. Once again we would be together, for better or worse, and go wherever fate led us.

Jozek had in fact defected from the Russian army and walked on foot hundreds of kilometers, arriving with swollen legs and bleeding feet. He was totally exhausted and only his worry about what had happened to me had kept him going. Was any spoken expression of such a love necessary?

My mother arrived from Schodnica, bringing with her my grandfather, grandmother and three-year-old cousin Klarcia, whose father had been exiled to Siberia by the Russians for crimes quite unknown to him. Two apartments adjacent to my uncle's became vacant and my mother, Jozek and I moved into one of them, beneath the roof of the building. The kitchen was a kind of square within a triangle, with an attic above it and on either side two hiding places whose entrances were concealed by closets. I don't know who had lived there before us, who or what had been hidden in those camouflaged hiding places under Russian rule.

The family's second victim was my Aunt Mina, little Klarcia's mother, wife of Uncle Sigmund, whom the Russians had sent to Siberia. They lived in Opaka, in a place where my grandfather owned a large farm. We had tried to persuade Aunt Mina to join us, but she refused. Her two daughters were in Boryslaw – three-year-old Klarcia with us, and her two-year-old sister Esther with Aunt Balka. Aunt Mina allayed our fears, assuring us that a friendly Ukrainian neighbor was looking out for her and protecting her and she would leave Opaka as soon as the harvest was in. Then we received word that this "friendly neighbor" had killed her with his own hands in order to take over her property. This was bitter news indeed.

Pogrom – November 1941

To deceive us, the Germans called it a "transfer." We believed that these people had been sent away to work in Germany or elsewhere. There were even rumors of greetings arriving by postcard. Only after the war did we understand that they had in fact been sent to the gas chambers in Belzec.

Fall-Winter 1941-42

Hunger, cold, sorting through the dead. The streets were full of bodies of Jews. In exchange for food, we would hand over clothing, tablecloths and anything else that

was left after our households in Drohobycz had been plundered. Farmers from surrounding villages would come and barter with us. A Judenrat (a committee representing the Jewish community) was set up. So was a Jewish police force, intended, at least initially, to maintain order near the stores – the Judenrat had opened stores which sold half a loaf of bread per person. Jozek, too, was asked to join the police force but refused, his motto being “keep away from the police.” It was almost as though he could foresee what the future held for those policemen.

Early in 1942 I realized I was pregnant. Not for a moment did either of us consider terminating the pregnancy - quite to the contrary, we were both delighted at the thought of a baby. From today’s perspective, I wonder what sort of insane act this was. The baby had an absolutely minimal chance of surviving; indeed the likelihood of our own survival was close to zero. I have since reached the conclusion that this was neither lack of responsibility nor bravado on our part. It was the result of pure ignorance. We truly had no idea how tragic the situation was. In our naivete, we believed that we were going through some sort of transition period, after which everything would return to normal.

We had been raised on a foundation of justice, morality and trust in people. These tenets had been reinforced in us by our parents, our teachers and the literature we read. We knew of the Spanish Inquisition, based on religious intolerance, and even of pogroms carried out by Ukrainian gangs (for instance at Petlura). But not for a moment did we imagine that this people, whose cultural standards were so high, would develop an ideology based on the superiority of the Aryan race, “for the good of future generations” – killing Jews, gypsies, the chronic sick and psychiatric patients. That one criminal psychopath would have so many followers. The legal regime planned and executed a program of systematic and gradual murder of an entire people. How blind and deaf we were.

August 1942

In an atmosphere of uncertainty, rumors spread of approaching action. Jews sought hiding places or fled to the surrounding forests. In an advanced stage of pregnancy, many facts were concealed from me. But I had my own plan. On August 2nd I came into labor. A difficult birth, at home, with neither doctor nor midwife. The pains grew stronger. Then at the last moment a doctor appeared, Dr. Teicher, and delivered my son with forceps. He suggested I should be hospitalized in his department – he was still head of the Gynecology Department, since no replacement had yet been found. I refused, afraid that if I left home, I would find no-one to return to. I had my own plan. I believed I could save my loved ones and would allow no harm to come to my son.

The action began on August 6th, in the early hours of the morning. I convinced all those present – family and neighbors – and nine people entered the hiding places next to our kitchen. I pushed the closets back after them. Like a theater director, I set the stage with all its props. Attractive bed linen, my baby asleep, recently fed and dressed in his best clothes. I was half reclining, wearing a nightgown, my long hair loose and with light make-up on my face, awaiting a social call. My son lay in my arms - a Madonna and child. I heard steps on the staircase. There were four of them – an SS officer, a German policeman, a Ukrainian policeman and a neighbor accompanying the Germans and leading them to Jewish homes.

The SS officer, an attractive young man, barked out an order in German: "Get dressed and come with us." I replied, also in German, "I can't get up. I'm very weak and only gave birth recently." "Then I'll have to shoot you in your bed," he said.

