

WITNESS TO HORROR

by Ann Kazimirski

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I am dedicating this book
to my children,
their children and those who will follow
and also to my fellow teachers
and my students.

Ann Kaziminski

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PREFACE

Witness to Horror was first published in 1993.

As a result, I have become active in the cause to preserve the memory of the Holocaust, through speeches, lectures and personal appearances. And I have given my recorded testimony to Holocaust Centers.

In this Second Edition of my book, I have added a *Sequel*, Chapter Nine, which tells the story of my experiences as a witness to the Holocaust from 1993 to the present.

A. K.

Montreal, 1997

PROLOGUE

It is difficult to go back in time and re-enter that horrendous, nazi-dominated world which I had so narrowly escaped from, but I owe it to all those I loved and knew, and all the others who rest with them in forgotten mass graves. They have no monument and survivors to say Kaddish (the Hebrew memorial prayer) for them. I feel that my memoirs will be a form of Kaddish for them.

On January 3, 1991, I received a brief telephone call from Professor Roiter, a Holocaust specialist, teaching at the Université de Montréal. He said: "Mrs. Kazimirski, I've received a letter from the German consulate. I'm sorry to tell you that SS Gebitskomissar Wilhelm Westerheide was pronounced NOT GUILTY and acquitted of all charges against him. I'm really sorry to have to be the one to tell you this."

I suddenly felt the blood drain from my head. My legs were giving way beneath me. The room started to heave. I heard myself repeating again and again: "It can't be! No! It can't be! It can't be..." I don't know how I managed to say goodbye to Professor Roiter, but I staggered to a chair and started to cry... and cry... and cry.

NOT GUILTY. NOT GUILTY. To understand how I felt you must read the following pages. And then you too will feel as I felt. And you will understand why that phone call left me in such a devastated condition.

CHAPTER ONE

My Once-Upon-A-Time World

My story begins with my birth on January 7th, 1922 in the town of Vladimir Volynski, also known as Wlodzimierz in Polish and Ludmir in Yiddish. Our town was located in the region known as Volin (Volhynia) and it was a part of Poland then. Jews settled there as early as the 12th century and the town was an important station on the trade route between eastern and western Europe. During the 16th century the Jews of Vladimir Volynski traded at the fairs in Lublin, Poznan and Crakow, where they sold furs, woolen cloth and wax. Some rich Jews engaged in estate-leasing and tax-farming. From the middle of the 16th century a number of famous rabbis lived in our town, and the renowned talmudist and author Yom-Tov Lipmann Heller, was Rabbi of the community from 1634 to 1643. The community suffered great losses from the Chmielnicki massacres of 1648-1649, when many Jews were murdered. Many economic crises further reduced the number of Jews in the 18th century, but during the 19th century the number of Jews rose slowly but steadily. Jews engaged in the trade of grain and lumber, and were active as small merchants, tailors, hatmakers and shoemakers. The hasidic movement became influential in the community and by 1931 Jews (10,665) were 44% of the population. In 1926 84% of the businesses

were owned by Jews and there were a number of excellent Jewish schools.

I remember our marketplace, a mixture of peoples and cultures. The aromas of baked breads, meat and fish floated through the air and the delicately sweet scent of fresh fruit teased the senses of merchants and customers. Human voices boomed loudly and the neighing of horses echoed in people's ears. It was a scene full of life, where people bought, sold and traded. Merchants worked long hours in the shopping district. Stores lined narrow streets waiting for customers to enter and buy goods. Shoes and boots filled racks outside the shoe stores; many could not afford such "luxuries" so they bought old ones and brought them to a shoemaker. Our shoemakers were veritable magicians — they could repair the old shoes and boots and shine them till they looked like new. Other merchants owned dress or suit stores, and street vendors sold fruit from carts and bagels from baskets. Peddlers set up stands on street corners, selling everything from bread to potatoes. Meanwhile, weaving in and out of the lanes and passages were the Tragarz, the porters, who transported goods with carts and wheelbarrows.

Two synagogues existed in Vladimir Volynski — one large and one small. The large synagogue was an impressive structure, with high ceilings, long passageways, rows of rich oak benches and a mahogany pulpit. Stained-glass windows adorned the synagogue with different biblical

scenes: Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, Joseph wearing his multi-colored coat, and Samson bound with iron chains between pillars, Moses striking the Ten Commandments on a rock, Noah building the great ark, and others. The Oren Hakodesh housed seven Torah scrolls adorned with silver crowns and covered with purple, velvet wrappings. Rich people belonged to this congregation and their contributions paid for the Rabbi's salary and the upkeep of the synagogue.

The small synagogue or shtibl resembled a small house. No paintings decorated the walls; a few benches stretched from one end of the chapel to the other. The ceiling was quite low. The Oren Hakodesh contained two sefer Torahs with simple linen coverings — no crowns or velvet adorned the scrolls. The congregants were poor people who paid the Rabbi with food. The Rabbi really lived on his salary from the local Yeshiva where he taught young children. Children enjoyed playing on the streets with each other; some, however, led difficult lives because they had to help their impoverished parents cope with everyday life. Such children rarely smiled or laughed and their faces, young as they were, already bore the stamp of struggle caused by a hand-to-mouth existence.

My mother Matilda (usually called Matl) and my father Yisroel Yoshua were very hard-working people. My father had been trained as a teacher but the pay was too poor so he became a merchant. He was a great schol-

ar — he knew the Torah thoroughly and he pored over Rashi's commentaries and those of other great scholars. My father was a highly intelligent man who devoured Yiddish and Polish newspapers. He was a heavy-set man, somewhat stout, with a handsome face. Above everything, I developed a great respect for his wisdom. People used to come often to him for advice. They respected the fact that he was a straight man and was knowledgeable in so many areas. And my brother Benny and I — if we had difficulty with our math or Hebrew assignments — we went to Aba (that's what we called him). He knew and loved Hebrew very much. My father was not a person who showed too much affection but I knew it was there. Aba never hit us — my mother was the one to punish and slap us. My father had one disciplinary weapon — a hard, severe look, and that look meant business.

Benny, was one year older than I was. He was an athletic, slender and tall fellow; he was both bright and reserved. He enjoyed soccer and was fascinated by mathematics. I always believed Benny was my parent's favorite, because he was the first-born son.

My mother was a redhead. She had a sweet disposition and a natural way of winning people's respect. Her marriage to my father was not an arranged one as was so common at that time. My father had been her teacher, or more correctly, her private tutor because she didn't go to school. He taught her how to read Yiddish and some

Polish, and he fell in love with her while he was teaching her. He knew that his parents would oppose the match because they were learned people and Mama's family belonged to a lower class; they were not "balebatish," or refined enough for his parents. They were very simple people. As simple as they were, mama's parents Leib and Basia Rucki had so much charm that they didn't need an education. I doubt that my grandmother could read a newspaper. Mama's parents had 8 children and 24 grandchildren. Not all of them, however, survived into adulthood.

My father made up his mind that, regardless of his parent's objections, he would marry his charming student. His parents locked him up in the house to prevent him from seeing her but nothing worked — he was determined and he did marry her. My parents seemed to be very compatible although he was the bossy type; she used to take pains to avoid arousing his hot temper. She knew how to handle him. We all did. Aba was a good violin player and he used to play for us often. He was the crown of the family. I had fear, great respect and love for him. His look was a piercing one and that's why I feared him. We all admired him greatly.

I received a rare gift in life: four wonderful grandparents. My mother's parents were so different from my father's but I received great love from all of them. I used to learn from my father's father because he was a scholar

and he loved to teach. I must get my love of teaching from him. He had an inexhaustible supply of stories, most of them biblical, and they were an education in themselves. I still use those stories today when I teach; storytelling is a very valuable educational tool which is too often neglected today. All this I got from my grandfather Aaron. My bobbe (grandmother) Reizl wore long, black dresses and she always draped a shawl over her head as a symbol of her devotion to her husband and God. Zeide (grandfather) Aaron had a long, white beard which, to my young mind, must have been exactly like those of the ancient Jewish sages. He incarnated our age-old heritage of wisdom for me.

Aaron and Reizl never ate from two separate plates. They each used a fork to eat from one plate. I once asked my Bobbe: "Why don't you eat from 2 plates? Don't you have more than one?" And she answered, her eyes gleaming: "Oh, I have many plates, but for us eating out of one plate is important, it symbolizes our sharing of life, it's part of the love that we share." I used to see him push a choice piece of chicken to her side of the plate and when he looked away for an instant she would push it back to his side — each wanted the other to enjoy.

Bobbe Reizl and Zaide Aaron weren't rich people; they had apple orchards just outside Vladimir Volynski. After school on Friday afternoons I used to travel with Bobbe and Zaide to their orchards by horse and buggy.

We arrived at their orchards before Shabos and we ate cold chicken with garlic, lokshen (noodle) kugel, potato kugel and fruit compote which Bobe had prepared before we set out. Ah, but the food tasted so good! Sunday all day meant work, harvesting the fruit. I could help because the branches, heavy with fruit, bent toward the ground. The sweet scent of apples (and some pears too) made my mouth water with delight. One harvest weekend I ate so many apples that I developed a severe stomach ache. However, the next weekend I was back at the job, helping Bobe and Zeide shake the trees so that the fruit fell to the ground. We collected the fruit, crated them and took them to Vladimir Volynski early Monday morning, where Bobe and Zeide sold them in the marketplace. Although the weekends consisted of hard work I enjoyed having my grand-parents all to myself. I always made the most of my childhood and loved each moment of it, like the taste of potatoes roasting over my Bobe's wood fire on Sunday evenings. I felt surrounded by love and selflessness and devotion. To grow up with that is the most important thing; that's why I am able to transmit that love I knew and felt to my grandchildren today.

In the winter my Bobe used to stand in a stall in the marketplace with a little metal burner between her feet to keep warm and she used to sell pickled apples in a sauce from a big barrel. In the winter the stall was

unheated and she wore a long skirt to help her keep warm while she waited patiently for customers.

All of Zeide Aaron's stories taught me something, and some still remain with me to this day because what I learned from them helped me survive through very difficult times. He used to sit in his rocking chair and I would climb into his lap and play with his long, white beard while I listened carefully to every word. Once, Zeide Aaron told me this story:

Long ago a man had 2 sons. The younger son Samuel went into the world to seek his fortune while the older son, Joseph, stayed home and helped his father care for the farm. Samuel met a merchant who promised him riches beyond his wildest dreams. Five years passed and he became rich. Unfortunately, Samuel spent all his money on drinking and gambling.

With Samuel's money gone, he decided to see his family again. After a time, he arrived home and his father greeted him with a hug and a kiss. The father prepared a great celebration in his honour; he invited everyone he knew, and they ate, drank and made merry late into the night. Joseph, the oldest son, grew angry because he had remained at home and helped his father, while Samuel had abandoned

them all. He thought that the party should have been for him, not for his brother. The next day Joseph angrily asked his father why he had made such a fuss over Samuel's return. His father answered: "I missed Samuel terribly. I thought he was lost to us forever. When a father's son returns to him after a long, long journey the father thanks the Almighty for sending his son home, by making a celebration on his son's return. We celebrated the fact that your brother was safely at home with us, reunited with his family.

My Zeide Aaron asked me: "Chanale, do you know the moral of the story? I answered: "No, Zeide, I do not know." Zeide said: "Don't worry, I'll help you understand the moral of the story. The father loved his son dearly, even though he was a bad son; the father always hoped, deep in his heart, that he would see his son again, and he did. The moral of the story is that when someone thinks that everything seems lost one must keep one's hope alive. One must always hope." I remembered that moral well in very difficult times and it helped me sustain through the most unspeakable tragedies of our history.

Mama's parents, Leib and Basia Rucki, owned a dairy shop; the store's interior was filled with the smell of fresh milk and the aromas of strong cheeses. When I spent time at the dairy store I used to see the vasertreiger (water man). He walked down the street with two, large

buckets attached to a heavy, wooden rod that he carried on his muscular shoulders. He stopped in front of the dairy store and Zeide Leib helped him pour water into several smaller pails which Zeide had taken out. Zeide paid him and the vaser-treiger continued walking, down the road. Zeide brought the pails into the store and he poured a glass for each of us. Ah, what a taste it had! It was the best water I've ever had in my life! As a child, I adored the taste of fresh water like adults enjoy the robust flavors of fine wines. Sipping that water there with my zeide was heavenly — a taste of paradise!

Zeide Leib used to sit in a rocking chair and I used to fight with his other grandchildren to sit on his lap while he told us stories. The rest of the children sat on the floor and listened to his stories with wide-eyed amazement. I remember one story which remains with me to this day and, like Zaide Aaron's story, has carried me through tragic times.

In a calm, grandfatherly voice Zeide Leib began:

Not long ago, a young man decided one Friday afternoon to take a walk in a forest. The young man, Shloime, walked and walked. He saw large pine trees and leaves of many colors, because the season was autumn. He saw a few deer, rabbits and squirrels. Shloime lost track of time as he walked

deeper into the forest. Soon, the sun sank lower and lower in the sky and Shloime decided that it was too late to return home for Shabus and...

One child interrupted: "What did Shloime do, Zaide? What did he do?" Zaide Leib patiently answered: "You will see, my child," and he continued:

Shloime soon realized that he was lost. He felt nervous because he knew that he would have to spend the night alone, without candles or supper, inside the heart of a dark and mysterious forest. He worried about the way his family would react and the anxiety he surely must have caused them. Before going to sleep he knelt and prayed; he recited "Shema Yisroel Adonoi Elohenu Adonoi Echod" (Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One).

He fell asleep and the next morning he awoke. He searched all day for a way out of the forest, but to no avail. He walked to the east, he walked to the west, still no way out. After several hours, he found some shade under a huge birch tree and fell asleep.

The next morning he awoke and found someone looking down at him. The man was close in age to Shloime, about 23 years old. The man spoke clearly and calmly: "What are you doing here?" Shloime answered: "I got lost in this forest. I took a walk on

Friday afternoon and I loved the beauty of this forest so much that I continued walking and got lost. I missed Shabos; my family must be worried sick by now and I tried to get out of the forest, but every way I tried was hopeless. What is your name? What are you doing here?"

The man answered: "My name is Karl Manski and I'm lost too. What's your name?"

Shloime responded: "I'm Shloime Telaski. What if we try to find a way out of the forest together?"

Karl said: "That's an excellent idea!"

Shloime asked: "I went east and west. What other ways are there?"

Karl said: "I travelled south. What if we started going north?"

Shloime exclaimed: "Good idea! Let's hope we get lucky!"

Shloime and Karl walked northward and sure enough, they found their way out of the forest. More important, Shloime and Karl became good friends and good friends are hard to find.

"Children, what does this story teach us?" The older grandchildren, who had heard the story many times

before, yelled out the answer in unison: “Shloime and Karl found a new way out of the forest. If one way does not work, try a new way! Never give up!”

We never lacked money. We lived in a simple, poor house not far from a river called the Smotch. That river was very smelly — it was badly polluted. That river was so much a part of my life that I got used to its smell. We had a shed where my parents kept horses for their business. The manure smell, mixed with the odor from the river, was like perfume to me. I remember that when I had to think hard I used to go to the banks of the Smotch and meditate (and absorb the fumes too, of course). At the front of the house we had a small garden with a couple of trees. I was an early riser, so I used to get up and study for my exams while I sat on a bench in that little garden. My parents admired my application. They used to call me in for breakfast but I would refuse to come in till I finished my studying. This little garden had birds in the trees and they used to wake me up every morning. They seemed to sing specially to me, urging me to get up. I didn't need a study or an office — that little garden, especially in the warm weather, meant a lot to me.

My parents, Benny and I, lived on one side of that simple house. Across the hallway with its earthen floor sometimes covered with paper or rags, lived Aaron and Reizl, my paternal grand-parents. That made me feel specially close to them. Just before Passover, my zaide

Aaron used to use that hallway to bake shmura matzo for us and other families. He was a very religious man and he was trusted by everybody. I received a lot of affection from both sets of grandparents. I used to go very often into my grand-parents' house and cuddle up to zaide Aaron.

Music played an important part in my life. I played the violin at a young age and then, when I was 10, I learned how to play the piano. My father inspired this love of music in us; he was a well-known violinist and his beautiful music used to bring tears to people's eyes. I played in a trio often with Benny and Aba, and we all enjoyed it very much. My mother had a beautiful voice. I remember how she sang so sweetly and my father used to accompany her on the violin. He taught her many songs. Mama and Aba expected the best from Benny and me — nothing less would do. We all enjoyed traditional Shabus meals. If we did not eat everything on our plates, Mama would chide us: "You must eat everything, you mustn't waste a crumb because children are starving on our town's streets." We knew how true her words were. Our parents paid much attention to us. I loved them dearly and wanted to make them proud of me.

My parents instilled a sense of hard work and honesty in me. They thought that I was never too young to learn such values. My parents had a coal and wood business. I used to wake up at 4 or 5 in the morning to travel to the

train station, where coal arrived by freight from Shloansk. Even though trucks transported the coal shipment to my parent's store, I waited for it regardless, because people would steal coal as it was unloaded from the train. My presence prevented people from stealing.

My mother was a simple, good woman, but after my father involved her in the family business she became a workaholic. I think that making as much money as he did gave her, with her simple background, an identity. Eventually they operated 2 businesses. She was in one and sold coal and kindling wood. He added construction materials to his operation. She couldn't do that because selling construction materials involved measuring and guaging which she couldn't do. She knew how to weigh coal and wood. She was very beautiful and that, coupled with her aggressiveness, came in useful. Once, the local police decided that selling coal in the city created too much dust. Our business was on a main street, across a synagogue. The police one day sealed the door with a big red seal and closed the business. My father sent my mother to the authorities in Lutsk (or Kovel) and she got an extension of one year. And that year was extended to another year. She was a charming woman and thanks to her the business stayed open. She had a coalyard (sklad in Polish) and a little kiosk near the piles of coal. The kiosk had a little cot and a heater. She hid her money in the kiosk and in her bra. My father trained her well, and

she became an excellent businesswoman, shrewd and honest.

From school we used to go straight to her sklad and she would always have something prepared for us — a bagel, a piece of bread and salami, etc., and then she used to send us home to do our homework. When she closed the sklad for the day, she would run home to cook for the children. All of my young life we had a “nanya” — in Polish that meant a woman who took care of children. I had the same one from my earliest childhood. She used to sleep in the kitchen and do the cooking, but my mother always did the cooking for shabbas herself. She would bake her own challah, make delicious chicken soup, etc. Observing the shabbas played a central part in our lives.

We had no real floor in the kitchen — just hard, compressed soil. Later on my parents brought somebody in to install a floor. We couldn't believe our good fortune — imagine, to have a floor in the kitchen! And we kept it like a mirror! We were becoming rich already! My mother loved her home. She would buy things for it — a chandelier, nice dishes, etc.

The area we lived in was a poor one. There was a small synagogue, a “shtiebel,” near our house. It was near the river Smotch. I used to see the Hasidim shaking at their prayers. I used to ask my mother: “Why do they shake like that?” And she answered like she always answered: “Go ask your pa.” She was afraid that she

wouldn't know the right answer. My grandfather Aaron, however explained it to me: "Shaking was very important because when you pray the whole body must pray, not just the brain and mouth." I used to see many Hasidim there, with their fringes and fur-trimmed hats.

Our house was visited by burglars many times and my parents knew who the burglars were but they never reported the burglaries to the authorities because my grandfather told them that the burglars would be sent to prison and the burglars were "nebach" poor people who needed to survive too. "Let them live too," he used to say. "Try to understand their poor lives. You're making a living so you'll soon replace what they stole." But I was always afraid to come home alone to the empty house; I was afraid of the burglars.