I didn't answer, or cry or beg for mercy. I merely looked straight into his eyes, quite calm and feeling no fear. Our eyes met and I saw that these were not the eyes of a murderer. We looked at each other and time stood still. Suddenly I heard his voice again: "I have decided to let you live. I'm not saving you, only prolonging your life. There will be other actions and there is an order to kill all Jews. This present action will last three days and I am in charge in this district. Nothing bad will happen to you – this time." His companions objected, but he ordered them angrily to leave. The two of us remained alone together. He pulled up a chair and began to ask me all sorts of personal questions, as though he really wanted to get to know this woman whose life he had just "prolonged." When I told him that I had studied medicine in Italy, his eyes lit up and, in Italian, he told me that he had spent some time during his military service in Italy.

The situation was paradoxical and surrealistic. Outside the "action" was at its height and we could hear cries, shouts, shots and German curses. Indoors, two people, seemingly isolated from this reality, were discussing the beauty of Italy, favorite operas and more. Not at all like a hangman and his victim, but rather like two peers sitting in a coffee house.

He continued to ask, I answered. I also asked occasional questions and even permitted myself to correct his Italian once in a while - if we were peers, then let it be all the way. I glanced at my son, the third actor on this stage, following my stage directions perfectly by sleeping like an angel. After a while, my "savior" went downstairs, returning with the neighbor – the same neighbor who had brought him herin hopes of raiding my apartment. The German ordered him to close the gate with barbed wire. He would come by himself every so often to check up. He gave this order in German and the neighbor didn't understand. With the utmost courtesy I translated into Polish for him, adding a few sentences of my own. Where did I find the courage??

To this day I wonder why he behaved as he did. There could be several explanations. Perhaps he was influenced by my restrained behavior – I didn't cry or plead, but simply waited quietly for his decision. Perhaps it was his reaction to the picturesque scene before him – a young woman with a baby in her arms, just like pictures of the Holy Virgin seen in so many Italian museums. But I like the third possibility best – perhaps he simply understood that he was unsuited to the job of hangman. He was still at the beginning of his "career" and not yet ready for murder. I would like to think that his encounter with me might have encouraged him to get out of that hell in time. I hope so with all my heart. There were such cases and I had reliable information about one.

After the war I met an aunt of Jozek's in Vienna. She told me her life story. During World War I an Austrian officer had fallen in love with her and she ran away from home with him. They married, had a son and lived happily together – until the day when her husband became caught up in "Hitlerism." He sent their son to join the Hitler Jugend movement and hung a large portrait of Hitler in their living room. His wife's Jewish heart was aroused. She escaped from home, her husband and her son and passed the war years in Vienna, with no information about her husband or her son.

Only after the war she found her son, who told her his story. He made a career in the army and took part in "actions," until one day he saw a Jewish baby being brutally killed and could take no more. He defected and managed to survive. Could it be that the baby in my arms had a similar effect on "my" SS officer? Deciding to spare us, did he also save himself and escape that hell? Perhaps, perhaps. I will never know.

The "action" of August 1942 was the worst of all. Half of the Jewish population perished in the gas chambers at Belzec. The weak and sick were killed in their beds. Babies in the orphanage were thrown from the windows. What chance did I and my four-day-old son have? Was this the kindness of fate? Pure chance?

But this action served to open our eyes and for the first time we understood just what grave danger we were in. How could I save my son? There were rumors that a Catholic priest named Osikiewicz was rescuing Jewish children, arranging for them to hide either in monasteries or with Catholic families. One evening I removed my white strap with a Magen David from my sleeve and went to the church. I waited for the end of prayers. When the congregation left the church I approached the priest. I told him I had an uncircumcised baby and asked for his help. "I'm sorry," he replied. "All the hiding places at my disposal have been used up and I am in danger myself. Unfortunately, word got out about my helping Jews and I'm very afraid that I too will soon receive a 'visit.' But there is one thing I can do for you. I can baptize your baby and give him a birth certificate. Perhaps you know someone trustworthy who might take in a baptized baby?"

I remembered that Stasia Fedorcio, the only Polish woman I knew in Boryslaw, lived nearby. She was a fair-minded woman who behaved well towards us. I put the priest's suggestion to her. She refused – she was too well known in the neighborhood, everyone would suspect the baby might be Jewish, she was afraid. I returned to the priest and told him about Stasia's refusal. My last chance was gone. Sensing my despair as we parted, Father Osikiewicz took my hand and said, "Don't despair. I have another plan that might succeed. Ask Stasia from me if she would just hold the baby while he is baptized." She agreed to this. After the baptism, the priest turned to her and said, "I know you are a devout Catholic. I see you often at prayers. As this child's godmother you have a duty to save him, and Jesus will not forgive you if you fail to do so." This dear, wonderful man had cunningly put her in a position where she was unable to refuse.

September 1942 – Ghetto

We received orders to move to the ghetto. We gave our apartment to Stasia and placed our son in the hospital. With a certificate of baptism from the Catholic priest he would be safe there. And so we began our life in the ghetto. It was relatively quiet. We missed our son and visited him in the hospital, where we found him in a terrible condition. We had handed them a beautiful, rosy-cheeked child but now found him thin, pale and neglected beyond recognition. We realized that he would not last long if we left him there and decided to take him with us to the ghetto. With the right treatment and care, he recovered in time.

The October Action

After washing the baby – his favorite daily task – Jozek brought him to me to be fed. At that moment the door burst open and a Polish woman we knew, a friend of Stasia's, burst in shouting, "What are you doing? There's a pogrom in progress. The ghetto is surrounded by police."

Without thinking for long, I wrapped the baby in a blanket and handed him to her, pleading, "Please, take him." "I can't," she said. "I live with my sister-in-law and she hates Jews. She will tell the police. I'll take him to Stasia." She ran out holding the baby, and from that moment on he remained with Stasia, who returned him to me only at the end of the war.

I want to pause here to describe my feelings. Occasionally I hear arguments about the behavior of Christians during the German occupation. I don't know the official statistics, but I have my own private ones.

1. I am aware that some of them were pleased to be rid of Jews.
2. Some remained indifferent and made no effort to get involved in our problems (they too had trouble with our common enemy).
3. Some were sympathetic but afraid to help under pain of a death sentence.

However!!!

There were also those who did help Jews, seeking no reward and endangering their own lives. These were rare and shining stars and I can count three such bright stars among my own private statistics:

1. Father Osikiewicz, who died in Auschwitz for saving Jewish children. He also issued forged certificates to adults in the full awareness that he was risking his life.
2. Stasia, who kept my son for almost three years. I also have definite proof that some of her neighbors knew about this but did not tell the police.
3. That worthy Polish lady who entered the ghetto during a pogrom. She came to warn us and smuggled a Jewish child out of a ghetto surrounded by police. I don't know her surname and am therefore unable to ensure that she receives the deserved title of Righteous of the Nations from Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum. This title was awarded to both Father Osikiewicz and Stasia.

After handing our child over, we ran to the neighboring house. We knew that there was a hiding place there behind a double wall in the attic. About a dozen people squeezed in there, standing close together. We heard the policemen's voices as they searched the house. Suddenly, our little Klarcia began to cough, endangering all of us. With one hand I held her head and with the other I pushed two fingers deep into her throat. The police knocked on the walls but found nothing. My hands were bleeding and Klarcia was hoarse for weeks afterwards, but once again we had escaped death. One more miracle.

After that pogrom, we hid for a short period in Stasia's house and then we were in a work camp. Both Jozek and I received the letter R^(*), which gave us temporary security. Jozek received work in the oil industry and I as a doctor in the work camp, a job which was arranged by my Uncle Ignac Flax, who was working as director of the camp.

In November 1942 another pogrom took place, this time lasting a full month. The victims were rounded up in the Colloseum movie theater, and this was the pogrom in which my beloved grandfather met his death.

The Times of Bunkers in the Forest, 1943-44

We were in four different. I well remember the first, the third and the fourth, but the second escapes my memory. The first was constructed like a corridor, some two meters wide and the height of a person sitting. We lay as close as sardines.

The bunker was built at night. We stole away from the camp in the dark, laden down with food supplies. Men and women all carried one backpack and two parcels in their hands, containing food that weighed little in relation to its caloric value: dried peas, beans, barley, and so on. But now that food was about to run out, the front was no nearer, and the camp was a relatively safe place. We returned there.

The Third Bunker, Spring 1944

The atmosphere in the camp deteriorated and the letter R* no longer guaranteed our safety. We decided to leave. Unusually for the time of year, it was snowing. One night, at the entrance to our bunker, we had a surprise visit from an acquaintance who occupied one of the nearby bunkers. He was frightened, and told us that armed Ukrainians had raided their bunker and killed everyone inside. He was the only one to escape. Suddenly, those same Ukrainians appeared at the opening to our bunker, having followed this man's footprints in the snow. Again, I faced death. I stood in front of Jozek in order to conceal him. My first thought was: not to see him die.

And then – another miracle! Our boys wore high boots. One had a particularly attractive pair decorated with shining nickel. The Ukrainians wanted them, and each wanted to be the first to grab them. As they bent over, one of our boys struck the oil lamp on the table with a stick. We were plunged into darkness, then the oil ignited and we all fled in panic to the forest. There was a couple in the bunker called Lorka and Dufko Altbach. Dufko was the only person injured that night and to this day he has a scar on his forehead (they both survived and live today in Holon).

I was barefoot and dressed only in a flimsy nightgown (it was hot in the bunker at night). We ran for several hours, barefoot in the snow. I didn't even sneeze. In normal circumstance I would at the very least have caught pneumonia.

Even at moments of danger one retains a sense of humor. Jozek jokingly protested to me: "Stop peeing! With those yellow marks in the snow, the Ukrainians will trace us again."

*R was the initial letter of the word Rustung – "armaments" in German.

On May 2nd we went to stay with friends who were hiding in another bunker. Something had happened to make us happy while we were in the forest. Boryslaw had been blown up. We were happy to leave our bunker – to go out to the fresh air. We feared neither bombings nor Germans. They were probably hiding in fear themselves.