When I was around 11 years old, my parents announced to my grandparents that we were moving out — they had bought land on Kovelska street and they would build a house there. I was reluctant because I loved being near the Smotch and my grandparents; I liked the whole setup and I felt that I was being uprooted. However, my parents explained to me that our present neighborhood was deteriorating rapidly and it was time to move. The new house was built in stages; my grandfather helped carry the lumber, my father pitched in with his skills, and neighbors came to help. They respected my father very much. He was in his early years called

Srul Shiya but later on in life they called him Reb Srul Shiya. The “Reb” was an honorific given to a respected and distinguished gentleman. It gave a certain dignity to his name.

And so we finally had the new house — it seemed so big to us! We still didn’t have inside plumbing. We had a well and we drew water from it with a bucket. In the first house we used the “vasser-traiger” (water carrier), but when we moved to the new house my father had a well dug for us — what a luxury! We now had 2 outside toilets which we kept very clean.

The coalyard, which was next to the new house, had a more primitive facility — the toilet was a small square hut over a hole in the ground. We would go to the coalyard to relieve our mother.

When I grew up, Vladimir-Volinsk was a Polish town. First I went to a Hebrew school, Tarbut, where I received a Hebrew education as well as the standard primary course of studies. The Tarbut school had a Zionist orientation; we met a lot of “shlichim” (emissaries) from Palestine who came to speak to us and encourage aliya to Palestine. We had various Hebrew youth groups — Hashomeir Hatzair (leftist), Betar (Revisionist), etc. The idea was to make the youth Zionist-minded. These youth groups organized dances, outings and other activities. So I grew up in an atmosphere of Jewish culture.

When I graduated from the Tarbut school I went to a “gymnasium” (high school). The gymnasium on Farna street was partially subsidized by the government but you had to pay privately too. It was a Jewish gymnasium because Jews could not get into the Polish gymnasiums. A few Jews got into one, the Povshechne gymnasium, but my parents lacked the “connections” to get me in. So I spent 4 years in the Farna street gymnasium. My final two years were spent when the Russians occupied our town, so we had to learn Russian. Education was important to me and very important to my parents.

When I was accepted to the Farma Street gymnasium, my mother and father were very proud of me. Of course, the Povshechne gymnasium would have been my first choice, but anti-semitism strictly limited the number of Jews accepted. Before the outbreak of World War II and before the increasing popularity of Hitler, Polish and Ukrainian racism reared its ugly head at the Jewish people. Nazism simply aggravated the beast of anti-semitism which was already deeply entrenched.

On September 1st, 1939 the German army invaded Poland and Hitler made a pact with Stalin dividing Poland between Germany and the Soviet Union. I was at school when the Russians arrived in our town on September 17th. At that time I didn't know the meaning of the word “nationalize.” I remember seeing big Red Army trucks and they looked ominous to my young eyes.

Change swept across Poland like a violent hurricane. All of a sudden the Russians nationalized everything; they enforced rules forbidding private enterprise and business “as usual” ceased. The Russians collected grain, produce and other things and then shipped the goods to the Soviet Union. People in our town were in turmoil. My parents had a business and we quickly learned that it would no longer be our’s — it was now their’s. We didn’t know what would happen with our schooling. Life as we had known it ceased to exist.

My father, being a scholar of Russian and a former teacher, felt that his fluency in Russian gave him a certain advantage, so he started to look for a job. His Russian was impeccable. (Being multilingual was part of our culture — at the Tarbut school we had started studying English with teachers specially brought from England. We learned Latin too — it was compulsory.) My father was lucky to find an excellent job in a Russian government office charged with the procurement of certain products and shipping them to Russia. It was a secretive kind of operation, run by the NKVD, and my father never discussed his work openly. He was highly respected at work and the Russian manager of the office was invited to our home on many occasions.

So we didn’t have it bad at all. Since a war had broken out and everybody was worried about food, we kept a cow. We had had working horses but, having lost our

business, we had no need of them so we sold them. This cow was a life-saver because it meant that we always had fresh milk and butter. Many people kept a cow like we did. My father had quickly sized up the new situation: we were citizens of the Soviet Union and we could own nothing. We had to survive, so having a cow became very, very important. It provided security for us. We lived in town and kept the cow in a little shack-like stable in the back yard. I grew up with animals: dogs to guard our business, horses for transportation, and now we had a cow. We used to drink the milk warm, straight from the cow — not pasteurized or homogenized. We churned our own butter; we had sweet cream, sour cream and cheese. In situations like we were in people adapt quickly to thinking first about survival. We had a front yard, so my father brought good topsoil and turned it into a vegetable plot. We grew tomatoes, carrots, lettuce, radishes, etc. My paternal grandfather lived far away but he didn't mind coming to us often and looking after the plot. (By that time my mother's father, Leib, had died a natural death.)

All in all, life went on for us. We were resigned to being under Russian rule because we already heard about the atrocities on the other side of the Bug river. I used to see streams of refugees (we called them "run-aways") running from German-occupied areas to be under Russian rule. I saw thousands of such people streaming through Vladimir-Volinsk, which was so close

to the new border. My father didn't want to move — he wanted security. He didn't want to become a refugee. He figured, somewhat fatalistically, that whatever would be, would be. But he also thought that his fluency in Russian would see us through any difficulties that might arise. I remember him saying: "Let them run, let them run as far as they can. I'm staying here; I have my home, my security, and my connections." Who knew that the German-Russian Pact would be broken and we would be occupied by the Germans? Perhaps some people suspected it and my father made an error of judgment. A good number of those refugees we saw kept going into Russia and quite a number of them probably survived the war. My father however, was killed, as was almost all of his family. Those refugees were the smart ones — they didn't want to take chances. They kept running as far as they could.

I finished gymnasium when we were under the Soviet rule. Russian had been added to the curriculum. My father had been selected to speak at the graduation ceremony on behalf of the parents. I was so proud of him. He made a beautiful speech about how proud he was of his daughter and the excellent education we had received at that school. He told the audience that they should all be happy to have lived to see this day. I was accepted for further studies at the University of Lvov and I looked forward to going away to study. I would leave our small town and live in a big city. I would learn new things and meet new friends. A bright life waited for me in Lvov —

I was so excited about it! Alas, all my hopes came to nothing. The new life that awaited me was nothing that I could ever have imagined even in my darkest nightmares.

On June 22nd, 1941 the Nazis crossed the Bug River and invaded eastern Poland. They tore up their pact with the Russians, and with that we entered a new era. All I knew and loved and cherished would be swept away. My world would no longer exist and my youth in Vladimir-Volinsk would become no more than a memory.

CHAPTER TWO

Darkness, Death and Betrayal

With the collapse of the Russo-German Pact in June of 1941 my world fell apart. I knew immediately that my father no longer had a job. His supervisor, the Russian Boris, told me: "Speak to your parents and tell them to get out of here!" Boris was a Jew but only my father and I knew that. Boris insisted: "The Germans will kill all of you. I know that for a fact! Pack and leave — now!" When I told my father, he calmly answered me that we were not going to run. He believed in stability and he saw the new, alarming developments as a passing phase. Besides, there was so little time. The Russians in our town packed feverishly and practically pulled out overnight. There was so little time to make a vital decision. I can see my father's situation: how do you make a decision overnight to abandon everything and run?

And then the bombardment started. The German planes zoomed low over people's heads like thunder; bombs plummeted like rain from menacing skies. Utter chaos and blind fear gripped the people in our town; they crushed and trampled each other in their panic as they scurried to find a safe place. But no place was safe from those bombs. Survival was a pure accident: if the bombs missed you, you lived. If they didn't miss you, or landed nearby, you were blown to bits.

It all happened so fast. On the evening of June 24th the last Russians pulled out and in the morning of the 25th the ominous columns of Germans moved in. There was really no transition phase. By the time the Germans, wearing their swastika armbands, moved in, Vladimir Volynski was in ruins. Buildings smoked from raging fires and ashes covered the ground like dirty snow. Some houses were lucky, as our's was — they remained untouched. I remained inside my house, shaking from the deafening sound of exploding bombs. Mother consoled me by saying: "Don't worry, Chanale. We're all fine. Property damage can be repaired, human lives cannot."

Bands of Nazi soldiers walked around the town and laughed at the Jew's misery. They enjoyed the sight of the destruction they had wrought. A series of orders were communicated to the Jews. They had to bring all their books and radios to designated places. The penalty for non-compliance was death. Jews had to wear yellow Stars of David. Any Jew caught not wearing one would be shot on the spot.

I had fallen in love with one of my teachers, Kizel. He lived quite a distance from us. The bombs were falling like hail and I worried about Kizel. I wanted to see how he was doing but my mother wouldn't let me out of the house. However, I sneaked out of the house and ran to his house. There I discovered that he had been killed in a

ditch by a bomb while he was running for shelter. I was devastated by that.

My best friend was my next door neighbor on Kovelska street, Sarah Chuver. Her father was a butcher. Sarah was a beautiful girl, with long, chestnut-brown hair, emerald-green eyes, pale-pink lips and delicate white skin. She had a sweet, positive disposition and we all admired her gentle laugh. Everybody liked Sarah. I was proud to be her special friend.

Shortly after the invasion, Mama and I were peeling what few potatoes we could find for dinner. Suddenly, screaming broke the silence — Sarah's screams. I ran to our living-room window. Sarah's house was next to my house. There was a fence between the houses. What I saw was a couple of German soldiers chasing Sarah, who was screaming. She had been sitting on the gallery in front of the house and she now was being chased to the back yard. Her mother and her oldest sister were running after her but I saw one of the soldiers, waving his club, push them back into the house. This was done so that they would not be able to see what would shortly happen. More German soldiers ran up and they caught Sarah. She was surrounded by them while they cackled like a band of hyenas. Sarah was sobbing and screaming hysterically. The soldiers attacked her as a wolf pack attacks a lamb. One soldier tore her clothes off while the others waited in blazing anticipation. Sarah fought the soldier off but

he clubbed her with his rifle butt; she fell to the ground and cried out in sheer anguish. The soldier unzipped his pants, removed his underwear and assaulted her. The screaming had stopped. My mother said to me: "Don't stand near the window — somebody will see you." But we had some curtains so, by pushing the curtains slightly aside I could peer out. I saw one soldier get up with a satisfied look on his face, and another one immediately jumped on poor Sarah. Other soldiers were waiting for their turn (the Germans are a very orderly people). The one who raped her first went around to the front gallery to watch the house so that nobody could leave. The satisfied whoops and laughter of the soldiers was so loud that I, as a young girl, knew exactly what was going on. My mother could not control my crying because I knew how Sarah was suffering. Tears poured from my eyes; my body was racked with sobbing. Mama hugged me tightly.

When the soldiers left, I saw that Sarah's parents were trying to lift her from the ground but they couldn't pick her up. Somebody from her house ran for help to the adjoining house (they lived in a semi-detached house) where a photographer lived. He came running to help and they carried her into the house. Her head flopped down and her beautiful long hair dragged on the ground. Whether she was dead then, or died shortly thereafter — that I can't say. I know that they buried Sarah the next day. Her parents never recovered; her mother always wore a black shawl which covered most of her face.

Nobody knew that had happened except my mother and I. Besides, to whom could the parents report what had happened. The police? The Germans were the police. They were the criminals. I believe that Sarah was probably dead when they carried her into the house. What pain the parents must have felt! My mother said: "Chanele, you musn't say a word about this to anyone." But from then on my mother never let me go outside because she was afraid that the same thing could happen to me. So I spent very many days hiding in the attic. From that time, I lived in fear, fear of becoming the soldiers' next victim.

The soldiers had obviously planned this rape very carefully. Across the road from our houses were barracks where the soldiers were stationed. Sarah was often sitting in front of the house and she must have attracted the soldiers' attention. She was very beautiful. The scene of Sarah being chased by the soldiers has been burned into my consciousness. When I visit my daughter and leave, I will not go till I hear the door being locked behind me. The helpless terror I felt so many years ago has remained with me.

Shortly after the death of Sarah, on July 31, 1941, Mama, Benny and I awoke at six in the morning after a restless night. We had heard footsteps coming from the street in front of the house. Mama and I went to a front window and peered out; a figure dressed in plain clothes was running towards our house. As the stranger ran clos-

er, Mama murmured: "There is Leon. What's he doing here, now?" Leon was a Pole who had been employed in our family business for many, many years. Mama and Abba had treated him like a family member and paid him well, because he had worked so hard with them to build up our coal and wood business. We had heard that, like other Poles and Ukrainians, he had joined the new militia organized by the Germans because he had been promised a "bright future" by them.

The gate in front of our house was always locked for the night. Leon came very early in the morning, and he wasn't going to wait for us to open the gate. He jumped over the fence and ran down the walk to our front door. It was quite a distance from the fence and gate near the sidewalk to our house. We saw him run closer with a rifle hanging from his shoulder. We didn't expect anything bad but when Mama opened the door Leon had such a vicious look on his face that we immediately felt that something was very, very wrong. He said: "Panye Ressels, get dressed and come with me. I have to take you to work." The word "work" struck fear into our hearts, most of those already taken to "work" had never returned. My father said: "Leon, I was always so good to you! How can you do this to me?" Leon answered: "This is no time for discussions. Get dressed right away and come with me. This is an order. Nothing bad will happen to you but you have to work now. The Jews all have to work." Mama pleaded: "Please, Leon. Don't take my

husband away. We were always so good to you!" Leon said coldly: "I have my orders. They must be followed — immediately!" Leon must have been filled with hatred for us for a long time but we had never even suspected it. Now was his chance to get even. He probably had to deliver a certain number of Jews for "work," so he combined this order with his personal desire to take revenge.

My brother Benny had put on a clean shirt and pants; he rushed out to join Abba. Benny said: "Father, I'm not going to let you go by yourself. I want to help." My father replied: "No, don't come with me." But Benny turned to Leon and said: "I don't want my father to work too hard; I'll help him at whatever job he has to do." Mama pleaded: "Benny, Leon asked only for your father, not you." But Benny insisted: "Under no circumstances will I allow Father to go alone. I want to help him." Abba spoke in a comforting tone to my mother: "Don't worry, ... We'll be fine." He kissed Mama and me goodbye and both Abba and Benny left with Leon.

Mama feverishly grabbed a few items of clothing and got dressed. She instructed me to stay home quietly and she left the house to see where Abba and Benny were being taken. I looked out the window and I saw Jews being herded all over the place. It seemed to be all so unreal. This was an "oblava" — they were catching Jews in the streets like a dog-catcher catches dogs. Jews wore yellow patches on their chests and backs; that made them

easily identifiable. The patches were in circular form. Jews had to wear them as a result of a directive of the General Kommissar handed down on September 6, 1941. Whoever was caught was taken away. My father, however, had been taken by Leon from his home. We figured that Leon had come to our house to meet his quota of Jews.

As Mama was chasing after Leon, Abba and Benny, a German soldier clubbed her across the face with his truncheon. She fell to the ground and blood streamed from her mouth. Nevertheless, she rose and continued following the 3 men, ripping the left sleeve off her dress and putting the material into her mouth to stop the bleeding. She saw Leon lead his two prisoners into the prison, a huge, old structure that loomed over the area near the Halle (a row of meat-sellers' stores). This prison had a very high wall made out of cement blocks. The black iron gate leading inside was quite wide and it would swing open as new groups of captured Jews were herded inside.

Mama saw anguished Jewish women waiting outside the gate for news of their loved ones, so she joined them. They could hear nothing from inside the prison. Some women went to see the head of the Judenrat, the council of Jews that had been established by the Germans. In a cold calculated manner, he explained: "I am sorry. We can't do anything now. It's out of our hands." These women reported his answer to the other women waiting

at the gate. After 27 hours of waiting, the gate swung open and one of the Judenrat officials came out. The Judenrat had sent him there to find out what they would do to the captured Jews. But when he came out his face was so pale and grim that my mother said: "He has a very sad face. It's probably very bad news." People mobbed him with their questions. He shoved them away, yelling "get away from me!" He didn't want to tell the bad news that the Jews were being killed there, yet he didn't want to lie. So he shouted: "You must have hope. Gott vett helfen (God will help)!" He repeated that over and over, almost mechanically. And we found out later why he had been so evasive. What was going on inside that prison was sheer hell, a hell that took my Abba and Benny away from me forever.

Henry Kazimirski, whom I was to marry later, was working in a German Wehrmacht dental clinic as a dentist. This gave him access to information which nobody else knew. He found out later that the Germans had killed the Jewish prisoners right there in the prison. He told me how the Jews were first tossed into group cells which were very crowded. They were beaten and brutalized by sadistic guards who considered them "untermenschen" (subhuman). They were starved. And then they were taken out to dig huge pits in the courtyard of the prison. When the pits were deep enough, the Jews were lined up beside them. Soldiers raised their guns and fired simultaneously into the necks of the Jews. As they tum-

bled forward into the pits, new lines of Jews were ordered to take their place and the same pattern was repeated. Some of the bodies in the pits were half-dead (still alive). Blood and bone fragments littered the ground. The tangled mass of bodies in the pit heaved. Abba and Benny died in this way. With Abba's death, a wealth of Jewish knowledge vanished and with Benny's death, a life of promise and achievement was cut off before it could bloom. Other prisoners were beaten and ordered to shovel earth on the still-warm bodies. Then they too were shot. Benny's life was wasted; he never had a chance. All he wanted to do was to help his father, and he paid for his noble motive with his life.

What Henry told me was corroborated later by a survivor who managed to get himself released from that prison. Perhaps his family had special "pull" or connections. I don't know. He said that there were quite a few pits in the yard of the prison but the Germans killed so many Jews that the pits were not big enough, even though the dead Jews were stacked in layers. Then the Germans turned to burning the corpses.

Did my father see how they killed his son? This question has always haunted me. The wondering is a big pain by itself. Were they tortured? Were they separated? They were so close. Did they ever see each other before they died? What were their last moments like? I have a deep need to know. What were their last thoughts? This is

something I always think about. The innocence of my brother — he gave himself up for no reason at all when Leon hadn't even come to get him. Benny only wanted to be by his father's side. Perhaps he might have survived the war. A young boy like that — he didn't deserve to be snuffed out like that.

We kept the truth from Mama. We wanted to spare her from further, mental anguish. Mama always kept a dim flicker of hope alight in her heart hoping that someday Abba and Benny would return to her. It would have been cruel to extinguish that little flicker of hope. A little hope is better than no hope at all.

Abba and Benny were taken from me forever. They were wrenched from life by the Nazi beasts, but they live in my heart and thoughts. I miss them every day of my life.

CHAPTER THREE

Marriage and the Aktion

I was left alone with Mama. I was desperately looking for a contact, for someone who could help me find out what had happened to Benny and Abba. We didn't know they were dead. Somebody told me there was a Jewish dentist working in a German Wehrmacht dental clinic so my mother said to me: "Chanele, maybe you can find out through him where your father and brother are." So I gathered all my courage and "chutzpa" and resolved to go and meet this man. What better link could I find? Perhaps he could save my brother and father. So I put on my very best clothes and ran across town to the German dental clinic.

Then I went into the waiting room. I sat down and waited. Then the door opened and this man came out wearing a white jacket. He noticed me immediately and was terribly embarrassed; he turned away, pretending not to have seen me at all. I learned later that the people at the clinic didn't know that the dentist was a Jew. He was afraid that the fact of his being a Jew would become evident because of the young girl with the yellow patches waiting for him. He treated 5 or 6 patients and after the last one, he came out, whisked me away to another room, and said to me: "How dare you come here? You know this is a German clinic." I explained my situation to him

and explained why I had come. Later on, he told me what a dangerous thing I had done by going there.

Dr. Henry Kazimirski was about 5'7" tall. He was slightly bald and had a wonderful sense of humor. He concealed his Jewish identity from his German patients because he carried a special ausweis (pass) that allowed him to walk the streets without a Jewish star. Even so, he lived in fear.