The Germans discovered us in the fourth bunker. One of our men had gone into town to find food. The Germans captured him and tortured him into divulging our hiding place. They took us back to the camp, to a place where in the meantime Jews had been removed from hiding and rounded up. They told us we were being sent in a mass transport to Plaszow (a work camp in the west). We were also told that anyone who came forward willingly for the transport would live, but anyone caught resisting would be shot. I witnessed several executions. I would close my eyes, hear a shot, and there was a body lying on the ground. The Russian army was so close, but those monsters were still combing the forests.

There were close to 300 people on our transport. We went on foot to the railroad station, where cattle carts awaited us. The way to Plaszow was already full of the retreating German army. We traveled south to Hungary, then west through Czechoslovakia and again through Austria. The journey lasted two weeks. One particular episode remains deeply etched in my memory. The train stopped next to a field where elderly Hungarian women were working. Seeing people in cattle carts, they asked in curiosity who we were. When told that we were Jews being led to camp, they clapped their hands and jumped for joy – like witches dancing with broomsticks.

Auschwitz

Through the notorious gate. I read the famous inscription *Arbeit Macht Frei* (Work Liberates). We had no illusions, we knew this was a lie. We were received by none other than Mengele, Auschwitz's "angel of death." Lowering me from the train in his arms and hearing Mengele's order: "Men and women separately," Jozek whispered, "It is the parting I have feared the most." It was the most eloquent affirmation of his love – and the last words he spoke to me. On that same day, as we arrived at Auschwitz, the Russians liberated Boryslaw – an ironic twist of fate.

So much has already been written about Auschwitz, so I will concentrate on my own personal feelings. Incredible though it may sound, I felt quite relieved to be there. The previous period in Boryslaw had been much harder. The many painful experiences – the loss of so many family members, the struggle to save those remaining – had drained my strength. I was the decisive one. Jozek was pessimistic and tried to persuade me to swallow cyanide (we weren't going to survive anyway, so why go on suffering?). But I wouldn't listen. Swimming against the tide had been so tiring, and here in Auschwitz I swam with the tide and didn't need to worry about anything or anyone. Fatalism – or apathy.

We were not beaten or sent to work. But we suffered from hunger, cold, dirt and loneliness. And more than anything else – the stench of scorched flesh emanating from the crematorium.

Loneliness is always depressing, but in these new conditions it became unbearable. I desperately sought someone to befriend, and once again I was lucky. Some women

from the Radom transport had joined our block. I became friendly with a woman named Anka Berger and in those grim conditions, we clung to each other. It is such a relief to know someone cares about you, sharing your warmth and last slice of bread.

Our block (Birkenau, Block 8) was close to the gypsies' block. One night they were all led to crematoria – men, women and children. The crematoria worked day and night.

Work Transports to Germany

There was a shortage in the workforce in Germany (anyone with arms and legs was sent to the front). This was the reason we had not been executed in Boryslaw. We pondered this on the journey.

Civilians came to Auschwitz, and they selected women for work. Our time had come. After some difficult developments (we kept being separated) I managed to get into the same carriage as my friend Anka. We were taken to a place called Lichtewerden, near Morawia-Ostrowska. After Auschwitz this camp seemed to us like heaven on earth – a veritable five-star hotel. We were still hungry, but the bunks were comfortable, we could shower in hot and cold water and we were given clothing appropriate to the season (winter 1944-45) and even warm coats. The camp was surrounded by barbed wire. We worked in a cotton factory. We were escorted to work by police with guard dogs. The work itself was not too hard. My supervisor, Frau Kumpke, was a member of the Volksdeutsch, a noble woman (there were some of those too). Out of pity, she brought me food every day, although she was running a risk by doing so – the head supervisor was a Nazi. Frau Kumpke had three daughters and her overall situation was not good – some Germans were going hungry too. To repay her kindness, I knit new sweaters out of her daughters' old ones, in a whole array of colors and designs (a hidden talent of mine). After work, lying on the bunk, this was a pleasant occupation.

We received our bread ration once a day. Some women ate it all immediately, while others divided it in two – half for the evening and half for the morning. Some even left it for the following day. This would make interesting study material for a psychologist.

Most of the conversations on the bunks after work were about food – what we would each cook after the war was over. The women exchanged recipes. Of course no-one took this seriously; it was humor born of desperation.

We had four Gestapo representatives. We called the senior one Schnautze, since at every opportunity he shouted at us, "Halt die Schnautze" ("Watch your mouths"), even when every single mouth was closed. Only on one isolated occasion and for no obvious reason, he beat us. The other Gestapo officers remained neutral, but the fourth was an odd character. We called him the Pacifist. He was overweight, very polite and had a ready smile. I don't know what his connection with the others was. On Sundays the Pacifist took Anka and me to his apartment on the other side of the camp to clean for him. He used this opportunity to feed us generously, saying, "I know you're starving." What strange situations fate places us in.

The End of the War

On May 7th, 1945, we clearly heard that the Russian army was approaching. On the night between the 7th and the 8th our fate was sealed – to be or not to be. I felt neither anxiety nor fear. We knew that “our” Gestapo people had negotiated with the Lichterwerden commanders – the priest, the factory director, the head of the village and others. They believed that we should be left alive, to avoid any act of revenge by the Russians on the civilian population.

Schnautze wanted to kill us but didn't have time. They prolonged the discussion intentionally. The Russians were already in our line of vision. The three Gestapo officers escaped and we awaited our verdict in the camp. The Pacifist opened the camp gates, saying, “What is finished for you, the hell will begin with us.” Together with him, the police and their guard dogs also vanished. The gate was now open, but not one of us moved. Nor were there any signs of joy. In silence we waited, and in silence received the Red Army.

The soldiers erected a stage in the center of the camp and on it stood a heavily decorated general. Addressing us in Russian, he said how happy he was to find us alive. In the middle of his speech he burst into tears. It turned out that he was Jewish. He wept and we listened in silence, not able to express any feeling.

Frau Kumpke appeared in the camp, excited: “The Russian soldiers are taking over the houses, raping. The authorities have granted them a free hand for 24 hours.” She asked for help. Anka and I went to her apartment. When the Russian soldiers arrived at night and I spoke to them in Russian, saying, “Please leave them alone. They are a decent family who helped us – Jews from the camp.” They agreed and left. Thus we were able to protect the innocence of three young German girls. After the war I tried to find Frau Kumpke through the auspices of the Red Cross, but was unsuccessful.

The next day we began our journey home. But where was our home, and who was waiting for us. Afraid to go back, I was in no hurry. I had a strong feeling that Jozek was no longer alive. Telepathy? I describe it as a wave connecting two people who are very close but separated by a physical distance. I have no scientific explanation, though perhaps in future one may be found.

After wandering for a long time, we reached Krakow. We walked part of the way, rode part of the way with Russian soldiers and finally, from Morawa Ostrowska we took a train. We spent the nights in houses abandoned by Germans. Every so often we managed to “improvise” something – Auschwitz terminology – a few items of clothing, a change of shirt or skirt. We even discovered remnants of food to calm our hunger. In Krakow we found the Jewish community, who was mobilized especially to help those who had miraculously survived the camps.

I also met people I knew from Drohobycz, from whom I learned that my mother, Clara, and my son were alive and would be repatriated to Poland (Drohobycz by then having been annexed by Russia). I stayed on to wait for them.

I was not hungry. The bread and soup I received from the Jewish community and the help of acquaintances satisfied me. It was hard to find a place to sleep. Sometimes I stayed with acquaintances, sometimes in a cheap hotel mostly at the railroad station. I didn't think about how much time was passing by; this was a time of confusion. One episode stands out clearly in my memory. I happened to pass the university. It was

the end of the academic year and students were relaxing in the courtyard. I stood and watched, amazed, as they jumped on the steps, laughed out loud and told jokes. They radiated happiness and optimism. I couldn't tear myself away. My own time at university came back to me – a time characterized by personal success and academic achievement, when it seemed I held the whole world in my hand. I could not stop the tears from falling as I mourned the years that I could never retrace, my lost youth.

I wept only once during the war, on my grandfather's shoulder after my father's death. Later, in even the most critical of situations, I was unable to weep. I once read the sentence: "When there's ice in your heart, even the tears freeze."

After some time in Krakow, I no longer had any illusions that Jozek would return. I later learned the details of his death from Luzik Schechter, who had been with him throughout his time in Auschwitz-Mauthausen-Gusen 2.

Jozek had in fact died of exhaustion two days after the American army liberated the camp. His last words to his friend were: "I hope that Berta and our child survived the war. Please, I ask you to take care of them." Luzik urged him to hang on – the Americans are already in the camp. But he lowered his head, closed his eyes and that was the end of his life. But I am still connected to him. Late at night, when I am in bed about to fall asleep, I turn off the light and talk to him, telling him about my life.

Sometimes I even argue with him: "Luzik told me you exchanged your bread for cigarettes. If you hadn't done that you would have come back to us and we could have raised our son together." Then, after a moment, I ask his forgiveness. No, Jozek, I'm not angry. I know how hard it was for you – the hunger, hard labor in the quarries and the occasional beatings too. Thinking of that, I am unable to stop crying. Perhaps he saw cigarette smoking as a form of suicide, to finally put an end to his suffering.

Rest in peace...
Sleep, my darling, sleep...

Jozek is Dead

I decided go to Gorlice, to the house where Jozek had lived with his father shortly before the war, hoping I might find some keepsake of his there. The most important things for me were photographs. I knew the address; I recognized the house and knocked on the door. A young girl opened the door, who, from what had been told me, I guessed was the family's home help. I introduced myself: "I am Jozek's widow." With a hard look, she asked, "What do you want?" I understood. The poor girl was worried, thinking that I had come to claim Jozek's inheritance. I pacified her with the words, "I will be really grateful if you can find me a picture of Jozek. It would mean so much to me." She returned inside the apartment, closing the door behind her. I stood outside, waiting. After a while she came back with a photograph album, the only "inheritance" I wanted. I thanked her and left. The album contained pictures of Jozek from his childhood up to the time of the war. I took them with me wherever I went, and still look at them sometimes.