After the last patient had left, Dr. Kazimirski said: "Please come into my office." As our eyes met, I felt a warmth between us, a certain emotional pull. After hearing about my quest for information about Abba and Benny, he said he would try to ferret out information about them. He told me that it wouldn't be easy to find out the truth but he would try his best. He also asked if he could see me again and he took my name and address.

There were no normal dates then. You didn't go on dates at that time. We met in my house or in his clinic. I fell deeply in love with Henry. In the midst of such tragic times, I met somebody who could give me comfort. My mother rejoiced in our relationship because she too liked Henry very much. He was a fundamentally decent man, and being a dentist gave him a certain status. He also played the piano. He said later that when he heard me play he fell in love with me. Whenever he came to visit I had to play for him because he enjoyed it so much. He helped sustain me through those very difficult times;

he was somebody I could lean on. Our two men were gone and Henry's presence made the knocks easier to bear. Our love ran deep — to the very center of our hearts; we comforted, supported, trusted and understood each other. My happiness grew and my sadness slowly diminished.

The people who had hired him knew that he was Jewish although officially he was supposed to be a Pole. When the German army swept into our area they had no dentists. The army badly needed dentists so Henry was hired — it was as simple as that. With 1 other man, Henry had to organize a clinic and get the appropriate instruments and medication. Henry and his associate did this all enthusiastically because it served them as a shelter, a front. The soldiers kept coming to the clinic in droves; the two dentists were very busy. The people who had hired them told them that they must never appear as Jews. They must not wear the yellow patches in the office.

Henry was far from home. He came from Wloclawek. He had studied dentistry in Belgium and then he practiced his profession in Warsaw. When the refugees started to flee Warsaw he joined them and fled towards the Russian border. He stopped in our town, Vladimir Volynski, because we were not far from the border; besides, he knew a renowned doctor in our town named Bubis who had studied with him in Belgium. Henry

decided he would stop in our town and stay with Bubis; he could afterwards decide whether to go deeper into Russia. His partner in the dental clinic told me that Henry had been a big playboy in his earlier years (he was eleven years older than I was) and he warned me not to become too attached to Henry but I saw Henry from a different point of view. I was attracted to Henry's sense of humour. If I felt sad, he would joke with me to make me feel better. He nicknamed me Kicia (the Polish word for pussycat) which always comforted me. In spite of his partner's warnings, I felt deep in my heart that Henry's love for me was an enduring and sincere emotion, the kind which one rarely encounters in life.

Our love grew deeper with each passing day and on February 1, 1942 we were married in secrecy at Rabbi Morgenshtern's chambers. The wedding meant everything to me although it was definitely not the gala affair that most young women dream about. Nevertheless, the Ketubah (Hebrew marriage contract) said it all: Chana and Henry Kazimirski were bound together in the holy vows of matrimony. I had found a husband who cared deeply about me and was devoted to Mama. For instance, Henry shared his food with Mama and I, because he possessed an ausweis that provided him with slightly more food than other Jews.

Henry was basically an optimistic person. He always told me: "Kicia, think about today, not tomorrow. Today

we have each other." However, as the war progressed, Henry became pessimistic. Henry had found out from the Gebittskommissar (area commander) what had happened to Abba and Benny — that they were both dead. We never told Mama what he had found out.

After a time, the clinic Henry was working in was closed. A German dentist, Dr. Hecker, a Nazi party member, was brought in and he set up a new clinic. He let Henry's associate go but he decided to keep Henry. He told him: "You'll continue working for me but you'll never pull teeth or do surgical procedures. You will do minor procedures under my direction. A Jew pulling German teeth — such things are not proper." So he moved the clinic and made it more professional. When Dr. Hecker came, he brought with him a dental technician (dental mechanic or denturologist) from the army's dental corps, a man named Hahn.

On April 13, 1943, an event happened which the Jews had been dreading. It was a prelude to annihilation. The Germans set up a ghetto in two sections: one for skilled craftsmen, nicknamed by the Jews "the ghetto of life," and a second ghetto for the non-productive, called the "ghetto of the dead." Both areas trapped 22,000 Jews. Those in the "ghetto of the dead" did not possess an Ausweis and the authorities considered them illegal. The Germans promised Kudish, the President of the Judenrat, that the Jews who had an "Ausweis" would live

Ausweis № 28/1

Der Kasimierski Euseb / Zahnarzt /
Die

wohnhaft Ustifluger № 44

ist in die Bescheinigung des Judenrates № 28
als Mitglied der Familie des Besitzers des Facharbeits-
ausweises № 723 eingetragen und ist berechtigt

die Strassen ausserhalb des Ghettos zu passieren, und
Wladimir, d. 18. VII 1942. ausserhalb d. Getto
zu wohnen.

Der Judenrat.



[Handwritten signature]

Ausweis... Special Permit

and work for the German army. The Germans considered them "productive," they said. However, in time the Germans slaughtered those with the work permits and those who had none. The "permit" (Ausweis) system was just a ruse to dupe innocent Jews who were willing to grasp at any straw to remain alive. Besides, to the Jews it all seemed so logical; nobody would dispose of skilled laborers whose skills were obtained for nothing. Killing them would be illogical. The Jews, of course, had no idea of the depth of German savagery; it was beyond their imagination. The laws of logic did not apply as far as the lives of Jews were concerned.

Henry lived outside the ghetto with me because the Wehrmacht (army) gave him a special permit. The permit permitted some freedom, yet danger surrounded us at all times. Mama preferred living with her sisters and parents in the ghetto of life. Perhaps she felt safer in the ghetto, but any Jew was in danger — no matter where he or she lived.

Jews besieged the Judenrat to get permits to live in the ghetto of life. They were willing to make all kinds of bribes and gifts to obtain the special passes. The head of the Judenrat, Leib Kudish, suddenly became a god. People rushed to him with "gifts" to buy what they thought was life; in reality it was only a stay of execution. Leib Kudish had a special meaning for me. His daughter Taubtcha was one of my closest childhood friends. We

lived on Kilshchizna street, not far from the Smotch river, and the Kudish family lived near us. He was a barber. He had an excellent voice and he sang well. He was a tall and rather stout man. His wife walked around and strutted like a peacock — she was always putting on airs. Although uneducated, she considered herself an elite person. I used to go to the Kudish house every day after school to play with Taubtcha. All of a sudden, when the war broke out I kept hearing the name "Leib Kudish" being bandied about everywhere. He became a personality — he pushed himself into the position of Head of the Judenrat. Some Jews were drafted into the Judenrat by the Germans; these Jews had no choice in the matter. Some of them later committed suicide when they saw what they were being asked to do. Other Jews joined the Judenrat because they thought they could help their brethren. They soon realized that their hopes were futile. Leib Kudish, however, saw the formation of a Judenrat as his chance to become a big somebody. He volunteered. He became so powerful that people feared him like they feared the Germans. He had to play up to the Germans and he became very vicious in order to appeal to them. He was a gross, uncouth person, a "proster mensch," but he knew how to keep people terrified of him. He did have with him in the Judenrat highly intelligent people. One of my teachers who had taught me math and physics was in the Judenrat. The rich man Mr. Sheinkestel, a respected man in the community and one of the elite, was in the Judenrat too.

I would not be here today to write these words today were it not for one highly moral and heroic man: Hahn, the dental technician. He always showed a great concern for Henry. Each time that he heard of a plan against the Jews he alerted Henry with information. When Henry used this information to alert Jews in the ghetto they nicknamed him "the panic-maker." They didn't want to believe that Henry was telling the truth. Besides, people believe what they want to believe and what Henry was telling them was what they didn't want to believe at all. Dr. Hecker, although a Nazi, also fed Henry with certain information. Hecker was a close friend of the Gebitskomissar Wilhelm Westerheide, who was in charge of the whole area. Hecker often brought Westerheide to the dental clinic. Hecker told Henry at the end of August, 1942: "You mustn't stay here because you'll be killed. I advise you to run into the woods, to another city, anywhere — something is being planned to make this whole area completely "Judenrein" (cleansed of Jews)." But where should we go? Where could we go? Who wanted us?

The first rumors of an impending "Aktion" (action) spread through the ghetto like wildfire in July. Henry believed the rumors because Hahn had overheard a German official talking about a plan to slaughter 20,000 Jews. He told Henry what he had heard. The Nazis began the genocide in a "small" way by murdering small groups of Jews. For example, on August 20th, 1000 Jews were



Holocaust Memorial in Wlodzimierz in memory of the 20 000 victims

forced to dig their own graves at Piatydnie, (just outside Vladimir Volynski) and they were then shot.

One day in late August Henry rushed home and told me: "I found a hiding place. Let's go and ask your mother to stay with us, but do not speak about the hiding place to anyone else, because the walls have ears." Death hung over the Jewish ghetto like a guillotine. Henry and I spread the news about the Aktion to our family. After hearing the news, Mama relented and decided to hide with us, because she understood that remaining in the ghetto meant certain death.

However, some people had prepared hiding places. Few of them survived. The Germans and their Ukrainian and Polish "helpers" became experts at ferreting out hiding places, no matter how well concealed they were. Jews hid in tunnels, under buildings, in attics, or sought shelter with Gentiles outside the ghetto.

Monday evening, August 31, 1942, Henry, Mama and I arrived mysteriously at our hiding place. Until that moment I hadn't been told by Henry exactly where our hiding place was. I just knew we had a hiding place. Henry had been afraid that I would "spill the beans" to somebody — that's why he didn't tell me. Our hiding place was the attic of the dental clinic where Henry worked, and we approached it through the back door. Hahn had agreed to hide us in the attic. He didn't do this for money or for jewels or for anything material. He did

this because he, a German, cared about his fellow human beings. He hated injustice. He had an innate decency and nobility of character.

It had, however, taken a lot of persuasion by Henry to get Hahn to agree to letting my mother join us. Hahn wanted to hide only Henry and me. The fact that he let my mother come too was the greatest favor. He had told Henry: "I don't know your mother-in-law. I don't feel responsible for her." But Henry begged him and said: "My wife won't come unless her mother comes too. So please, you must let her join us. She's a good woman." Hahn finally agreed to hide my mother too. Henry was telling the truth: I wouldn't have gone without my mother. There was no question about it. Mama wasn't living with us, as she was in the ghetto. When Henry told me that Hahn had agreed, I ran to the ghetto (I had a pass allowing me entrance and exit) and excitedly told my mother to come with me and hide. Imagine my consternation when she said she didn't want to go. She told me: "What are you making a panic for? Why do you spread such stories?" I pleaded with her: "Ma, I know from a very important source what's coming. Please! Please! Come right away with me!" I grabbed her and begged and pleaded and cried till she allowed me to lead her away with me. She came as she was — no packing or preparing or anything.

I led my mother out of the ghetto and brought her to my house. From there we proceeded to go to the clinic which was 9 or 10 blocks away. I had asked Henry if I could take something with me — a small valise, a change of clothes, some precious photos, etc. — but Henry said no because the neighbors were all Gentiles and they might suspect that we were escaping somewhere. All Henry had in his hand was his rolled-up dental diploma from the Université de Belgique and some gold coins for use in an emergency. I had nothing. I had earlier hidden a lot of personal things by a Polish neighbor and I figured that I could always return to her someday to retrieve them.

So we went to Hahn in the evening, at a time when we knew that there was nobody in the clinic. My young cousin Motel wanted to hide with us too but Hahn absolutely refused. Too many people in one small hiding place would cause problems, he said. Not enough space, too much noise, too little food, and every extra person slowed down others from escaping quickly, if that became necessary. I suggested to Motel that he hide in the dark basement of my apartment building. He agreed and I found out later that the Germans found him there. They executed him immediately — another life wasted.

Hahn, inside the back door, saw us coming and quietly opened it. He rushed us quickly without any hesitation to the stepladder leading up to the attic and we clambered

up hastily. My immediate reaction when I saw the attic was: Oh My God! Don't tell me I'll have to stay in such a place for some time! When Hahn had opened the attic trapdoor, the heat rushed out at us and hit us in the face. This was summer. The trapdoor was a very tightly fitting one.

The roof was sloped but high enough in the middle to allow a person to walk upright. But that was only in the middle — on either side where the roof sloped down you could only move in a crouched position. I saw a wooden floor with some hay and straw on it, mixed with a few rags. However, it was in general neat and clean, not dirty. Hahn must have worked hard to prepare it for us. A 16” x 18” window did not open but provided light and a full view of the ghetto's gate.

Hahn gave us rapid but thorough instructions. His voice was strained; he knew that, as a soldier of the Reich, if he would be caught sheltering Jews he would be shot immediately. He said: "Do not walk around during the day, except during the clinic's lunchtime, when everyone is out of the building — between noon and one o'clock. At any other time, your footsteps could be heard downstairs. I will bring you food and water during the evenings. Deposit your waste in a bucket and I will remove it when I bring your food. Also, do not talk during the day; if you must, then whisper. Good luck."

Thoughts raced through my mind: "Will we survive this? Will Motel survive? What if the chief of the clinic, Dr. Hecker, will come in after regular hours — he has a key. He belongs to the SS and he's such a good friend of the Gebittskommissar, Westerheide, the man who is planning the "Aktion." Hahn told us that we should expect the "Aktion" between 2 and 3 in the morning. Hahn left us and we heard him shut the clinic's door around seven o'clock in the evening. Mama and I tore off our Jewish stars and threw them into the waste bucket.

Intense heat smothered us. Outside all was silent. Thick darkness soon swallowed us and we could not see ourselves — let alone each other. My mother was somewhat of a complainer — being older (38), she couldn't cope with the heat. I told her: "Stop complaining. Let's wait a few days and see what happens." She was a person who liked comfort, so this discomfort affected her terribly.

We didn't have to wait long to find out what would happen. At 4 or 5 in the morning we heard terrible screaming. Mama whispered: "The Aktion is beginning." And those terrible screams continued: "God, my God! Gevalt! Gevalt!" And Henry was the first to move to that small window (it faced the ghetto exactly, and the gebittskommissariat was in full view) and he said: "A broch, a broch — men harget Yidn" (oh my, oh my, they're killing Jews). I said quietly: "It is the end of us." The window

allowed only one person at a time to see so I pulled Henry away and said "Let me see what's going on!" And I saw a sight straight from hell, a sight that burned itself into my memories.

I saw big trucks scattered all over the place. I could hear their loud motors idling. I saw men, many wearing taleisim (prayer shawls) being herded into the backs of the trucks. Some raised their arms to the sky, as if appealing in their panic to the heavens, while others knelt on the ground, crying out in anguish: "Lama Hazavtonu (why have You forsaken us)?" These men must have been rounded up while they were at their morning prayers. SS men, with their rifle butts, clubbed Jewish children and hit them with their long, metal flashlights; the poor kids were screaming as they were pushed into the trucks. Blood stained the ground and blood stained the children's clothes. Meanwhile, Nazis shouted at the tops of their lungs: "Shneller, shneller, farfluchte Juden (faster, faster, you accursed Jews)!" The wounded screamed loudly; many never made it into the trucks because they were trampled by other Jews who were hurrying into the trucks to escape the Nazi blows. Some Jews were shot right there on the spot. The shooting and screaming was unbearable; the Germans were kicking the Jews and cursing them. The trucks were filled up, one after another, and when full they set out for their "destination" (mass graves which had been prepared in the Piatydnie area). I saw mothers clutching their children

being beaten — it was horrible! After some time, the Jews became more passive — there was nothing they could do. After a time I couldn't look any longer and Henry took my place at the window.

Then we took turns. After Henry my mother looked out the window and then it was my turn again. My mother couldn't look much because she felt like fainting. At one point I had to put a rag soaked with water to her forehead.

The trucks kept loading all day long. I think the shouting and beating and general panic and chaos of the scene was specially created by the Germans to prevent any resistance from forming. You can't do anything when you are caught up in a wild mob scene. Trucks were coming and trucks were going — continuously, all day long. Henry and I saw the Gebittskomissar Westerheide walk straight into the ghetto to make sure that things were going "smoothly." He was in a resplendent uniform, wearing his high polished leather boots; he was surrounded by many soldiers. He looked like he knew exactly what was going on — the annihilation of 18,000 innocent human beings. My husband and I had seen him before so we recognized him immediately. He was only about 22 feet away from our window when he came into the ghetto; it was 10 minutes after 12 noon. I felt like strangling Westerheide with my bare hands. How could he order them to be rounded up like wild horses and loaded into

trucks like cattle? And all the while he had a playful smile on his face as if the whole procedure amused him very much.

Henry kept watching the horrible sights with a solemn face. He said nervously, time and again: "Look at that! Nobody would ever believe it!"

I learned later that the Gebitskomissar Westerheide and his secretary-mistress, Anna Altfuter (aka Johanne Zelle) were not happy that this "Aktion" was such a massive one (18,000 Jews killed). They would have preferred having more Jews. The two of them had collected hundreds and perhaps thousands of diamonds and pieces of gold jewellery as bribes. They did this through the Judenrat but **never** personally. Now, with this Aktion, their gold mine was drying up. (I heard that after the war Westerheide was living a very luxurious life in West Germany.)

By four o'clock, an ominous and deadly silence hung over the ghetto streets. The German beasts, assisted by their Ukrainian and Polish collaborators, had achieved their objective: 18,000 innocent people who had been alive at the beginning of that day were now a jumbled, tangled mass of corpses in the pits at Piatydnie. The area which our little window overlooked was covered with torn articles of clothing, blood, pieces of human bones, and human waste. (When people are in a great panic they

often can't control their bodily functions.) The trucks were gone. The Jews were gone too. Forever.

That day we hardly ate anything although Hahn had given us some bread and varied cheeses packed in a very clean towel. He included a few apples too. He couldn't give us much because it would have attracted suspicion. We slept restlessly that night. I thanked God that we were safe for the time being and that I had Henry and Mama with me. However, I was covered with a cold sweat (in spite of the heat in that attic) when I thought about the future. Surely, Hahn would not let us remain in the attic for the remainder of the war.

At eight o'clock Wednesday morning we drank water which was somewhat stale from the heat. At noon, we heard the sound of heavy truck engines coming from the open area beneath our little window. We ran to the window and saw that the Germans had prepared a follow-up to yesterday's Aktion. Polish and Ukrainian militiamen dressed in special uniforms were ordered to "finish the job." They pulled out Jews from chimneys where they had been hiding. Don't forget, people were hiding everywhere. They had prepared themselves with tunnels, bunkers and holes behind cupboards ("schrons" — this means a concealed hiding place) which were carefully masked. And yet the murderers found them. I heard the soldiers screaming in Ukrainian, Polish and German. The Germans had help — big help. They could have never

done what they did by themselves. The Ukrainians were screaming "Davai, Davai" (fast, fast); the Poles were yelling "Parshive Zhid" (Dirty Jews), and all the while they were herding Jews and loading them into the trucks. The screaming of mothers and children can't be believed — I hear those screams ringing in my ears to this day and it often keeps me from sleeping.

I saw militiamen entering houses empty-handed and exiting with prisoners. A man in a long, black coat tried escaping from his captor's hands, but to no avail. They fired twice and I saw the man fall to the ground a second later. He was lying in a pool of blood. A militiaman threw his warm body into a wheelbarrow like a sack of potatoes.

At half past six in the evening, Hahn appeared for the first time since our arrival three days ago. He opened the trapdoor; his face was pale and his voice shaky. He had a shameful look on his face; he didn't look straight into our eyes. He asked: "Did you hear screaming? Are you aware that an Aktion began yesterday?" Henry answered: "Yes, we knew that an Aktion started. Is that why you did not come yesterday?" Hahn responded with a simple nod. Henry hugged him and said: "Thank you for saving our lives! Thank you!" Hahn removed the waste pail, emptied it and brought it back. He also bought us some bread, cheese and fresh water. He said: "Remember, do not move during the daytime, except

during lunchtime or outside of clinic hours." He descended quickly, not wanting to speak about the Aktion or answer our questions. He was ashamed at what his countrymen had wrought.