Back to Krakow. I learned that my mother and the children were at Gliwice, where they had been given an apartment. I traveled there. Our reunion was quiet, with no outward signs of joy. None of us was able to express those feelings. My three-year-old son ran from my arms, crying "Don't want to!" "Don't want to!" It would take time until he was willing to be embraced.

A relative, Wilek Tepper, came to visit. His grandfather and mine had been brothers. Wilek had been conscripted into the Red Army in 1941, leaving behind a young, pregnant wife. On his return he learned that his wife and baby daughter, who had since been born, had both perished. So had his parents. One of his sisters survived. Two other sisters had also survived, whose Zionist beliefs had taken them to Palestine before the outbreak of war. In Drohobycz he met my mother, who told him tearfully that she was now alone with two children. She lived on what she earned from trading. She had moved back and forth between Bory and Drohobycz, sometimes on foot, taking advantage of the price difference between certain products. She had not been particularly hopeful that I would return from Auschwitz.

But Wilek, always the optimist, comforted her saying, "I'm going to Poland now. I'll find your daughter and help her." And indeed he kept his promise. In Gliwice he told us of his plan to go to Palestine and suggested that we should join him. I agreed willingly. I had never been a Zionist in the past and had seen Zionism as some kind of Utopian dream. But having paid such a high price for being Jewish, I now decided I could not give up my connection with the Jewish people. I remember a masterpiece written by Tuwim, a well-known Jewish Polish writer. It was called *We are Polish Jews*, and in it he expressed similar emotions.

And so we left Poland. A Russian officer, bribed by Wilek, transferred us to Prague, in Czechoslovakia. From there, with the help of the organizers of illegal immigration to Palestine, we went on foot through the forest to Germany. We stayed in Munich – it turned out that it was not so easy to get to Palestine with two children, and we had to wait patiently.

A Jewish hospital had been established in Munich for Nazi victims. I offered my services, hoping to find regular work. But at the very first blood test I performed, I fainted, and realized that I would have to give up my profession.

The next blow was that I fell ill shortly after arriving in Munich, with symptoms like bad stomach pains and vomiting. For a long time I was treated as an outpatient by a variety of doctors, until at last I reached the clinic of the famous Prof. Lydtke. He was a major authority and a lecturer at the university. The treatment I received from both doctors and nurses was of the highest order, but they were unable to help me. After many and lengthy tests and attempts at their own cures, Prof. Lydtke told me in a long conversation: "Your condition has an emotional basis." (This was a common phenomenon among camp survivors.) "I'm afraid the doctor can't really help you. I hope that in future your own defense mechanisms will help you. Only you and the passage of time can provide the help you need." Both his diagnosis and his prognosis turned out to be correct.

Knowing that I would need to know English in Palestine, I devoted much of my time in Munich to studying the language. I enrolled for a course in German-English simultaneous translation. I had actually begun studying English while living in Italy. I stayed on there an extra year (the seventh after six years of study) to help my Italian friend develop his scientific career. Cesare Sandro Blondet was an assistant in the gynecology department at Genoa University and dreamed of becoming a full

professor. In order to help him, I spent hours in the university library translating articles in his field from various languages into Italian. I didn't know any English at that time and translated with the help of a dictionary that I kept with me at all times.

Our apartment in Munich was on the first floor, and the doorman usually locked the gate early in the evening. If anyone rang the bell, Wilek or I would go down and open the gate. One evening Klarcia took the key and ran downstairs to let a visitor in. Opening the gate, she found a soldier in uniform standing there. Speaking to her in German, he asked what her name was and she replied, "Clara." With a sob he took her in his arms. This was her father, my Uncle Sigmund, who had not seen her for more than eight years.

Before the war Klarcia had lived in Opaka with her parents, her young sister Estherke and her grandfather. During the Russian occupation her father had been sent to Siberia. During the German occupation her mother had been killed by her "friendly" Ukrainian neighbor. Her sister Estherke had been killed during an "action" in Belzec in August 1942. At first, Klarcia stayed with us in various hiding places. Together with my mother, she survived living in a bunker in the forest. Her father remained in the Polish army in Russia, serving on the Italian front. After the war, he was given our address by mutual acquaintances. As I said, he had not seen his daughter for over eight years, and I find this one of many moving stories of the post-war period.

The Road to Israel

We left Germany at the beginning of 1949, stopping for a short time in Italy to see friends in Milan. To this day, any time spent in Italy is a real experience. I consider it my second homeland.

Wilek and I married in a civil ceremony in Italy, the religious ceremony taking place when we arrived in Palestine. We took a train to Bari port and from there sailed to Israel, anchoring in Jaffa. From the harbor, on foot through neglected fields, we reached Givat Aliya (Jablia), where Wilk's sister lived.