Hahn was a very special human being. He was about 40 years old, skinny, with a smart look on his face. He had blondish-brown hair and looked very Germanic. He was an Aryan type. He was well-groomed and dressed. There was a certain look he had on his face, a human expression, a kind of soft warmth. How fortunate we were to have stumbled on such a man in the midst of the greatest genocidal mass murder in history! He was a German — yes. But he was, first of all, a caring human being.

In the attic, our enemy became the heat. We prayed for rain or for a cool spell to break the heat; relief from the oppressive heat would have meant more to us than bathing or eating. We fought a non-stop battle against that heat and the draining fatigue it brought. Water could not cool us; nothing could. I asked myself: since we were so worn down by the battle against the heat and fatigue, how could we survive against more powerful enemies — Nazis and their militia accomplices?

During the next few days, Wehrmacht soldiers with the help of Polish and Ukrainian militiamen rushed in and rushed out of the ghetto. They dragged Jews out of their hiding places and forced them into trucks. Many

scenes burned themselves into my memory and haunt me to this very day. I recall a mother carrying her crying son. A German soldier grabbed the young child from her arms. The mother's shrieks could have pierced the heavens! The Nazi soldier gave her a tremendous blow to the head with his rifle butt; the child was crying and screaming from fear. Another Nazi soldier ran over, picked up the child by his neck and threw him into a truck like a sack of potatoes; his mother, groggy but still conscious, dragged herself to the truck and tried to crawl into it in order to stay with her son. Her head was covered with blood. Meanwhile, around her Germans were yelling "Zum Teivl" (To Hell), "Schneller in den Wagen! (Faster into the truck!)."

Similar scenes occurred regularly; we watched with anguish as militiamen beat Jews and herded them into trucks. We felt so depressed, but what could we do for the victims? Nothing, except hope for their survival. Our little window faced the ghetto; we could clearly see the Gebittskommissariat in an old high school and the gates of the ghetto. We had to be careful however; nobody outside was to know that we were watching.

My husband Henry was a heavy cigarette smoker. During the days he didn't smoke but in the evenings, when the clinic was closed, he used to smoke. I asked him not to smoke because I was afraid that the smell would give us away. I don't know whether Hahn knew that

Henry smoked in the attic. Henry must have rationed his cigarettes carefully because they lasted him for the duration of our stay in the attic.

On the fourth evening Hahn explained: "I'm sorry, but you must leave the attic tomorrow night. I received news from some high-ranking dental patients: the SS will stop at nothing to capture more Jews. They plan to communicate with Kudish and Shenkestel of the Judenrat to "obtain" more Jews, the few who are left. There's a rumor that our dental clinic will be closed. I advise you to look for another shelter."

The news struck us like bullets through our hearts. We had survived a bloody massacre and by leaving the attic we would become prime targets for the Germans. Of course, we had realized that staying in the attic of the Wehrmacht Zahn Clinic for the entire war was impossible, but to leave so soon — where would we go?

We spent our last evening in the attic making plans for our survival — plans that meant life or death. Henry explained: "A former patient of mine, Maria Wierzbowska, offered to help me and my family if we would be in extreme need. Unfortunately, her husband, a bailiff by profession, hates Jews, but she thinks she could hide us without his knowledge. I think we should take Maria's offer — I don't have a better one". Mama stated: "I want to return to the ghetto and see if my parents and sisters are living or dead. Even if it means facing my own

death." I implored her: "Please, Mama, I beg you. Don't risk your life! Please, come with us to Maria's!" Mama responded: "I will, Chanale, but just for a few days. Then I must go back to my own — maybe they need me."

The fifth and final day in the attic approached quickly. The exhaustion and worry had taken its toll on us; we couldn't eat or drink. We wanted to remain in the attic; it had become our home. At 7 o'clock in the evening the trapdoor opened. The head of Hahn appeared. He furtively said: "Come down slowly. No noise, please!" We climbed down the ladder. My body trembled. Mama was the bravest of all and she gave us hope and support. She said: "Don't worry, everything will be fine. I have a feeling that we'll live to see the end of the war. We'll make it. You'll see!" My mother's words gave us courage.

When we came down, my mother went over to Hahn and kissed his hand. He said: "Don't — it's not necessary!" Henry said: "Hahn, take these two gold coins as a token of our gratitude. You saved our lives and for that we will be forever grateful." Hahn replied: "Don't give me anything; I cannot accept your gift." His eyes still avoided ours, but he was sincere. He was such a special person; he was ashamed at all that had happened. He was probably also ashamed that he was acting against his own country's policies, but deep down, I think he felt human lives are precious and should be saved — even if they were Jewish lives.

We went to the back door of the clinic and Hahn said: "Be careful! Good luck and Auf Wiedersein." We went into the dark unknown and it swallowed us up.

Although we had lived in the attic for five, exhausting days and battled heat and fatigue constantly, we were the lucky ones. Others had experienced much more: beaten by soldiers, pushed roughly into trucks, watching loved ones perish while standing at the brink of a mass grave and waiting for the shots that meant the end of everything.

Yes, we were the lucky ones, but only God knew what waited for us. We had no choice except to plunge on and hope.

CHAPTER FOUR

Hiding in Maria's Attic

When we left the dental clinic I knew that we were totally vulnerable — we were like hunted prey. But we were human beings without the natural survival instincts which animals have. My heart beat thunderously in my ears. My eyes tried to pierce the silent darkness which enveloped us.

Henry knew the alleyways and shortcuts which led to Maria Wierzbowska's house on Kosharna Street. We moved rapidly along, but we knew that at any moment we might be recognized as Jews, and that meant instant death. After what seemed like an eternity we arrived safely at the back entrance of Maria's garden. We entered the garden like cats and crouched behind some bushes, near the door. A chained dog sensed our presence and barked loudly. Maria opened the door and the light spilled into the garden's darkness. Henry moved out from behind the bushes and called out: "Pani Maria, Pani Maria (Mrs. Maria, Mrs. Maria)!" Maria asked in a trembling voice: "Who's there? Who's there?" Henry replied: "It's Dr. Kazimirski, Maria." She approached closer and exclaimed: "Oh my God, Jesus Christ!" She made the sign of the cross because she was so shocked and frightened when she saw our desperate faces. We must have looked like ghosts to her.

Henry explained: "Maria, we were lucky to arrive here safely. The pogrom rages on and Jews are being caught and killed all the time. We have nowhere else to hide. Please, help us, we beg you." Maria answered: "I will try my best. I know what's going on. But you and your family must be very careful because my husband is extremely antisemitic and if he finds out that I'm saving Jews he'll go straight to the Gestapo and squeal on you. Hide in the bushes and I'll make certain that the coast is clear. Then I'll come back out for you."

Her words were like sweet music to my ears. My mother, however, said firmly: "Chanale, I'll return to the ghetto in a few days to see if my family is alive." Knowing my mother well, asking her to change her mind was futile, because she was determined and very stubborn. Besides, that was not the time to enter into long discussions and pleading. My mother must have been thinking about her own plans for a long time.

I asked Henry: "Why is Maria taking such a risk to hide us?" Henry then told me the story of the Wierzboski family. He said: "Maria was my patient for some time and she kept in touch with me. She married a bailiff who did well financially, but he spent his earnings on drinking and carousing. Maria had 3 children but she now has only 2: a 12 year old son Yanek and a 9 year old daughter Kotka.

When the Germans invaded Vladimir Volynski, Gebitskomissar Westerheide hired Irka, Maria's oldest

daughter, as a secretary. Irka was very beautiful and very naive; Westerheide fell in love with her. According to Maria, he forced Irka into an affair and she became pregnant. Westerheide's mistress, Anna Altfuter, must have given him a hard time about his affair with the young and pretty Polish girl. When Irka was in her fourth month, Westerheide's chauffeur staged a car accident and killed her. The authorities, with many regrets, delivered her broken body to the family. Maria is a devout Catholic and she prays constantly for forgiveness. She believes that all human life is sacred. She is, however, also a wronged mother and she has a score to settle with the Germans."

We sat in the bushes for about 30 minutes and then Maria appeared again; she beckoned to us with her arm. We entered the house through the kitchen and we smelled freshly-baked bread. I used to love that smell and memories tried to flood into my mind; however, I could not enjoy the luxury of memory at that time. I noticed the shiny, waxed floor and I envied the "normal" life that people led and which I had once enjoyed.

Maria lit a lantern and we climbed two flights of stairs leading to the attic. Inside, we saw a small 9' by 10' room, with a slanted ceiling and a small window facing the garden. The room contained a double bed and a dresser. The attic in the dental clinic was a big one, the size of the whole building. In comparison, this attic was like a tiny,

miniature room; the bed occupied most of it. Maria spoke softly: "I'm sorry for any discomfort you may have up here, but this is the only place where I can hide all of you safely. I'll bring up some home-cooked food; I'm sure that you're all hungry." Maria descended and my mother started grumbling: "I want to leave this place; I can't stay here." I begged her: "Please, mama, don't leave us. Think it over." I was terrified that if she went to the ghetto some soldier might shoot her.

Maria returned shortly with a pot of vegetable soup. Ah, what a soup that was! It tasted heavenly because we hadn't eaten anything decent for a long time. We shared the potato pieces in the soup; each bite was so tasty! The baked bread smelled and tasted wonderful. When we finished eating, we wiped our faces and hands with damp towels which Maria had thoughtfully provided. Maria knew that Henry was a real smoker; she included a few handrolled cigarettes and Henry's morale rose. He kissed Maria's hand in the old, European customary way, and I saw by the look on Maria's face that she had great respect for Henry.

I slept all night with Mama in the bed and Henry slept on a thick blanket he had spread on the floor. We slept soundly; the stress we had undergone had taken its toll. In the morning, Maria, Yanek and Kotka came to see how we had spent the night. We were alarmed when we saw the children but Maria pacified us by explaining:

"Don't worry! My children will cooperate because they know how I feel about helping people." Henry asked them: "Please, children. We are old friends of your mother. Don't tell your father about us." Yanek responded firmly: "Don't worry. I won't tell." And Kotka answered innocently: "Me too. I promise."

I looked out the window and in the daylight I could see the entire yard. A picket fence partly overgrown with shrubs surrounded it. In the garden Maria had planted vegetables and a few fruit trees grew there. A small barn with open doors allowed chickens, pigs and rabbits to roam around the yard; one bushel of hay lay beside the open, barn door.

After our third day at Maria's, my mother left the attic and returned to the ghetto. She was a person who needed her comfort. She was a very aggressive person with a high energy level. Hiding passively was not for her. She felt that she had had enough of attics. She figured that she'd manage somehow on the outside. She contained a mixture of high confidence, energy, courage and martyrdom. She had never been afraid of anybody or anything. She was very self-reliant and figured that she could cope with anything that life threw at her. She had already lost her husband and her son, and she felt that she was leaving me in good hands, in a safe haven. Besides, we had received news from Maria that things had become quiet in the ghetto. Mama figured that if

things were quiet in the ghetto, why should she remain stuck in an attic?

Two weeks passed. Long weeks. One day the attic trapdoor opened and I saw Mama's face. I was overjoyed — I hadn't known how she was doing in the ghetto, or even if she had reached it safely. Mama told us about the situation in the ghetto. On September 15, 1942, the Germans and the Judenrat formed a new ghetto. The Judenrat was now led by Kudish, Shenkestel and Regal. The new ghetto contained 4,000 tradesmen. The Jews there did not wear yellow stars and the Germans "promised" that the Jews would survive if they were "productive" for the Third Reich.

My mother explained that she possessed an Ausweis (pass) and she worked in a large, red schoolhouse where Jewish workers sorted clothes of killed Jews and searched for gold, jewels and any other valuables that might have been sewn into the clothes and hidden there. There were mountains and mountains of these clothes — 18,000 dead people represented a vast amount of clothing. The Germans sent decent dresses, shirts and pants back to Germany; the clothing shipments were only a part of the freight that was shipped out to Germany. It included gold, jewels, fur coats, furniture and expensive paintings. Skilled Jewish carpenters prepared special packings for the paintings. The Germans did not pay the workers for their labors. The Jewish slaves worked fever-

ishly in hope of staying alive, of showing how "productive" they were. My mother, in an anguished voice, told us how repulsive it was to have to handle clothes that once belonged to innocent people who were savagely massacred. Working this way stripped the surviving Jews of their human dignity. It was one more blow. My mother told us how people in the ghetto lived in constant fear of another pogrom, especially as the mountains of clothes grew smaller and smaller. They tried to live normal lives but most of them had lost members of their families and they were very demoralized. Still, with all that, they wanted to survive.

Mama visited us several times after that; she risked death doing that. She was afraid that she might be observed entering Maria's house. She begged us to come with her to the ghetto. She said: "Come be with all of us in the ghetto. You'll live normally, not like you're living here. Why should you suffer like this?" But Henry replied: "Oh, no. Absolutely not. I don't trust the Germans and their 'promises'. After what we've seen, I'm sure there will be another pogrom. If you want to stay there, stay! I can't keep you here! But Hanka and I — we're staying here!" Henry told me later that he replied that way because he had overheard conversations while working at the Wehrmacht dental clinic that the Germans planned to eradicate all the Jews, without exception.

Attic life inexorably took its toll; the attic room became our cage. Maria still supplied us with food, but Henry and I suffered from lack of exercise, from the heat, from the lack of personal hygiene, and from the constant fear of Mr. Wierzbowski discovering us. We gave Maria some precious gold coins so she could buy more food on the black market and some cigarettes for Henry. When I helped Maria by doing housework downstairs, I felt free like a bird out of its cage.

Time proved that my husband Henry was right. On November 13, 1942, the second pogrom in Vladimir Volynski began and it lasted for several weeks. The Germans and Ukrainians annihilated 2,500 Jews. Only 1500 were now left in the ghetto. Maria told Henry and me that hundreds of Jews had perished in this pogrom. Thinking that my mother died brought tears to my eyes; nevertheless, I hoped and prayed that my mother would appear in our attic once again.

God answered my prayers. Mama arrived late one evening. She had sneaked out of the ghetto, under the barbed wire fence, and risked life and limb to see us. I cried like a baby and I hugged her tightly, not wanting to let go. Miraculously, my mother survived, because her friend told her that in the event of trouble she could hide with her friend's family in a tunnel dug deep underneath a bakery.

Mama told us about horrible events in the ghetto. Her voice was breaking as she said: "One man was hiding inside a chimney. He had wedged himself in secure in the knowledge that nobody could get at him there. Two Germans soldiers climbed up onto the roof and pointed their rifles straight down the chimney. They kept firing while muffled cries of pain and shrieks of hysteria came from the chimney. Drops of blood began to leak into the fireplace in the house. The drops fell faster and faster. The soldiers then used a grappling hook to drag out the man's body as if it were a side of beef. The corpse was covered with a reddish-black mixture of blood and soot." Mama described how people, running from the soldiers, tried to climb the barbed-wire fence that surrounded the ghetto. As they climbed the eight foot fence, soldiers shot them. They fell to the ground, lying in a mixture of blood and guts. Other Jews, with German guns pointed at them, were forced to throw the dead, blood-stained bodies into wheel-barrows and clean the soiled streets.

In spite of all that had happened, Mama pleaded with us again: "Henry, Chanale, please come and live with us in the ghetto. You'll get a special (ausweis) pass as 'professionals'." My mother's visit shook us up; it left us with disturbing thoughts. On one hand, we wanted so much to leave Maria's attic and move about "freely," albeit in a ghetto. On the other hand, we didn't trust the Germans. We felt, deep in our hearts, that they would exterminate all the remaining Jews like cockroaches. Henry remem-

bered the conversations he had heard when he worked in the dental clinic. The Germans had one goal that was more important to them than military victory. That goal was to make the world "Judenrein" — totally free of Jews. Every last Jew must be caught and exterminated.

Meanwhile, we were attacked from another angle. Horrible boils appeared all over Henry's neck and under his arms. I could see how painful they must have been but Henry tried to minimize his condition in order to spare me additional worry. I applied hot compresses to the boils to bring them to a head. One after another, they burst and the pus oozed out. Henry felt better. Attic life was almost unbearable but we survived and, in the final analysis, survival was what counted then.

A tragic incident forced us to leave Maria's house. One Sunday in March of 1943 the Wierzbowski family went to church, as usual. Neither Maria nor her children had alerted us that Mr. Wierzbowski, feeling ill, remained at home. He must have heard some noise from the attic. He came up and, seeing us, started to scream like a wounded and enraged beast: "Parshive Zhidy!" (Dirty Jews!). He scared us half to death. We tried to speak and plead with him, but he kept on screaming: "Out! Out of my house, you filthy, rotten Jews!" We were panic-stricken.

After one hour, Maria returned home. She said: "You must leave tonight, because my husband is in one of his

worst black moods and he will report you to the Gestapo." Henry answered: "I'm deeply sorry for any trouble that we caused you. We will go to the ghetto tonight." On Sunday evening we said our farewells to Maria and we kissed the children who had kept our secret so well. We gave Maria some gold coins for all the help she gave us and for all the risks she took. Yesterday, the attic room of Maria Wierzbowska provided a refuge from Nazi malevolence; today, Mr. Wierzbowski thrust us straight into the dangerous inferno that had consumed so many of our brothers and sisters. In spite of all our instincts and doubts, we left Maria's house and headed for the barbed-wire fence of the ghetto. Perhaps the killing would stop and we would survive.

We had to go; we had no other choice.

CHAPTER FIVE

Ghetto Life

At half past seven in the evening, we arrived at the gate of the ghetto and we entered. Soldiers stood guard, yet they asked no question. The ghetto covered a small area and we went around and asked people if they had seen my mother. We found her a half hour later. Mama was living in a small apartment with nine other people. We were so happy to see her.

Henry and I had to speak with Kudish, so we could remain in the ghetto and receive Ausweizen to become "legal." I told Henry: "Tomorrow let me go alone to see Kudish, because I was close friends with his daughter Taubcia at one time. I'm sure he'll remember me — I was always hanging around their house — and he'll treat us better than other people." Henry agreed and that night I slept with mama in her bed while Henry slept on the floor.

The next morning I was ushered into Kudish's office by capos (Jewish police) armed with hard-rubber ("gummi") clubs. They thought that they were very important and would escape the fate that awaited the rest of the Jews. On seeing me, Kudish wanted to have me thrown out of his office immediately; however, Shenkestel calmed him down. I reminded Kudish of my

connection with his daughter and said: "Is there any way that my husband, Dr. Henry Kazimirski and I, can stay in the ghetto?" Shenkestel immediately snapped back: "Of course! Just pay us 500 American dollars or the equivalent in gold." I responded: "We don't have that much money." In an instant, Kudish ordered his capos to arrest me. "Throw her into the cellar," he roared. "She stays there till her family brings the money." They locked me away in the ghetto jail, a damp basement with iron bars on the window. I had expected considerate treatment from Kudish. Now I felt that he was out to bury me.

I slumped down on the floor of that cellar. I soon realized that I was not alone. I saw bulbous and glittering eyes looking at me — they belonged to enormous rats, some as big as kittens. I hid my face in my hands; I was afraid that the rats would get at my face. The rats were utterly unafraid of humans; they stared at me and their nostrils quivered. I was seized with terror but I had no escape. Meanwhile, the rats scurried along the floor. There was a small barred window so I screamed to passersby: "Please! I'm Kazimirski! Find my mother and tell her I'm in jail! Please!" Finally, someone listened to my pleas and found my mother. The ghetto was small and everybody knew everybody else.

After what seemed like an eternity, Mama and Henry arrived. They pleaded with Kudish but he wouldn't budge from his position. He said: "I keep your woman as

collateral until you collect 500 American dollars or its equivalent in gold and bring it to me." Between my mother's gold coins that she had collected from friends and Henry's gold coins, they had just enough money to pay Kudish and get me out of the cellar. They later told me how Kudish's eyes glowed as he counted the coins — he was almost panting from pleasure.

Shenkestel, on orders from Kudish, provided one Ausweis for both Henry and me — this was a pass to work and, supposedly, a pass to live. In addition, he arranged living space for us among 8 other people in a small house. At night, our bed was beside the kitchen stove. The house had 2 bedrooms, a kitchen and a living room. Each bedroom housed a different family and a family lived in the living room. At that time no ordinary Jews had houses for themselves. Kudish had a house for himself and the capos lived comfortably, but the rest of us were crowded together, with 5 or 6 families in one house. The filth and squalid conditions were demoralizing, but it was better than the alternative which had swallowed up so many of our people — death.

Mama shared some of her meagre food with Henry and me for a few days after our arrival. With ten people living in our small house, we all shared one bathroom. When we had favorable weather, people bathed in the river next to the ghetto. Because of poor plumbing, normal baths were not possible. But who cared

about modern conveniences? We cared only about each other and survival! Anyway, I thanked God because he let us live and I thanked God for allowing me to visit Mama regularly, even though we did not live together.

People moved around the ghetto freely; however, when warnings reached Jewish ears about Gebitskomissar Westerheide and his mistress Anna Altfuter visiting the ghetto, people remained at home. Westerheide and Anna used to ride through the ghetto on white horses like a King and Queen riding through their kingdom. When someone walked outside and was seen by Anna, she lashed the person to death with a leather whip. She enjoyed this "divertissement" very much. People also feared Kudish when he made his rounds through the ghetto with his gang of truncheon-wielding capos, because it meant that he was looking for "workers" to meet German quotas. Few of those captured "workers" ever returned.

There were no small children in the ghetto. When soldiers spotted young children they shot them. Many parents had hidden their small children with Gentile families. Of course, people made love, but at the first indication of pregnancy the women would have abortions. The Wehrmacht had forbidden Jewish women to bear children; pregnant Jewish women were fair game for the soldiers. And people worked and worked, because work meant life. Bakers, barbers, butchers, carpenters, dis-

tillers, dressmakers, shoemakers and tailors worked in the ghetto. People made the finest handmade clothes and shoes for Frau Anna Altfuter and Gebitskomissar Westerheide.

An 18 year old confectioner named Berl lived with Henry and me. His parents had been killed earlier. I knew Berl well, and we used to laugh and talk together. One day, a brutish oaf of a capo burst into our house and took Berl away "to work." I hugged him and kissed him and felt in my heart that we'd never meet again. And that's the way it was. He was taken away and I learned later that he had been shot. Berl had been taken away because Kudish had to deliver a quota of Jews every day to the Germans. Kudish decided life and death. The Germans had decided on a process of slow liquidation of the remaining Jews, whittling them down and down and down until few would be left and then, the final pogrom would finish the job. The Gebitskomissar had assured Kudish and his cohorts that they would be the chosen few who would be left alive because they were so "important." The Germans had encouraged them to believe this — it was all part of a carefully elaborated plot to exterminate all the Jews.

Henry spent many evenings playing cards with friends; it helped take his mind off the tragedy we were living. I used to visit with my mother and I found solace in her company. She told me: "Chanale, I believe that

you have been chosen by God to survive. You are special and if all the people in the ghetto perish, I know you alone will live." Mama touched my face with her soft fingers, kissed me and said: "My dear child, I lost your father and Benny, but you are chosen to survive. You must live on and tell the world about how we suffered and how we died." I asked: "Mama, what about you?" She answered: "Of course I want to live. Who wants to die? I want to see the destruction of Germany. The Germans must pay dearly for all that they have done to us. Who knows if I'll live to see it through to the end? You, Chanale, must have courage and you must fight for your life. Always remember the saying that Abba and I taught you: 'Tzum Koenig (To the King)'." That phrase meant: show courage and do not be afraid of anything, even speaking with the King.

Meanwhile, the Germans were escalating their war against us. In December 1943, under the leadership of Krause, they entered the ghetto and searched homes for several days, trying to find "umlegale" (illegal) Jews who did not possess Ausweizen (work permits). The soldiers murdered 40 people on December 5th, the first day of Chanukah, our festival of light; 50 people perished on December 10th in Vladimir Volynski's prison.

Jews were absolutely forbidden to have radios; anybody found with one was shot on the spot. However, some people took the risk and smuggled shortwave

radios into the ghetto. They heard that the Germans were losing the war against the Russians; the Red Army had turned the tide against the Nazis. The Germans were losing on other fronts too. We greeted this news with rejoicing and hope — perhaps survival was possible until the Red Army would rescue us.

The partisan movement grew more powerful and some Jews ran away to join them. Kudish, afraid of losing control, warned us against the "bandits" (the German appellation for partisans). He ordered us to stay in the ghetto because the Wehrmacht had promised him that the remaining Jews had nothing to fear.

On Monday, December 13, 1943, at around 5 in the morning, Henry and I were shocked out of our sleep by ear-piercing screams in German and Ukrainian. Shots rang out shrilly. All the people in our house ran helter-skelter into the street. The German Gendarmerie had surrounded the ghetto. We were trapped! The final, much-feared liquidation had arrived!

I threw my coat on and pulled my boots onto my feet; I reached for my knipl (knot) of gold coins which I used to hide in the ashes of the woodstove every night before going to bed; I stuffed it into my bra. Henry, never at his best in the early morning, was shaken up and half-asleep. He threw his coat on and his socks but he couldn't find his shoes in the darkness. Clutching each other's hands,

we ran in front of our house. People were running everywhere, but we couldn't see faces — just silhouettes.

We ran to the barbed-wire ghetto fence which was just forty feet away from us. We scaled the cold fence like wild monkeys. I never would have imagined that I could climb that way — never! But when you are seized by blind panic you develop superhuman strength. When we neared the top we heard shouting: "Tsurik ins ghetto! Wir shisen! Wir shisen! (Back into the ghetto. We'll shoot! We'll shoot!)" We wanted to reach the other side of the fence because we hoped that one of Henry's friends, a Dr. Grunvald, would save us. When Henry was working in the Wehrmacht dental clinic, a Dr. Grunvald used to come in to see how Henry was working. He liked Henry's work. Dr. Grunvald was a German. He ran a little hospital, practically on the border of the ghetto, for injured soldiers. It was a type of forward casualty station and had formerly been a private Jewish home. Henry had gone a few times to see Dr. Grunvald and had asked him if he could work for him. But Dr. Grunvald had said: "If you were not a Jew I definitely could use you, but you're a Jew so it's impossible — utterly impossible." However, he was always very sympathetic to Henry. He seemed to be a decent person. Our aim was that Dr. Grunvald might save us for a while.

On hearing the shooting and shouting, we jumped back to the icy ground because it was evident that climb-

ing over the fence meant suicide. Soldiers were shooting like robots, in a cold and calculated way. For them it must have been like shooting fish in a barrel. Those who had tried to escape before us and failed lay on the ground; their blood and guts littered the white snow and stained our feet. I was stepping on bone fragments which felt like big splinters. I felt the warm, quivering bodies with my legs, but I had no time to think...

I heard Henry shouting: "My feet! My miserable feet!" I thought that a soldier had shot him but he was shouting from the pain caused by his shoeless feet which had frozen from the ice and snow that covered the ground. It was a chaotic scene, straight from hell! In the darkness I spied an open doorway of a house near the fence. I dragged Henry after me into the house. People must have just evacuated their home as we had done. I groped in the darkness, hoping to find a pair of shoes for Henry. I soon found a pair of worn rubbers.

As I stood up with the rubbers, I heard a soft, whispering voice from above call to me: "Chanale, Chanale! Kum arif (Come up)!" I looked up and vaguely saw Ciupa, my mother's friend, leaning over the opening of a trapdoor. Henry and I didn't hesitate for a second. I climbed the lengthy ladder quickly and Henry followed me. He then pulled the ladder up after him.

CHAPTER SIX

Hiding and More Hiding

I looked around in the dim light of early morning, which had come through small cracks in the attic walls. I saw another scene from hell: there were many people, like ghosts, there. Some were curled up on the floor while others were silently squatting. The silence was unnerving. The attic was the largest I had seen and I had, sadly, some experience with attics. Icicles were hanging down from the roof of the attic. After more light penetrated into that attic, I could recognize several people: one was my friend Machla and another was an old school friend Shmulek Szyzman.

Ciupa had silvery gray hair and black eyes; she was a tiny, weak woman. She shared her grief and fear with me. She asked: "I'm so frightened. What will happen to all of us?" She pointed to her husband and said: "Look at him. He sits and stares at the roof all the time. It's as if he has gone somewhere, far away." I saw that her husband had lost his mind. He had lost the will to live: You must understand that when Ciupa's husband fled to that attic, it was the last step in a long series of degradations. Those people who broke down like him had seen their families killed, their homes taken away, their work disappear, their possessions confiscated and their whole community decimated. They simply could not take it anymore and

lost the will to live. After the war, I read about such people in the concentration camps. They were called "Musselmen," the living dead. Other people sat in the attic with their faces buried deep in their hands; they were gripped by hopelessness, utter hopelessness. Inside of me I raged and raged: "God! How could you do this to us? How can such things be?"

Outside, constant screaming pierced our ears. Shooting broke the air. I heard: "Out, dirty Jews! Line up!" I wondered: "Where's Mama? What's happened to her? I need her!" I found a place with Henry in the attic corner and I rested my head on his left shoulder. I whispered: "I took my knipl with gold coins and hid it in my bra." He stated: "We'll probably not be able to use them. This is the end of us. We'll never leave here — alive anyway." And these words came from my usually optimistic Henry. I answered: "We must leave here! We have to!" Henry rose and walked into the midst of the people. He ordered them: "These are the rules: no walking during the day; we shall all move to one side of the attic and deposit our waste in the corner of the opposite side."

The boards of the roof did not fit tightly and the icicles hung down from the openings. The cold lashed our bodies and we sat huddled together, hoping to keep warm with our own body heat. I counted 12 people in the attic: seven elderly people and five young ones. People were wearing coats, housecoats and even pyjamas —

whatever they could have grabbed when they fled to that attic. One woman mumbled something over and over to herself. We ordered her to stop, yet she did not.

Around 10 o'clock in the morning, through cracks in the attic walls, we saw German soldiers and Vlasowce (turncoat Ukrainian and Russian soldiers who deserted and joined the Germans to fight the Russian army). They ran from house to house, hunting for victims. However, instead of thoroughly searching for Jews, they were pre-occupied with looking for gold and jewellery for their own use. They were also quite inexperienced as searchers.

It was December and it was quite cold. I kept staring at one icicle. I thought: "If I could just lay my hands on that icicle and suck it — how refreshing it would be!" Henry broke off the icicle and handed it to me. I quenched my thirst with it — it was great! And after that we all lived from these icicles.

Thoughts kept running through my mind: How long could we remain in this attic? Could we stay alive? What if soldiers discover us? At 5 o'clock in the afternoon we heard heavy footsteps downstairs and someone shouted in Ukrainian: "Do you think Jews are still hiding here?" We stopped breathing. Someone else yelled in Russian: "Davai lestnitzu poidiom na cherdak (Give me the ladder and we'll go up to the attic)!" Looks of utter dread settled upon our faces. I thought: "If they come up, so help me I'll choke them to death!" However, we forgot that

Henry had raised the ladder and placed it on the attic floor. No way existed for the soldiers to climb up because the trapdoor was too high for anyone to reach it without a ladder. We heard some loud curses and then the sound of heavy walking as the soldiers stomped out of the house. The Vlasowce were not master killers like the Polish and Ukrainian soldiers; otherwise, they would have found a ladder, climbed up and viciously murdered us where we sat.

We were safe again, but for how much longer? If the Germans and their "friends" would not find us, extreme cold and hunger would finish us off. Ciupa fainted. Henry collected some snow that had drifted through the cracks onto our waste heap and spread it on Ciupa's face. Poor thing, she begged for death, but when we revived her and she saw that she was still alive she said: "It's not so easy to die."

The second night in the attic was horrible. We huddled together like animals; we kept poking and waking each other when someone snored or sobbed. We knew that the soldiers were constantly watching and listening for Jews like tigers waiting to pounce on their prey.

Early the next morning, when it was still dark, I told Henry that I wanted to go down to find some food. Henry was afraid, but I insisted: "Put the ladder down, let me go!" Henry let the tall ladder down at the trapdoor and I descended into the dark, deathly quiet house.

My knees trembled and my hands shook with fright and cold. I figured that people had been living in that house just three days ago. I made my way into the kitchen; on the stove I saw a pot filled with a semi-frozen liquid and I saw a heavy, aluminum coffee percolator. I climbed back into the attic, gave Henry the pot and went back down for the percolator. I brought it up too. The pot and the percolator were two treasures I had found.

People were waiting anxiously for food. We warmed the pot with the heat from our hands; the semi-frozen mass eventually melted. I dipped my finger into the mass and tasted cold porridge. I approached Ciupa first because cold and hunger had attacked her helpless body more severely than the rest of us. She ate very little. We all, in turn, dipped our fingers into the pot and ate; there was enough porridge so that we could dip our fingers into the pot a second time. We passed the coffee percolator, hand to hand, from one person to the next. Within a half hour the liquid inside the percolator melted from the heat of our palms. Everyone took a small drink from the spout. You can imagine what that percolator meant to us; it was manna from heaven. I can still taste that coffee; I have the taste in my mouth. No coffee in the world will ever taste to me as good as that stale coffee was then. It was coffee that someone must have made just before they were rounded up; they had already sweetened it. We all knew that this "meal" was our last for the day.

Around two o'clock in the afternoon, one of the men with us, crouching near one of the cracks in the wall, noticed some soldiers dragging Mama and four other people out of a nearby house. He motioned to Henry and me. We quietly approached the crack. Two German soldiers were yelling at the prisoners to turn, face the wall and raise their arms. Then I saw my mother kneel to the ground, grab the boots of one of the soldiers and cry out in despair: *Lassen sie mich leben! Lassen sie mich leben!* (Let me live! Let me live!) The soldier hit her over the head and shouted: *Shnell, Aufschtehen!* (Quick! Get up!) Then I heard the rat-a-tat-tat of machine gun fire and saw the prisoners hit in their necks and backs. Their bodies collapsed like bags of potatoes and their blood splattered the wall and the snow on the ground. My beautiful Mama was dead, her long auburn hair covered with a thick mass of blood. I wanted to die with her.

I screamed like a wounded animal and a man near me put his hand over my mouth and nearly choked me. Henry pulled him away and wrapped his hand tightly around my mouth for fear my screams might endanger everyone's life by attracting soldiers. I became numb, my blood froze inside my veins; my heart was pounding as if it would burst my rib cage. God, I thought, what had happened to us? German soldiers had butchered my father and my brother Benny; they had slaughtered Zeide Aaron and Bobe Basia in the first pogrom. Now, Mama

was gone forever. But her words echoed in my ears: *Chanale, you will survive! You must live! You must fight! Tell them, tell them what they have done to us!* Her words kept repeating in my ears. *I'll try Mama, I'll try, I promise I'll try!* Henry held me in his arms and comforted me until I fell asleep for several hours.

When I awoke, Ciupa had died and we had nothing to cover her body with — not even a sheet. Somebody recited the El Moley Rachamim (Prayer for the Dead). People's waste accumulated in the corner and the stench grew unbearable. That evening, a young woman, Machla, decided to leave; she had a plan but she did not want to tell anyone. Fifteen minutes after her departure, we heard shooting; we thought that Machla had become the soldiers' next victim. (I learned after the war that the shot, aimed at her fleeing silhouette, had missed her. She survived the war and now lives in Israel.) Henry became depressed and he threatened to swallow a pill that he carried with him. I could feel his sorrow and hopelessness, but I thought: "My husband must never commit suicide." I held Henry in my arms and said to him: "I promise you, we will survive! We must fight and never give up. We need each other. Promise me that you will help me survive!" He nodded. I continued: "Remember my mother's words — To the King!"

My friend, Shmulek Szyzman, moved closer to us and confided in us: he planned to escape and he wanted to

bring us along. The following day we reviewed our plan again and again. With luck, the plan might work; anyway, we had to take a chance because we could no longer remain in the putrid attic.

We heard shooting many times during the day. Soldiers and Vlasowce were searching continuously for Jews; they pulled victims out from houses and shot them mercilessly.

On the fourth night, December 16th, Shmulek, Henry and I said goodbye to the others and we descended from the attic. We furtively left the house and, stooping close to the ground, we ran to a manhole that was about 35 feet away from the house. Shmulek pried up the cover and jumped into the blackness; I followed and Shmulek caught me. Then Henry jumped in. Shmulek climbed onto Henry's shoulders like an acrobat and slid the lid back into place. We stooped down and clambered singlefile through large, iron sewer pipes deep under the city streets. Our eyes grew accustomed to the darkness and we felt our way along by touching each other's shoulders and by touching the cold, slimy walls of the sewers.

Shmulek knew his way well; he must have explored the underground sewer system at some earlier time in preparation for just such an emergency. We crawled along until we reached a manhole that was just outside of the ghetto. On the surface, 25 feet away from the

manhole, was a German guardhouse with two sentinels. They carried rifles and they watched the ghetto fences and gates. Henry and Shmulek managed silently to lift the lid a bit. Shmulek waited until the guards' backs faced us; he hoisted himself out with incredible speed and so did Henry. They pulled me out and put the lid back; with eyeblink speed they grabbed me under my arms and we sang Christmas carols in Polish as we sauntered along. One guard turned quickly and shouted: "Halt!" In a confident voice I said in Polish: "Wesolych Świat (Merry Christmas)!" He motioned for us to pass the guardhouse. We walked slowly, not to raise any suspicion. Our hands and knees were shaking, but we were soon away from the guardhouse. We made it! What a relief!

Our plan was to reach the house of a farmer Zaslow, who lived in Zajetze. Henry and I had prepaid him months ago because he promised to hide us in the event of an emergency. We had made this arrangement because most Jews did that; besides having tunnels and bunkers and hiding places in the places where you lived, it was also important as a back-up to find farmers who would be willing for money to hide you if you would be able to escape from the ghetto. Very many Jews had made similar arrangements to our's. My mother had known some farmers and I also knew some; we asked among them till we found Zaslov. I might add, parenthetically, that a lot of the farmers took the money, promised to

keep the Jews, and then turned them over to the Germans or Ukrainians who killed them. Some farmers, however, were honest and faithful. I knew a woman who hid a group of Jews for the longest time; she saved Dr. Podlipski practically till he was liberated. (That's why I try to avoid generalizations like "All Polish people are bad."). Zaslov was not our only back-up; we had, in almost every direction, some pre-paid farmers to whom we could run because we knew that when a roundup of Jews began we would not be able to cross the city. We knew that the Germans and Ukrainians were experts in spotting fugitive Jews; they knew how we looked and how we walked — they practically could smell us.

We reached Zajetze around 8 o'clock in the evening. We had an excellent hiding place which Zaslov had built for us under his silo. We had already had a chance to see it; we had checked it out on one of the numerous occasions when Zaslov came to us and said he needed more money to complete it. We had told Szyzman that there would be no problem — Zaslov would surely allow him to hide with us.