I was horrified by the ugliness of the scenery around me. My esthetic sense remained strong in spite of my war experiences. On top of that, there was the smell of scorched meat, which reminded me of the smell of the crematorium at Auschwitz. So my first encounter with Israel was not auspicious. But once I visited Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Haifa a change took place in me and I began to take an interest in this new country, its life and its people.

We rented an apartment in Bat Yam. Wilek and my mother began working in the field they were familiar with from the past – wood trading. Wilek bought crates from new immigrants, removed the nails and worked on the planks. We arrived with virtually no cash, carrying only the contents of our apartment. At that time there was a great demand for wood in the burgeoning construction industry. I, meanwhile, set up our apartment and took care of household matters and the children.

I heard that a good friend from my student days, Herzl Kook – nephew of Rabbi Kook of Jerusalem – was living in Tel Aviv, and I called him. Hearing his voice on the phone, I said in Italian, "This is Bella Brawer speaking." There was a momentary silence, then he replied angrily, "This is a tasteless and appalling joke. It is in really bad taste to impersonate a woman I was fond of, and who I know perished in

Auschwitz.” It took me a long time to convince him that I was not speaking from “another world.” “Just tell me where you are, and I’ll come right over,” he said. From him I learned which of my old friends had arrived in Israel, such as Shulamit Swirsky, and I contacted them. Herzl was working as a urologist at Hadassah Hospital. Shulamit had already become a recognized pediatrician. She had completed her specialization in the USA and brought the first incubators for premature babies into Israel.

Herzl and Shulamit convinced me that I must return to practicing medicine. They believed in my ability both to be a successful doctor and to cope with the difficulties stemming from not knowing the language and from having had such a long break. Both of them accompanied me to Hadassah Hospital, introduced me to the Director and told him of my academic success. I was taken on as an intern in the pediatric department, with no pay, for a period of six months. This turned out to be the most fateful step I could have taken. At first I found the work hard, but it bore fruit and in time both my professional and emotional confidence returned.

The Director of the pediatric department, Prof. Werbin, had also studied medicine in Italy. Standing at the bedside of a sick child, I understood nothing, and Prof. Werbin translated some of the information into Italian for me. It was a great help. This brings back to me one amusing moment. Many times I heard and confused the Hebrew words for diarrhea (“shilshul”) and cough (“shi’ul”), and when I asked what was the difference between the two, the explanation given was that “the first runs downwards, and the second upwards.” Everyone present found this entertaining.

Prof. Werbin gave me files of children who had already been discharged, allowing me to take them home for 24 hours. I suspect that in doing this he broke several rules, delaying the transfer of these files to the archives. But it was a valuable help to me, and I sat with a dictionary until late at night, learning from the files.

I also acquired medical text books in English, which helped me complete my knowledge of symptoms and treatments of different ailments. Twice a week I studied with a Hebrew teacher. He came to my house and helped me translate. Our common language was Yiddish. Thus, until I learned everyday vocabulary such as “bread” and “butter,” the only words I knew in Hebrew referred to things like “fever” and “pain.”

It was not easy, not only because of a lack of proficiency in Hebrew, but also due to a lack of professional knowledge. After such a long gap, I had not only forgotten some of what I previously knew, but in the meantime a genuine revolution had taken place in medicine, especially in the field of treatment. For instance, a subject as vital as antibiotics was entirely unknown to me; I had to start all over again.

In addition to the hurdles arising from linguistic difficulties and innovations in medicine, other, even more serious problems were surfacing. Our family resembled a mosaic made out of the remnants of four splintered families: two widows, one widower and two orphans. Each of us carried with us the burden of the past in memories, yearning and pain. It was hard to act like a regular family with such complex dynamics as these. Looking back today, I see how wrong my priorities were and how I misjudged the gravity of the problem. My egotism had revived. I began to devote more and more time to my professional rehabilitation and less to my son. I forgot how much he needed me. Perhaps, subconsciously, I chose to avoid the problem. In Germany, where I had plenty of free time, I spent most of it with my son. I took him for walks, read and told him stories. We became very attached to each other. I have a picture from that period, in which I am holding a happy, contented

child in my arms. Yet the wounds of his early years had not healed. He had been hidden in an attic for over two years in almost total isolation (Stasia used to take him downstairs only at night, so that he could shower and eat). Then within a fairly short space of time, he was parted from Stasia, reunited with a mother he did not know, separated from his friends in Germany, moved to an entirely new environment and exposed to three different languages – Polish, German and Hebrew. How hard it was for him to cope with so many changes, and there was no-one to support him. Problems arose, and I didn't know how to solve them. I accept full responsibility for this.

After six months of study at the hospital, I was offered a paid job at the children's clinic in Jaffa. I am grateful to Prof. Boger, who recommended me. I had no difficulties with the language there. Most of the population were new immigrants. With those of Ashkenazi origin I spoke Polish, German or Yiddish. Conversations with Sephardi immigrants were bi-lingual – they spoke to me in Ladino and I answered in Italian. All parties were satisfied.