Henry knocked on Zaslov's door and his wife answered; she was startled and clearly disappointed to see us. Zaslov approached the door quickly and he scowled when he saw Shmulek Szyzman. Henry told him that Shmulek was our good friend and we would pay extra for his stay; however, Zaslov refused. We

explained that we had survived because of Szyzman — he had shown us a way to get out of the ghetto through the sewers. But the farmer stood his ground. He said: "I don't want him here — the hideout was made to accommodate only two people." I went down, literally, on my knees and begged him: "Don't turn him away! Please let him stay with us!" Szyzman was so smart that he had served as a comfort to us. We figured that with his help we could survive the rest of the war — he knew what he was doing. We regarded him as a big asset. Zaslov still refused, however, and there was no changing his mind. However, he told us: "I'll send him to a neighbor who lives 5 houses down the road. He can stay there." We felt terrible that Shmulek could not stay with us, after everything he had done. Anyway, we made plans with Shmulek to meet him later.

Zaslov led us to the small hiding place under his silo; he covered the entrance with a pile of straw. We knew that this hiding place was temporary but we welcomed the respite it offered us; we lived one day at a time. We hungered like wolves because we hadn't eaten anything decent in several days. Zaslov fed us. I had difficulty swallowing food because I had a parched mouth and throat.

At 10 o'clock Zaslov came to our hiding place and he said: "I sent your friend to my neighbor's house and she came back some time later and reproached me for

sending a Jew to her and risking her family's safety. She said that she called the Gestapo, and that she had heard her Jew say, while he was being beaten by the Germans, that there were more Jews hidden. I suggest that you leave here tonight as quickly as you can, because I heard that the Gestapo is looking for a dentist and his wife."

We knew what had happened. In those situations you could trust nobody. I knew that, under torture, people talked. When the Germans found a hidden Jew, they didn't kill him immediately. They beat him to a pulp so that he would reveal what he knew about other hidden Jews.

Then they killed him. For the sake of hope, of surviving another few minutes or hours, people would "sing." We didn't know exactly what Szyzman had told them, if he had given away our actual location, but we knew one thing for sure: we couldn't remain there. We had to move fast! We left Zaslov's hiding place. Under no circumstances could we give up our fight to survive. Many months later we learned that Szyzman had been shot by the Germans. It's possible that the neighbor hadn't squealed on him; it may have been Zaslov himself who squealed in order to get rid of us.

The ghetto no longer existed. 1,300 Jews had been given the "Final Solution"; 500 remained. I found out from other survivors that a few soldiers had led Kudish,

the head of the Judenrat, and his family out of their house, with rifles pointed at their faces and backs. Kudish's kingdom collapsed and the King ceased to rule. He had been promised safety and survival, and now he shared the fate of the poor, unfortunate Jews he had helped eliminate.

As for my mother, I found out after several months that soldiers had burned her body. The pits were all filled with dead Jews; therefore, the Germans resorted to burning the bodies. They took Mother's body to Hvalimitz (4 kilometers outside Vladimir-Volynski). With the help of the Vlasowce they made a huge pile of bodies; they poured gasoline over the bodies and lit the pile. A raging fire consumed the corpses and my mother's ashes were scattered by the wind.

I have no grave to go to, a place where I can thank that brave woman who gave me life and then kept me alive with her encouragement. But I can still hear her words saying "Chanale, Tzum Koenig! You must survive! You will survive!" She will be with me till my last breath.

CHAPTER SEVEN

From Voitek's Tunnel to the Partisans and Freedom

After leaving Zaslov's, we had no choice but to return and hide with Maria Wierzbowska. Although her husband had caught us once, we had to take another chance with Maria because she was one person we could absolutely trust. Maria would never betray us — of that we were sure. We had no other options.

Zaslov gave us directions to return to Vladimir-Volynski via farms and fields. We trudged for two hours in the darkness and we kept our distance from all roads. Zaslov gave us a loaf of bread and two apples. We reached a church which meant that we were heading in the right direction. Dogs sensed our approach and barked fiercely. A priest dressed in a long, black coat and black hat came out. Henry asked: "Please, give us some shelter for the night." In a firm voice, the priest responded: "The Germans are constantly looking for Jews. They are so eager and frantic that they are searching churches too. If you stay here, they'll kill you and I cannot stop them. Go in safety! God bless you!" On hearing the words, we turned and left.

The snow crackled under our weary feet but we did not feel cold because we were walking briskly. We

reached a mill and turned right, heading towards the outskirts of Vladimir-Volynski. We had to pass a most dangerous crossing. A German guardhouse was located there and soldiers on duty often watched the approaches, ready to pounce on anyone or anything that moved. Luckily, when we arrived, there was nobody on guard; we walked briskly and in a short time we arrived at Maria's house on Kosharna Street.

Henry and I were familiar with the back entrance into the garden. The kitchen light spilled into the darkness of the garden. We sat in the bushes for a while. Finally, Henry knocked on the back door and Maria came out. In a startled shaky voice she said: "I can't keep you in the house but I'll give you some blankets and you'll stay in the hayloft of the barn. I'll check in on you in the morning." Dear, dear Maria — we were right: she wouldn't send us away.

When we entered the barn, a few chickens startled us when they fluttered their wings; pigs waddled around while rabbits hopped from place to place. We almost felt that the animals welcomed us. In our new, brutal world, people behaved worse than animals and we could expect less danger from beasts than from humans. We climbed the ladder and made ourselves comfortable in the hay. We felt warm, but what was more important was that we felt safe. Henry and I slept all night long.

Around 9 o'clock in the morning, Maria came with some baked bread in a bag and a container filled with hot tea. She sat down besides us and we told her all about the third pogrom. Maria said: "Keeping you for a long time will be hard, because I hired a Polish girl to help me around the house and she must never know that you're here. The only place for you to go is into the partisan movement. I'll contact a Polish farmer I know who lives in Pisajova-Vola, 20 kilometers from Vladimir-Volynski; I know he has connections with the partisans and I'll see if they can accept both of you."

Maria checked in on us once a day. We knew that she didn't want to shelter us any longer. On the 5th day, Maria's maid climbed the ladder to get some hay and she was startled to see us lying in the corner. She was in a state of near-shock when she ran out of the barn. Maria came later and told us: "You must leave tonight. I think you should leave separately, because the German guard-house nearby might be occupied and two people together are always more suspicious-looking than one person alone." We arranged that I would leave on Friday night and Henry would leave on Saturday night. Maria alerted the farmer that we would be coming.

Since Henry and I had married, we had never left each other's side until now. We could not bear the possibility of losing each other. We reviewed the route to the farmer's house several times in our minds. Henry stated

solemnly: "If I do not survive, you must still fight for your life; we've been through so much together. You must live to tell the world about our lives and what we've suffered through. This hell-on-earth that the Germans created will not last forever. A better world will come, and you must survive to be a part of it."

On Friday night, just before Christmas, we divided our remaining gold coins between us; we said goodbye to one another. We loved each other so much that we both cried and we both hugged each other tightly — we didn't want to let go. Maria arrived at the barn around 7 o'clock in the evening, with supplies. I bundled up in extra warm clothes and I carried a basket with bread and other food to take on my journey. By wearing the clothes and carrying the basket I hoped to fool the Germans by disguising myself as a farm girl.

I left Maria and Henry reluctantly, but I had no choice. I walked for 30 minutes until I reached the German guardhouse. A guard shouted: "Halt! Vohin ghest du? Ausweis, bitte! (Halt! Where are you going? Identification, please!)" He focused a flashlight on my face. Although I understood him, I answered plaintively in Polish: "Ya nie rozumiem (I don't understand)!" He searched my basket, tapped me on the shoulder and let me continue. The guard probably thought that I was a farm girl, returning to my village. Anyway, I felt relieved, but I worried terribly about the trip that Henry would

have to make on the following night. I followed sleigh tracks in the snow; they led me to Pisajova-Vola. Lights from houses spilled into the darkness as I wandered into the village. I knocked on the door of the fifth house I saw. A woman answered and she gave me directions to the house of Voitek Sinarski.

When I arrived at Voitek's small farm, I saw the lights from his house. I knocked and Voitek and his wife came to the door. Voitek asked: "Were you followed?" I answered: "No one followed me. As for my husband Henry, he'll arrive tomorrow night." Voitek said: "You and Henry will hide in a tunnel under the potato patch in my store-house. I'll contact the partisans during the next few days." The tunnel was a large hole smelling of soil and potato-mold. Voitek had covered the floor with straw and pillows; he had folded blankets in the corner. I laid down on the straw and the blankets, but a short time later I heard the sound of straw crackling under heavy footsteps. Then I heard Voitek's voice: "If you and your husband don't like it here, you can go to my sister's farm-house. She's hiding five Jewish couples." I felt his warm breath near my neck and he approached closer and closer, as if he wanted to embrace me. I exclaimed: "Get away from me!" He said: "I want to make love to you." I said: "I'll tell your wife and if you don't get away from me, I'll scream!" He turned and left.

Voitek and his wife didn't give me any food on Saturday. I felt weak and I worried constantly about Henry making his way to Voitek's farm. I mumbled to myself: "God, please let Henry live and let him share his life with me still." I peeked outside the entrance to the hole. Shadows blanketed my surroundings; I assumed that Henry would arrive in a while. Outside I heard the wind howling and I was sure that a fierce winter storm must have been raging.

Waiting, waiting for Henry. Sure enough, I soon heard footsteps and voices — Henry had arrived! God had answered my prayers! I left my hiding place and hugged Henry tightly. Henry felt warm and he didn't speak. I felt Henry's forehead; he obviously had a high fever. I spoke to Irka, Voitek's wife, about Henry's fever. Her cold response was: "Too bad! Tough luck!" Henry knew a pharmacist in Vladimir Volynski; he wrote a prescription for sulfa drugs on a plain piece of paper and he hoped it could reach the pharmacist.

Before Voitek and Irka left for Church via horse and buggy, Irka permitted Henry and me to enter the house. Instead of cooking the turkey there for Sunday's lunch, I made turkey soup. Henry and I ate four bowls of the hot, heavenly soup; Henry felt a little better but he still felt he needed the sulfa drugs. We took short naps in real beds — this was the first time we had done so since the ghetto. It felt so good!

Voitek and Irka returned late in the morning. They were impressed with the cooking. They went to the pharmacy and with the help of Maria Wierzbowska they bought the sulfa drugs. In 24 hours, Henry felt much better.

On the fourth day after our arrival at the farm of Voitek and Irka, we heard shooting. Voitek explained: "The Ukrainians have invaded the village; you must run to my sister's barn!" Voitek gave us directions and we left immediately. Henry and I ran toward the sister's barn as fast as we could. Bullets raced past us and flew over our heads. We didn't know who was shooting at whom, what side they were on, etc. We only knew that we were caught in a hail of fire. I stumbled and I was sure that I had been shot. However, a bullet had only bruised my foot — I wasn't really wounded. We reached the sister's barn and met five Jewish couples there; among them we met Dr. Podlipski, a well-known surgeon from Vladimir Volynski and his wife. The people were happy to meet us and they shared their food with us.

After two days in the huge barn we met Voitek's sister. She told us in a tense voice: "The Ukrainians have surrounded the village and Polish Jews are running away to Bielin, to join the Polish partisans. You'd better do the same thing!" Voitek's sister and her family took their horses and buggy out. Everyone put what few paltry belongings they possessed into the buggy and we took

turns riding on it. After battling bitter cold for five hours, we reached our destination, Bielin.

Voitek's sister and her family left us at partisan headquarters. Dr. Podlipski and Henry introduced themselves to the leader of the partisans who received them with open arms on learning that they were, respectively a doctor and a dentist. The partisans sorely needed medical personnel. The partisan leader ordered an officer, dressed in a Polish army uniform, to give us living quarters; he also assigned two other men to care for the others in our group.

Henry and I cried tears of joy. I no longer envied the life of a dog on a chain, because we had been received like human beings, not beasts to be hunted. We had a small house with a wood stove and earth floors, but who cared? It was still a house — not an attic or a hole in the ground. Henry and I felt that we had returned to the human race.

After living with the partisans for six weeks, we learned about many things. The Polish partisans destroyed bridges, demolished ammunition storehouses, fought with Ukrainians and wrecked communications equipment. More importantly, they killed German soldiers. The partisans lived violent and bloody lives. One thing, though, disturbed us greatly: terrible news circulated that the Polish partisans killed Jews and only allowed the useful ones to live.

At the beginning of our seventh week with the Polish partisans, we saw a few German planes high overhead which were making slow and lazy passes over our camp. They were probably making photographs of the area. After seeing those planes, people dug shelters (open trenches) outside their homes. Later that day we saw hordes of Luftwaffe (German Air Force) planes approach their target — Polish partisan headquarters, our area.

The low-flying planes started to bomb and strafe us systematically. The sound of exploding bombs was deafening! The staccato firing of aircraft machine guns was all around us. I saw pieces of animals and human beings flying through the air. I threw myself into a nearby ditch, hoping to survive. Henry ran for cover to a haystack. It was as if we were caught in a hailstorm, but the hail consisted of blood and bones. It resembled a scene of exploding Roman candle firecrackers, but the streamers pouring down were pieces of human flesh and bone.

I had been separated from Henry when we both ran for cover at the start of the attack. As I cowered in the ditch, I heard Henry screaming to me: "Run! Come here! Come to the haystack!" Why he thought that the haystack was a safer place — that I'll never know. That's destiny. After all, what kind of protection does a haystack afford? And the Germans could have easily fired on the haystack. But they didn't. I obeyed Henry's screams; I

jumped out of the open ditch and ran to the haystack. The wild shooting continued and all the people in the trenches and ditches were killed. There was nothing left to bury — not one whole corpse.

Three months after the finale of the Aktion to make Vladimir-Volynski judenrein (totally cleansed of Jews), the Polish partisans posted announcements saying that all Jews must leave Bielin for Vorchin (a small village outside of Bielin) before midnight of March 24, 1944 or they would be killed. The excuse they gave was that they believed the Jews were spies. The logic of that excuse was beyond my comprehension then as it still is now: who would the Jews spy for? The Germans, out to exterminate them? The Ukrainians, those eager helpers of the Germans? However, the Poles were just looking for any excuse to rationalize their desire to get rid of the Jews so that they could be in a better position to build the "new" Poland in the future. Remember: many Jewish survivors had fled to the partisans. They had nowhere else to go. So I had long ago started to hear rumours of the partisans "eliminating" Jews, whom they had always hated.

I heard about a dear friend of mine who had attended the gymnasium with me. She was now alone with her child; her husband had been killed but she had miraculously survived. I received information that she had been killed (burned, I think it was) with a group of other Jews solely because they were Jewish. So I thought: if they're

killing them they'll get to us, sooner or later. Probably later, since my Henry was a dentist and dentists were needed. Still, there was a great mistrust that filled our souls. After you went through what we had been through, you didn't trust anybody — you took the slightest rumour seriously. It might make the difference between life and death. And many of those rumours reported massacres of Jews by partisans.

Henry spoke with other Jews about leaving Bielin and travelling to Lutsk, a Polish town where the Russian army was fighting fiercely with the Germans. We could already hear the rumbling of the Russian heavy artillery. It was almost like a signal to us. That booming thunder beckoned to us. So Henry, I and sixteen other Jews met at a secret, prearranged area and sneaked out of Bielin before the fatal deadline (we learned later that on midnight of March 24th the Polish partisans surrounded the houses where Jews lived and murdered them all).

One of the sixteen, Yosef, knew the surrounding forest area like the palm of his hand; he became our leader. He told us: "We must stick together; we'll stop in abandoned villages to look for food and water, if we can find some. When and if we'll reach Lutsk, we'll split up and fend for ourselves." As I walked, my hopes rose at the thought of reaching the Russian front. I'm sure that the others felt the same way. Liberation was so close that we could almost feel it. We had favorable weather and the

fresh scent of pine trees refreshed us — it was so different from the horrendous stench of the attics and the ghetto. After so much walking, Henry developed blisters on his feet; we had to slow down to enable him to keep up with us. I told Yosef about Henry's feet and he suggested ripping a scarf in two and wrapping his feet in the fabric. It helped a little and Henry kept going.

After a day and a half, we reached Lutsk. The Red Army surrounded the city and we were challenged by two soldiers on sentry duty. They must have believed that we were spies because they locked us away in a barn with a heavy gate. After two hours, a "Pod Polkovnik" (Lieutenant Colonel) opened the gate and questioned us. He was stout, short and bald; he had many medals pinned on his chest. Although we were confined prisoners, we were happy to see him. He personified "liberation" for us. With all those medals, he must have been one of those who, since faraway Stalingrad, had been slowly and systematically destroying the evil Germans who had condemned us to death. He had come a long way and so had we!

The officer spoke in a firm, commanding voice: "Who are you?" Yosef answered: " We are Jews." The officer went on: "How is that possible? The Nazis murdered all the Jews. You must be spies!" Yosef answered: "No, we're not spies. We ran away from the Germans and the Polish partisans." The Lieutenant-Colonel then said: "Ihr

redt Yiddish (Do you speak Yiddish)?" We screamed back in unison: "Yeah, yeah, mihr zenen Yidn (Yes, yes, we're all Jews)!" Surprised, the officer said: "I came all the way from deep inside Russia and I came across thousands and thousands of dead Jews. You are the first live Jews that I've encountered!" Most of us spoke Russian to him; we were overjoyed to meet such a high-ranking official who was Jewish. He ordered two soldiers to take us out of the barn and give us a full-course meal, hot from the kitchen. That was the best meal I've ever eaten, or will probably ever eat! Imagine finding kindness in a world dominated by sheer hatred and cruelty towards Jews. We experienced our first taste of freedom, yet it was marred by the memories of all those we had left behind, those of our loved ones who hadn't lived to see this day.

Henry and I said farewell to our travelling companions and to the Russian officer. We had our freedom — nothing else mattered to us. After years of pain and treachery, after years of suffering and fighting for our lives we had freedom. My mother had been right — I had been chosen to survive. I felt sure that our lives would improve; bleak and harsh times would give way to a better life. The cage that had held me for all this time opened and I would fly out into the open air and soar higher and higher. I knew Henry and I could build a life for each other, a life free from danger and full of love and devotion.

We travelled to Lvov, the city of my adolescent dreams, the place where I should have had a glorious university experience. In the kitchen of our apartment there I gave birth to my first child, Mark, on April 4, 1945. Henry had a private dental practice in Lvov but he was denounced and came close to being sent to Siberia. The Russian soldiers returning from the front wanted gold teeth — they were insistent on having gold teeth, it was almost an obsession with them. Henry had to buy the gold for those teeth in one way or another. Somebody "informed" the authorities that he was dealing in gold and they came and searched our house. A Rabbi from Lvov came to us and warned us to run because the NKVD (Soviet Secret Police) were preparing to go after us.

While we were living in Lvov, we decided to go back to Vladimir-Volynski and see what had happened to the community. I had left some suitcases at a neighbor's, a Polish woman. We decided to go see her and repossess our belongings. When we returned, our neighbor said: "I have nothing to return to you because the Germans came with dogs and the dogs smelled that the suitcases were filled with Jewish things. And they took them away." But Henry grabbed her and shoved her aside. We went up to her attic where we knew we had put our suitcases and we saw they were still there. We took them back while the neighbor cursed us in Polish. We found that our community was gone and that our Polish neighbor was not

exceptional — returning Jews were greeted with hatred and resentment. We knew that we had to get out of Poland and start a new life.

Henry, I and our infant hurriedly left Lvov one step ahead of the NKVD. It seemed ironic to be on the run again after so much running but we had no choice. We went to Berlin. We had found out through the Red Cross that my brother-in-law, Henry sister's husband Nathan Cytryn, had miraculously survived as a prisoner-of-war. He had been a Polish army officer and was captured at the beginning of the war, in 1939. He was shipped to a POW camp in Murnau, Germany. Henry had written to him many times before the war broke out and when we learned that he was alive Henry contacted him. He said to us that we had to get to Munich, in Bavaria. From there we could make papers to emigrate to Canada. Nathan had a mother and father in Canada. They were our aunts and cousins. We also had other cousins of Henry in Canada, the Blatt family. So we knew that reaching the partitioned city of Berlin would allow us to cross over to the west and get to Bavaria.

After Berlin, we moved to the resort town of Garmisch-Partenkirchen. Henry was working as a dentist for UNRRA (United Nations Refugee Relief Association). Henry knew where our dear Hahn who had saved our lives came from so he took a train there. Hahn and Henry were joyously reunited; each had thought that

the other hadn't survived the war. Henry told me that they were both crying like babies. Hahn was saddened to learn that my mother hadn't survived. However, Hahn told Henry: "Please, don't tell anyone that I saved Jews. Don't make a fuss about me. I don't want anybody to know what I did for you. I would do it again, but you don't know what people are like around here and I could get into a lot of trouble. Please!" So Henry, somewhat crestfallen, left it at that. He had wanted to show the world that, when murderers ruled and human life was worthless, one German remained human and decent. But, evidently the "new" Germany was not "new" enough for such revelations.

One evening, while we were living in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, we went to the theatre. As we were walking into the theatre, I was sure that I had spotted Dr. Hecker. I started pinching and pulling Henry. He said to me: "Are you crazy?" Henry said: "O.K. We'll pass close to him and you'll say 'Dr. Hecker, Dr. Hecker'. We'll see if he'll respond." Sure enough, as soon as we were close to him and I said "Dr. Hecker, Dr. Hecker", he turned around and said: "Kazimirski, du bist leben geblieben (you remained alive)!" And everybody was staring at us. He left the beautiful woman he was with and he said: "What are you doing here? How did you survive?" Henry replied: "That's a long story — we have to meet." Dr. Hecker said: "Where do you live?" He took a pen,

wrote down our address, and the next day he came to see us.

We sat for hours and hours and talked. And we told him about how we survived. And we showed him our 2 sons (another son Seymour had been born in 1948). Dr. Hecker said to us: "I want a big favor from you. I'm on the list of Nazis and I want you to help me pass the denazification process." So Henry said to him: "Yes, you helped us at times. But one person is not enough. We need a list of people who would vouch for you." So Henry went to many people and they refused point-blank. They said: "There's no way we're going to do such a thing!" They were very bitter. "You want to do it, go ahead! But don't ask us! No! Absolutely not!" And that was that.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Bearing Witness: Postwar 'Justice'

On June 28th, 1949 we arrived in Montreal, Canada. Henry, Mark, Seymour and I settled down in Ste-Agathe (a small town nestled in the Laurentian Mountains) because Henry was offered a dental position at the Mount Sinai Hospital. Henry and I lived normal lives; the tranquility of Ste-Agathe was a restorative for us. We knew we could never forget about the war and its atrocities. Such things cannot be forgotten. But we could involve ourselves in raising a new generation and building a new future. And we did. I missed Abba, Mama and Benny terribly but we all had to go on.

A few years later, I gave birth to a little girl, Heidi. I had three children and a wonderful husband. I instilled a sense of hard work and honesty in my own children. I tried to teach them all the values my parents and grandparents taught me, including the love of music.

We were called to the trial of a number of German murderers which occurred on November 2, 1971, in Dusseldorf, German (Document 1). The German government believed that Henry, who worked in the dental clinic and had contact with numerous German officials, would be an excellent witness. They did not consider me

as a witness at all. So I simply accompanied Henry to the trial.

On our arrival in Germany, we were received by people who had some Red Cross affiliation or connection — at least that's what they told us. They explained that for our own protection they were watching us very carefully. So they were in charge of us from the minute we got off the plane. They brought us by limousine to a beautiful hotel. They treated us royally, wining and dining us, but always under close guard. They were obviously professionals. They guarded the door of our hotel room. In our room, when I wanted to say something to Henry about the trial, I wrote it down and then destroyed the paper. I was afraid that our room was bugged.

The next day, at the trial, we met the famous nazi-hunter, Simon Wiesenthal. Henry was called to testify. Henry took his place in the witness box; the judges were on his left, the lawyers on his right, and at his back was the audience. Facing him, in front, were all the accused. When he was called, they wanted him to tell the story of what had happened during the pogroms. He started from the very beginning and told them the whole story. When he finished, they said: "Did you come alone to this trial?" He answered: "No, I came with my wife." To verify whether he had told the truth, they asked him for permission to call me to the box. They wanted corroboration of

Henry's testimony. They asked me if I agreed. I agreed, because all the details were still fresh in my mind.

As I was getting up to go to the witness box, a woman jumped out of the audience and lunged at me and started choking me. It all happened in a split-second. I started to yell: "Oh, help! Help!" The police ran over and with some difficulty pulled her off me and dragged her away. I didn't know who it was — nobody wanted to tell me. Perhaps she was the wife of one of the accused, or simply an unrepentant Jew-hater. All this left me in a state of shock. If I didn't faint then I must have been stronger than iron. For such a thing to happen in the formal setting of a courtroom — she had really wanted to choke me to death! The judge ordered a recess in the trial and I was given cold water. I needed it!

After a short time the trial resumed. They went over the same ground with me as they had done with Henry. I hadn't been in the court when Henry gave his testimony. I came in later.

When the trial ended, we were re-imbursed for our expenses and we flew home. The people who guarded us had become somewhat friendly with us so we asked for their address and they gave it to us. Testifying was a painful process for us as we had to relive horrible events; the bucolic surroundings of Ste-Agathe were therefore very important for us. We had gone to the trial because we felt that we had to; we felt that we had been sum-

moned to testify by the bones of our brothers and sisters resting in unmarked mass graves. The trial for us was a piece of unfinished business that only we could complete.

We wrote to our "friendly" guards and we never received a reply. They obviously didn't want any communication with us; perhaps they were not allowed to write. We were dying to know the outcome of the trial but all our letters went unanswered.

At the trial, one question kept popping up: Who told the accused to carry out those pogroms? We said that we believed — we didn't have written proof — that the man in charge was SS Gebitskomissar Westerheide. And Westerheide's name was brought up again and again during the proceedings. Henry told me that at one point he startled the court with the following testimony: Dr. Hecker, immediately after speaking with Westerheide, told Henry that Westerheide had said that the Jews didn't have it so bad at all — they didn't suffer before they were killed. Westerheide had said: "I have my men simply put the Jews on the edge of the pit so that they don't even face the firing squads. They are neatly shot in the back and they fall forward into the pit." This information was important because then they knew that Westerheide organized the whole thing.

Westerheide was obviously the major player but he couldn't be found. Henry's name was kept on file because he was such an important witness against

Westerheide. On a trip to Atlantic City, we met another survivor who had been a witness, named Davidovich, and he told us that all of the accused had received jail sentences. In October of 1980 I finally managed to find out officially what the verdict was at that trial (Document 2). The accused were sentenced to jail sentences for being accessories to murder; the sentences ranged from 3 1/2 years to 9 years.

On July 28, 1976 Henry died of cancer; a part of me died with him. We had lived through hell and built a life for ourselves and our children and now my lifetime companion died and my world crumbled to dust. My children Mark, Seymour and Heidi, who were grievously hurt themselves, helped me endure this terrible blow. Mark said to me: "Mommy, when one loses a parent, the other becomes even more precious."

I remembered how, during his last days, Henry had told me: "I'm sorry to leave you alone. You deserve so much. With the condition I'm in, I can no longer provide you with happiness, just heartache. I'm deeply sorry. You always wanted to resume your studies and now you will have the chance." And so I started, once again, to pick up the pieces of my broken life and rebuild it; therefore, in September of 1976, I registered at Concordia University (in Montreal) and began course work leading to a Bachelor of Arts in Early Childhood Education. Later I

obtained a diploma in Teaching English as a Second Language.

In December of 1981 a letter arrived at my house (Document 3) addressed to Henry. Westerheide and his mistress had been found and they were being tried! You can imagine how I felt then — Henry had passed away in 1976. He had not lived to receive this letter which had been sent by the German Consul General in Montreal. I informed the Consulate that Henry was dead. The Consul asked me: "Do you have most of the information that Henry would have given us had he been alive?" I answered: "Yes, I think so, because he used to come home and share all the information he had with me. We lived through all of those terrible events together." The Consul said: "We'll have to consult with the authorities as to whether you'll be summoned as a witness." A short time later I was called by the Consul and told that I was being considered as a witness. However, the authorities wanted me to come to the Consulate for certain basic tests. When I came to the Consulate the Consul was very friendly. He said: "I don't want your testimony now. That's for you to keep till the trial. I'm going to show you some photos and you'll tell me which one is Westerheide." So he took out a collection of photos and showed them to me. Each time Westerheide appeared in his uniform I recognized him, but when he showed me photos of Westerheide in civilian clothes I was unable to identify him, because I remembered vividly how he

looked in his uniform, with the hat and boots. The Consul seemed satisfied with me.

In March of 1982, I received an official letter from the German court inviting me to testify on July 13, 1982. I phoned the Consul and told him that I was afraid to go by myself, especially after the experience I had had with that murderous woman who had tried to choke me. I told him that I had remarried and that I would like to be accompanied by my husband, Albert Bereznik. The Consul was very understanding and he agreed immediately. We later went to Lufthansa and picked up our tickets. My hand trembled as I held the ticket — at last, at last! This ticket would bring me face to face with the monster who had committed so many evil acts! He would have to listen and hear how the world is informed about his terrible deeds, and this information would come from me, one of his victims who got away.

This time a husband and wife team were responsible for us. The security was nowhere near as heavy and as formal as it had been at the first trial in 1971. We were brought straight from the airport to the judge's chambers. He told us that we would sleep that night in a hotel and the trial would begin the next day. The couple would pick us up at our hotel. He suggested that we shouldn't roam round the streets — we should stay in our hotel. He also showed us the courtroom and told me I could have an interpreter.

We had arrived around noon; we finished seeing the judge in the late afternoon. The couple then took us to their luxurious home just outside of the town. They entertained us and we enjoyed a royal meal with them. It was all pre-arranged: they were supposed to keep us busy. Later on they drove us to our hotel.

The next morning the couple came precisely on time and brought us to the trial. Needless to say, I was very apprehensive because I knew I'd be seeing Westerheide. My husband Albert was sitting in the audience among many journalists. I had told him: "When I see the monster I'll signal you." As I was sitting and waiting I saw the judge come in, the lawyers in their black robes (Westerheide had hired many of them). We all waited. Finally, I saw Westerheide, wearing civilian clothes, and Anna. She had aged terribly and she appeared helpless, no longer high and mighty like she did when she rode on her white horse through ghetto streets, lashing innocent victims with her terrible whip and striking fear into their hearts. I signalled frantically to Albert: "It's them! It's them!" I didn't recognize him in the photos when he was wearing civilian clothes, but here he could have been standing among 200 people and I would have recognized him. You don't forget such a face!

The court was packed; in the audience I noticed many journalists and students. During one of the breaks, a journalist for a German paper came over to me and said:

"Isn't it great that Westerheide is finally being brought to justice?" I took the opportunity to ask him how Westerheide had been found. The journalist explained the matter to me. It seems that no enormous effort had been made by the German government to find Westerheide. He had been squealed on by one of his former underlings. The latter either wanted revenge for some personal slight, or he resented the fact that he and his colleagues were shouldering all the blame for what had been done. This man was determined to find Westerheide, so he did all the digging and spadework until he found the address in 1982.

The courtroom in 1971 had been built as an amphitheatre, with seats rising from the platform at the bottom. This time the courtroom was flat. The defense attorneys (Westerheide had hired the best lawyers in the land) tried to confuse me. They asked a question and 20 minutes later they came back to the same question. I told them: "I answered that before! I resent the fact that you keep asking me the same questions! I already answered them!" For instance, they asked: "What was the distance from the window you were looking through in the attic to the gates of the ghetto?" I told them that I hadn't measured it but I gave them an approximation. Fifteen minutes later another lawyer asked the same question. I resented such transparent attempts to trip and discredit me. I testified in English using an interpreter. I spoke German well, but I used an interpreter to give me time to

reflect. One of Westerheide's lawyers was so sharp and knew English so well that he questioned the interpreter's accuracy. He told the judge: "That's not what the witness said!" And the judge had to agree with him.

At many points I started to cry. Each time they took a break and offered to let me out of the courtroom for a while, but I was afraid to leave because of my experience at the first trial, when the woman tried to choke me. I did the right thing because who knows what somebody was planning for me?

When spectators heard my testimony and heard about the evil acts of violence and cold-blooded atrocities, they covered their faces with their hands; I saw tears too. But Westerheide and Anna held their heads high — their faces appeared proud and defiant. They showed absolutely no remorse.

My appearance lasted from 9 a.m. till 12 or 1. They asked me about Anna in the ghetto and I told them I couldn't answer them much because I was in the ghetto only during the third pogrom. I knew more about Westerheide because he used to come to Dr. Hecker's dental clinic and Henry used to tell me exactly what he had said. I described how I saw him come into the ghetto during the pogrom — I saw it with my own eyes. And I asked: "What do you think he was doing there? Playing cards?" The lawyers pressed me: "Did you actually see Westerheide there?" And I responded: "Absolutely!" To

verify what I said the lawyers presented a set of photos. The judge called me over and asked me to identify photos of my town. They showed me the Gebitskomissariat and I identified it. I identified where the high school was and they even had a photo of the dental clinic which I recognized immediately. I identified all the photos correctly.

As my appearance drew to a close, the judge asked me if there was anything I wanted to add. I thought of my father who was such a good speaker — how he would have seized this opportunity! And Henry, who burned with hatred for the assassins who had murdered whole communities of our people, was no longer alive — he, too, would have had much to say now. And so I said:

On behalf of my parents and my late husband I'm going to say something.

I have come from across the ocean to face a man and to face a woman who were responsible for eradicating my entire family and annihilating 18,000 Jews in the town of Vladimir-Volynski, Poland.

Their lawyers paint a pleasant picture of them and point a finger of blame at "higher authorities," saying Westerheide and Altfuter followed orders from those "higher authorities." Nevertheless, they deserve punishment and they deserve to feel

the mighty lash of Justice's whip. The Germans ordered the genocide of innocent people. People died horrendous deaths. Everybody involved is guilty; those who carried out the orders are just as guilty as those who gave them.

Human life had no meaning to those assassins. They penned people like animals behind barbed-wire fences; they tortured young girls by raping them before killing them; they humiliated Jewish males by shaving their beards and cutting off their side-locks in public; after all of these torments, they forced the innocents to dig their own graves after they had robbed them of their possessions.

What did these simple, innocent people do to deserve that? All that was inflicted on them came because they were Jewish and the genocidal murderers decreed that no Jew had the right to live. But before they would be killed, they were to be tormented, humiliated and tortured.

Westerheide and Altfuter are not above the laws of decency and toleration and respect for human life. They are lower than animals. They tried to exterminate a people as if they were vermin. They wallowed in the blood of innocent people. They should rot in jail for the rest of their pathetic, deformed lives. Where is Justice? God spared me and the others to tell the world about

such vile criminals and their infernal deeds. All of you in the audience must learn about the vile crimes committed by your people against humanity.

I hesitated and dried my eyes. Dead silence blanketed the courtroom; however, the sound of sobs broke the silence. Gathering my wits, I continued:

The world must never witness such massacres and horrendous events again. Soldiers dropped children from rooftops and let them plummet to their deaths; soldier shot innocent people and burned their bodies. Why? Why? Why?

It is ghastly to hear how your father and how your brother spent the last moments of their lives facing an open pit yawning wide to receive them; it is heart-wrenching to see soldiers shooting your mother in the neck and watching her fall to the ground, dead. Why did this have to happen? Why? Because there are people like the accused in this courtroom who lack any sense of decency and justice and mercy. They are lower than animals. Justice must not forget their crimes and Justice must not let their ferocious crimes go unpunished. All humans are responsible for the sanctity of human life. Following orders is no excuse! Justice must prevail!

I don't know where I got the strength to speak like that. The judge thanked me and they all stood up; the session was over. I saw the judge afterwards in his chambers and I said to him: "I know it's not fair to ask, but I'm going far away to another country. Do you think Westerheide will be punished for his terrible crimes?" (This was not a jury trial, the sole arbiter was the judge.) The judge answered: "Believe me, I don't know. I really don't know at this point." It was an evasive response. The prosecutor had asked questions which weren't really germane; he seemed inept. I couldn't tell him what to ask but in his shoes I would have done a much better job although I never received training as a lawyer.

So my ordeal at the trial ended. I told Albert, my husband, that the emotional stress had been severe. He saw it himself. I didn't want to go straight back to Canada; I wanted to go to Israel. I needed to see the Jewish state — it would be a restorative for me. We went to a travel agent and converted our return tickets to Canada into two Germany-Israel-Canada tickets. When we came to Israel, I was at my cousin's place in Bnei Brak. I phoned Machla who, notwithstanding our fears, had survived and she invited me over. She told me she, too, had been summoned to the trial. She had testified a day before I did. She told me that witnesses had been summoned from all over the world, but she said: "I don't believe they are going to convict him." She felt it.

I desperately wanted to know the verdict of the trial so I wrote to the "friendly" couple who had taken care of us. They never answered. Then somebody told me to write to the court. From them too — no response. Not a word. Until I started to write this book I knew nothing. Then I realized how important it was for me to know the verdict. I made inquiries through the Montreal German consulate but they didn't want to help me at all and treated me somewhat rudely. So I went to the Canadian Jewish Congress and they put me in touch with Dr. Julius Pfeiffer, a Montrealer who had been a judge in pre-war Germany. He wrote a letter for me to the court in Germany and they responded (Document 5) that they would not communicate the verdict to a private person. I became suspicious at this point. Why didn't they want to tell me? They were ashamed — that's obvious.

I got in touch with Professor Howard Roiter, a Holocaust scholar from the Université de Montréal. In 1984 he was instrumental in helping the Montreal German consulate organize a judicial hearing concerning the atrocities committed in Sobibor, a death camp. A whole court was moved to Montreal for this hearing, and Dr. F.W. Conrad, the Consul General, wrote to Professor Roiter (Document 6) expressing how much his help had been appreciated. On hearing about the difficulties I had in learning the verdict about Westerheide, Professor Roiter wrote to Dr. Conrad's successor, Dr. M. Schmidt (Document 7) and explained the matter. Dr. Schmidt

promised to help (Document 8) and he contacted the court in Germany and insisted on learning the verdict. On January 2, 1991 he wrote to Professor Roiter and explained that "a verdict of Not Guilty was pronounced on December 20, 1982." (Document 9).

That is why I staggered from the telephone when Professor Roiter called me on January 3, 1991 and told me about the verdict. I resolved then and there that if human justice would not be rendered to the victims of Westerheide and his bloody associates, I would render to these victims a form of justice by telling the world what they had endured and how they had perished. And my testimony would mean that I was keeping faith with my mother and all the others who had implored me to "tell the world."

I have kept faith with them and the preceding pages are my monument to those who did not survive to testify.

I became a teacher because I love children. I saw, in my lifetime, lives destroyed; I wanted to be part of building new lives. I work in a Jewish school; when I look at my eager students singing with joy and gusto, I know that the Hitlers and Westerheides and Altfuters failed. I rejoice that I can be a citizen of a country where people are free and children can sing with joy.

And so, when my young students sing, I sing with them. Although I have a lot to cry about, I have more to

sing about. So if, by any chance, you pass the United Talmud Torah school buildings in Montreal or Ville St-Laurent, Quebec, and you hear the students singing, listen carefully: you'll hear that their teacher's voice is the loudest of all. And the happiest of all too. And that voice, my voice, came all the way from Vladimir-Volynski to Montreal and Ville St-Laurent, Quebec. It wasn't an easy trip, but I'm glad to be alive and glad to be of service to a new generation.