Although my confidence returned, my emotional rehabilitation came about only after the birth of my daughter. It was love at first sight. I could hardly believe that my weary heart could still experience and express such profound love. Ronit was a delightful child and it was easy to raise her. This is significant, since I don't know how I would have reacted if I had encountered new problems, in addition to those already mentioned.

Ronit slept quietly through the night, without disturbing any one of us. She progressed wonderfully into a smiling, happy child that it was easy to pamper. With every hug, I felt again how important it is to love and be loved. This was my emotional awakening. I had family, work, and friends. I felt like a human being again.

After Ronit's birth I stopped work and enrolled for a Hebrew course. Meanwhile there had been a marked improvement in our financial situation and we moved to a more spacious apartment in Tel Aviv.

Then I returned to work in the hospital, this time officially and with pay. This was a very interesting and intensive period on the one hand, and on the other extremely tiring. The shifts were the worst. After a 24-hour shift, we had to work an additional four hours in the department – that is, 28 hours without a break. I envied my male colleagues who, after such a shift, were able to rest, to sleep. But female doctors returned to more work at home – child care, homework checks, etc. In general I find the life of a female doctor in Israel – perhaps in other countries too - incomparably harder than that of a male doctor. Our professional duties are identical, but we women must add to those all the demands of the home, with help from the spouse a rare luxury.

The sight of suffering children affected me more than anything else. Standing at the bedside of a dying child awoke painful memories in me. I also felt the pain of the despairing parents. I never performed autopsies – it would have been more than I could bear.

For this reason, I gladly accepted the offer of a half-time job at mother and baby clinics. For a time I also worked in schools for special children – CP sufferers, deaf mutes and the retarded. This work was under the auspices of the Public Health department of Tel Aviv Municipality. I continued working in the mother and baby clinics for almost 30 years. The work was pleasant and interesting and I enjoyed it.

The clinics were all over Tel Aviv, in Sheikh Munes, Shabazi, the Hatikva quarter. I never refused to go to any of them, knowing that in these troubled areas I was needed even more than in the middle-class neighborhoods. I recall one particular clinic in Givat Aliya, housed in a run-down old Arab hut with a leaking roof. Whenever it rained, we had to move the babies and the examination table from place to place.

During my final 12 years I worked in a comfortable new building in Yad Eliahu. Our staff included a gynecologist (for pregnant women), a pediatrician, four nurses and a psychologist-counselor. We had ongoing contact with the Department of Welfare. The name of the clinic was changed several times. At first it was *Tipat Chalav* ("A Drop of Milk"), then "Counseling station for mothers and babies," and later "Family health counseling station." This is probably the name that best reflects the nature of the work. I have the impression that the public does not adequately value the work done in these clinics. Public medicine there lays an emphasis both on treating sick children and on follow-up and supervision of healthy children, which sometimes involves merely seeing them. There is also a focus on prevention of future problems. Children in these clinics were thoroughly examined by doctors to identify any physical defect, and their motor and mental development was also documented in detail.

We vaccinated children at the appropriate age against infectious diseases and tested their hearing and sight at the earliest possible age. For diagnostic purposes, we used graphs and statistics and compared them to the children's height, weight and the circumference of their head. I can illustrate the importance of these routine tests with a specific example. At one time, I worked in a special education school for challenged children. Examining a nine-year-old boy, I instinctively realized there was something wrong. I sent him for an audiometry and found that his hearing was poor. After receiving a hearing aid, he then underwent an IQ test and was transferred to a regular school. His parents could have been spared so much distress and the child so many complications if only his hearing had been tested at an earlier age.

Cases I was unsure about I referred to the counseling clinic, under the direction of Prof. Hyman. To me, he was the epitome of an outstanding doctor, an admirable person and a true friend. He never once disappointed me during all the decades I worked. I consulted him not only regarding my patients, but also for my own children and grandchildren. Indeed, my granddaughter owes him her life.

During that time I was working part time and had some free time. Some of this was devoted to courses in pediatrics, lectures, seminars and medical congresses in Israel and abroad. I had to catch up on the study time that had been lost in my youth.

A few years ago I received a letter from the Ministry of Health, tactfully suggesting that I should vacate my position in favor of younger doctors. I quite understood; everything comes to an end. I was even somewhat relieved. I didn't have the courage to reach this decision on my own and give up my work. I am probably one of the oldest retirees.

Although I gave up work, I am never bored. I devote time to my home and family. I read a lot – always my favorite pastime – and watch interesting programs on television. I have a subscription ticket to the theater. I go abroad often and am an enthusiastic bridge player. I believe this game to be the best investment for our later years. It is a form of mental physiotherapy and a great boon to concentration, memory and logical thought.

While playing bridge, I am able to forget both past and present troubles. Dr. Bridge is an excellent psychologist. The bridge club is a place to meet new people – an important factor at our age, as we lose so many of our old friends. I wholeheartedly recommend bridge.