EPILOGUE

I feel that all those who perished in the Holocaust left me a legacy: to make sure that their story is not forgotten, that future generations will know and remember. That is why I welcomed the opportunity to address the students (Grades 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5) of my school, the United Talmud Torah, on April 19, 1993, at the Yom Hashoa (Holocaust) memorial assembly. This is what I said then:

Mme Bensimon, Fellow Teachers, Boys and Girls:

Today we are commemorating the Shoa, the destruction of the 6 million Jews and the Jewish communities in Europe between 1939-1945.

It's very painful and difficult for me as a Holocaust survivor to reveal to all of you the deep wound that I carry in my heart. Our principal, Mme Bensimon, some of the teachers and many students have read my book called "A Witness to Horror." You all expressed pain as you tried to understand my struggle for survival. Only a few people from my hometown, Wlodzimierz, remained alive; the rest, including my brother Benny, my parents, and my grandparents were brutally killed by the nazis.

For 5 years I was hiding in attics, stables, ghettos and forests, and I struggled to go on, to live, to be the lucky one to survive. I paid a big price for my freedom but my mother's words kept ringing in my ears: "Chanale, keep on fighting, you will live, you must survive and tell the world about the murders and

atrocities committed by the nazis." To follow my mother's words — that's a promise I made to myself when I was liberated by the Soviet army and I became a free person.

I can never forget my brother Benny who was 17 years old and was never given a chance to become an adult, and my wonderful parents who loved me so dearly, and my grandfather Aaron who had a long white beard and loved telling me bedtime stories. We must never forget the little children who were taken away from their parents and gazed in the gas-chambers. We must never forget the 6 million Jews who perished from the face of this earth.

Let's hope that all of you will never have to face such sufferings and that you'll be able to grow up in a happy and free world.

THANK YOU.

When I sat down there was total silence in the assembly hall. Nobody seemed to move. The hall felt like another audience had joined the children, an audience of perished children and their families. We all were united by the enormous grief and pain everybody felt.

When the students returned to their classes, the teachers asked them to write down their thoughts and feelings. I am enclosing a sample of what they wrote:

1. The Holocaust shouldn't have happened. So many children, fathers and mothers perished just for one reason that they were Jewish. In our hearts it's painful and sad to hear what they went through. One of our teachers was a survivor. Her name is Mrs. Ann. She told us what it was like in

the ghetto. It was like a prison to them. They had no hope. But our teacher had the courage to fight for her freedom. Her mom said: "Hannah, you will live!" It echoed in her mind night and day and even today it echoes in her ears. Her mother also said: "It is your mission to tell how people suffered and perished, what they went through."

Mrs. Ann did as her mother told her and still continues to tell the children she teaches her story.

We are glad that she is our teacher.

She still carries the sadness and hurt in her heart.

Claudia & Karine

2. The Holocaust was a horrible thing that happened. I hope it will never happen again. I really felt sorry for Mrs. Ann. She lost all her family in the Holocaust. When she told me what happened I was about to cry. My family was also in the Holocaust. Some of them died, some of them survived. What happened to Mrs. Ann is worse than what happened to my family. Mrs. Ann was left alone in that war. If I were in her place I wouldn't know what to do. Mrs. Ann is a very brave person. She went through a lot of pain and trouble.

I hope this will never happen again.

Audrey Dadoun

3. Dear Mrs. Ann: I know how you feel about your family. Thank God that we have a teacher like you. We all love you and care about you. In my whole life I won't forget the words that your mother said to you before she died: "Do not give up!"

Thank you, Mrs. Ann.

Nathalie Kogan

4. Today I went to an assembly in the gym. Mrs. Ann read a speech. It was about her survival in the Holocaust. Mrs. Ann said that her mother told her that she would survive and that she would tell what happened.

Well, she did survive and Mrs. Ann is a teacher. She tells her students what happened. At least there were some good Germans who let some Jews survive. But there were only a few survivors.

There were so many ways that the nazis killed the Jews. There were concentration camps, ghettos, gas chambers and lots of other ways. The Jews suffered so much.

I know how Mrs. Ann feels because if I lost my whole family in the Holocaust I wouldn't know how to live for the rest of my life.

I really hope that it will never happen again.

Lynn Cohen

5. I am writing this story and I feel very sad.

First, I want to write on the Holocaust. From 1939 to 1945 millions of people from our community died. They were killed by the nazis. The nazis had a lot of terrible ways of killing them. The Jewish people had to hide in attics, cellars, forests, ditches, stables and many more places.

A very small amount of people survived and one of them is my teacher, Mrs. Ann. She was in the Holocaust with her family. From day to day people in her community were killed. Mrs. Ann had a terrible life. I feel very sad for her. On Monday we had a Holocaust assembly. Mrs. Ann told us her story. I cried in my heart. And I thought of what a big community we would be now if the nazis didn't exist.

Mrs. Ann's story started when they went to the Holocaust. Her mother kept telling her that everyone will die but you will survive. And that is what happened. One day the nazis killed her family. Her mother was killed, also her father, her brother and her grandpa who she loved so much. But she got away and went to another country.

But even if she survived she missed her family very much. Until now she misses them and always will.

She wanted the whole world to know about the nazis' cruelty so she wrote a book. When she wrote the book she was thinking about the times she spent with her family and she was crying. One day I will read her book and I will cry also. But I will always remember what the nazis did to the Jewish people and I will remember what Mrs. Ann felt when she was all alone.

Kim Derrick

6. When we think about the Holocaust we feel very sad. We feel sorry for all the people who went through the scary, horrifying Holocaust, who got killed by soldiers with machine guns for just one reason — because they were Jews. Like us.

When we think about you, Mrs. Ann, penned up in a ghetto we feel so sorry and we wish we could help but we just have to face the facts. It is too late.

But you are a messenger and you are the one who has to tell everyone, "Hey, this happened and I was there!"

We love you very much, Mrs. Ann, and we really mean it.

Nathalie Ohnona and Laetitia Sabbah

7. Our nation suffered a terrible loss in the Holocaust. We lost 6 million Jews. It hurts us to know that people (nazis) in this world could be so terribly disgusting.

But it hurts us most to know what Mrs. Ann, all the survivors and all the men, women and children who suffered and died in the war, felt. Everytime Mrs. Ann tells us her story our eyes fill up with tears.

We wish this was all just a horrible nightmare but it's not, it really happened, and all we can do now is wish and pray that this war will never repeat itself.

We know it's extremely hard to accept the truth but we must remember everything so such things will never, ever happen again.

Hadar Shaulov and Jessica Sharafi

APPENDIX: RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

- Document 1 : 1971 invitation from the German Court in Dortmund to Dr. Henry Kazimirski to appear as a witness at the trial of various Germans charged with participating in the killing of the Jews of Wladimir Wolynsk. (English and German versions).
- Document 2 : 1990 letter from German court to Ann Kazimirski: telling her the verdicts and various punishments handed out in 1973 at the trial cited in document 1.
- Document 3 : Letter (1981) from German Consul (Montreal) to Dr. Henry Kazimirski, who had died in 1976, to testify at trial of Westerheide and Zelle.
- Document 4 : Letter (1982) from German Court (Dortmund) to Ann Kazimirski summoning her as a witness at trial of Westerheide and Zelle. (English and German versions).
- Document 5 : Letter (1990) from German Court to Ann Kazimirski; The court refuses to tell her the verdict in the Westerheide trial.
- Document 6 : Letter (1984) from German Consul-General (Montreal) to Prof. Howard Roiter thanking him for his valuable assistance in war-crime hearing.
- Document 7 : Letter (1990) from Prof. Roiter to German Consul-General Schmidt (Montreal) asking for the verdict in the Westerheide trial.
- Document 8 : Letter (1990) from Consul-General Schmidt to Prof. Roiter telling him that he is actively looking into the verdict in the Westerheide trial
- Document 9 : Letter (1991) from Hars Hartwig, German Vice-Consul (Montreal) to Prof. Roiter telling him that Westerheide was pronounced "Not Guilty."

Der Leiter der Zentralstelle im Lande Nordrhein - Westfalen
für die Bearbeitung von nationalsozialistischen Massenverbrechen
bei der Staatsanwaltschaft Dortmund

Geschäfts-Nr.: 8 Ks 3/70 StA Düsseldorf

Bitte bei allen Schreiben angeben!

45 Js 24/62

46 Dortmund,
den 16.9.1971

Soarhöcker Straße 5.9
Fernruf 527821 - 29
Fernschreiber 08 22451
Postfach

Mr.
Dr. Henry Kazimirsky
12 Albert Street

To be served to:
Mr. Dr. Henry Kazimirsky
12 Albert Street
Ste. Agathe des Monts, P.Q.
C a n a d a

Ste. Agathe des Monts, P.Q.
C a n a d a

In the matter of the criminal proceedings against
Günther Herrmann and accomplices for
murder and aiding and abetting murder
(actions of killing Russian, especially
Jewish people in the Ukraine and at
Wladimir-Wolynsk);
here: Summons to appear as a witness at
the trial before the Court of
Assizes at Düsseldorf

Dear Mr. Kazimirsky,

In the matter of the criminal proceedings against the
German subjects Günther Herrmann, Fritz Braune, Hans-
Joachim Sommerfeld, Wilhelm Bockstette, Hans Juhnke,
Wilhelm Ebert, Rudolf Haubach, Walter Hupp, Waldemar
Krause and Wilhelm Braune (former members of the
"Sonderkommando 4b") charged with murder and aiding
and abetting murder the presiding judge of the Court
of Assizes has ruled that you be summoned to appear
as a witness before the Court of Assizes at Düsseldorf
(Federal Republic of Germany) on

November 2nd, 1971, 9.00 a.m.

in the building of the Landgericht at Düsseldorf,
Mühlenstraße 34, room L 111.

Therefore you are herewith summoned to appear there at the above date.

I beg to ask you to take into account that possibly, by order of the presiding judge of the Court of Assizes, you may be examined also on some of the following days. You are requested to bring this writ of summons to the hearing.

Your financial indemnification will be calculated pursuant to the German law concerning the indemnification of witnesses and experts of October 1st, 1969.

You are entitled to the following fees and indemnification for loss of wages or salary:

- a) the necessary travelling expenses (railway or airline tickets) including the fees for the transport of the necessary luggage,
- b) allowance for boarding and residence,
- c) loss of wages or salary will be reimbursed up to the legal maximum limit (Loss of wages or salary must be proven to the Court of Assizes by production of vouchers.),
- d) expenses caused by provision of substitutes in working or household must be proven by production of vouchers. The necessity of a substitute must be proven also.

I beg to ask you to acknowledge the receipt of this letter as soon as possible to me with reference to the file number 45 Js 24/62 Staatsanwaltschaft Dortmund and to inform me that you will appear before the Court of Assizes at the date fixed in this summons.

For the travel to Germany travelling by air has been arranged. I shall take care of an airline ticket and of information to you about the exact date and moment of the start of the aeroplane in good time.

A larger advance payment for the fees may be granted on your request. The petition should be sent at once to "Staatsanwaltschaft Dortmund". At any case the Court will arrange for an adequate advance to be paid to you at your arrival at the airport in Germany.

Please address all letters to "Staatsanwaltschaft Dortmund - Zentralstelle - AZ.: 45 Js 24/62".

Yours faithfully,



by order

[Handwritten signature]
(Menne)

State Attorney

Der Leiter der Zentralstelle im Lande Nordrhein - Westfalen
für die Bearbeitung von nationalsozialistischen Massenverbrechen
bei der Staatsanwaltschaft Dortmund

Geschäfts-Nr.: 8 Ks 3/70 StA Düsseldorf

Bitte bei allen Schreiben angeben!

45 Js 24/62

46 Dortmund,
den 16.9.1971

Saarbrücker Straße 3-8
Fernruf 5278 21 - 29
Fernschreiber 08 22 451
Postfach

Herrn

Dr. Henry Kazimirsky

12 Albert Street

Ste. Agathe des Monts, P.Q.

C a n a d a

Zuzustellen an:

Herrn Dr. Henry Kazimirsky

12 Albert Street

Ste. Agathe des Monts, P.Q.

C a n a d a

Betrifft: Strafsache gegen Günther Herrmann und Andere
(ehemalige Angehörige des Sonderkommandos 4b)
wegen Mordes und Beihilfe zum Mord (Tötungs-
handlungen an der russischen vorwiegend jüdi-
schen Zivilbevölkerung in der Ukraine und in
Wladimir-Wolynsk);

hier: Ladung als Zeuge zur Hauptverhandlung
vor dem Schwurgericht in Düsseldorf

Sehr geehrter Herr Dr. Kazimirsky!

In der Strafsache gegen die deutschen Staatsangehörigen
Günther Herrmann, Fritz Braune, Hans-Joachim Sommerfeld,
Wilhelm Bockstette, Hans Juhnke, Wilhelm Ebert, Rudolf
Haubach, Walter Hupp, Waldemar Krause und Wilhelm Braune
(ehemalige Angehörige des Sonderkommandos 4b) wegen Mordes
und Beihilfe zum Mord sollen Sie auf Anordnung des Ge-
richtsvorsitzenden als Zeuge vor dem Schwurgericht in
Düsseldorf (Bundesrepublik Deutschland) vernommen werden,
und zwar am

2. November 1971, 9.00 Uhr

im Landgericht Düsseldorf, Mühlenstraße 34, Saal L 111.

Zu diesem Termin werden Sie hiermit geladen.

RECHEN 1

**Der Leiter der Zentralstelle im Lande Nordrhein-Westfalen für die
Bearbeitung von nationalsozialistischen Massenverbrechen
bei der Staatsanwaltschaft Dortmund**

Geschäfts-Nr.: 45 Js 24/62
Bitte bei allen Schreiben angeben!

4600 Dortmund 1, 29.10.1990

Frau
Anna Kazimirski
5790 Rembrandt, # 702
Cote St. Luc, Que.-Canada
H4W 2V2

Postfach 18 29 42
Hans-Litten-Straße 3
(ehemalige Straßenbezeichnung
Saarbrücker Straße)
☎ Durchwahl (02 31) 54 00 521
☎ Vermittlung (02 31) 5 40 31
Fernschreiber 06 22 451
Telefax (02 31) 55 14 87

Betrifft:

Strafverfahren

gegen Günther Herrmann u. A. - 8 Ks 3/70 StA Düsseldorf -

Bezug:

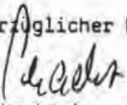
Ihr Schreiben vom 16.10.1990 und Ihr an das Generalkonsulat der
Bundesrepublik Deutschland in Montreal gerichtete Schreiben vom
17.09.1990

Sehr geehrte Frau Kazimirski!

Auf Ihre oben bezeichneten Schreiben teile ich Ihnen mit, daß
die Angeklagten in dem oben bezeichneten Strafverfahren durch
Urteil des Landgerichts - Schwurgerichtskammer - Düsseldorf
vom 12.01.1973 wegen gemeinschaftlicher Beihilfe zum Mord ver-
urteilt worden sind, und zwar der Angeklagte Herrmann zu sieben
Jahren Freiheitsstrafe, der Angeklagte Braune zu neun Jahren
Freiheitsstrafe, der Angeklagte Sommerfeld zu sechs Jahren
Freiheitsstrafe, der Angeklagte Ebert zu fünf Jahren Freiheits-
strafe und der Angeklagte Hupp zu drei Jahren und sechs Monaten
Freiheitsstrafe.

Falls Sie eine Kopie des Urteils benötigen, müßten Sie diese bei der Staatsanwaltschaft in Düsseldorf unter dem Aktenzeichen 8 Ks 3/70 unter Angabe der Gründe, die Ihr berechtigtes Interesse an der Einsichtnahme in das Urteil erkennen lassen, beantragen.

Mit vorzüglicher Hochachtung


(Schacht)

Oberstaatsanwalt

Generalkonsulat
der Bundesrepublik Deutschland
Consulat Général
de la République fédérale d'Allemagne
Consulate General
of the Federal Republic of Germany

Montréal, P. Q., den 10. Dezember 1981
(Canada) H3G 2A3
3455 rue de la Montagne
Tel.: 849-1134/-38
FS (Telex): 05-24483 (Consugerma Montreal)

RK 5 SEN/WESTERHEIDE, ZELLE

Dr. Henry Kazimirsky
12 Albert Street
Ste-Agathe-des-Monts, P.Q.

Sehr geehrter Herr Dr. Kazimirsky,

In dem Schwurgerichtsverfahren gegen Westerheide und Zelle wegen Verdacht des Mordes (NS-Gewaltverbrechen, Getto Wladimir-Wolynsk) möchte ich mich heute auf Ersuchen des Landgerichts Dortmund an Sie wenden. Das Gericht möchte Sie gerne in dem bei ihm anhängigen Schwurgerichtsverfahren als Zeugen vernehmen und dem weiteren Zeugen, Herrn Dr. Hecker aus München, gegenüberstellen.

Das Gericht hat dem Generalkonsulat ferner folgendes mitgeteilt: Seine verfahrensrechtliche Verpflichtung zur erschöpfenden Sachaufklärung dränge zu einer Gegenüberstellung von Ihnen und dem Zeugen, Herrn Dr. Hecker. Daher sei Ihr persönliches Erscheinen in Dortmund besonders dringlich. In diesem Zusammenhang sei weiter zu bemerken, daß es in dem Verfahren um die Aufklärung schwerwiegender Tatvorwürfe (Mord in mehreren Fällen im Zusammenhang mit Vernichtungsaktionen gegen das jüdische Getto in Wladimir-Wolynsk im Jahre 1942) gehe und nur noch wenige Zeugen verfügbar seien. Nach dem Grundsatz der Unmittelbarkeit der Beweisaufnahme seien Zeugen über ihre Wahrnehmungen in der Hauptverhandlung zu vernehmen. Eine persönliche Vernehmung könne grundsätzlich nicht durch Verlesung früherer Vernehmungsprotokolle oder schriftlicher Erklärungen ersetzt werden.

Eine Vernehmung würde nach Mitteilung des Gerichts - vorbehaltlich näherer Terminsbestimmung - voraussichtlich im Mai oder Juni 1982 in Betracht kommen können. Die erforderlichen Reiseunterlagen würden Ihnen zur Verfügung gestellt. Für Ihre Betreuung in Dortmund würde das Gericht Sorge tragen. Die Entschädigung für Verdienstausfall, Tagegeld, Unterkunft und sonstige Unkosten würden nach den gesetzlichen Bestimmungen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland erfolgen. Auch die Kosten für eine Begleitperson würde das Gericht übernehmen.

Angesichts der besonderen Bedeutung Ihrer Zeugenaussage für das Gericht in Dortmund wäre ich Ihnen für baldige Mitteilung dankbar, ob Sie bereit sind, sich dem Gericht als Zeuge zur Verfügung zu stellen. Falls in Ihrer Person liegende Gründe Ihnen eine Reise nach Dortmund nicht ermöglichen, wäre das Gericht für ergänzende Informationen dankbar. Gegebenenfalls wollen Sie bitte dem Generalkonsulat Krankheitsgründe mitteilen und nähere Angaben über die Art Ihrer Gesundheitsbeeinträchtigung machen, damit ich das Gericht entsprechend verständigen kann.

Für Ihre Kooperation in dieser Angelegenheit möchte ich Ihnen verbindlich danken. Ich sehe Ihrer Nachricht mit Interesse entgegen.

Mit freundlichen Grüßen
Im Auftrag

F. W. Conrad

Dr. F. W. Conrad
Konsul I. Kl.

Landgericht Dortmund

Geschäfts-Nr.: Ks 45 Js 32/64
Bitte bei allen Schreiben angeben!

4600 Dortmund, 16th of March 1982
den
Postfach
Kaiserstraße 34
☎ Durchwahl (02 31) 54 03
☎ Vermittlung (02 31) 5 40 31
Fernschreiber 06 22 451

Mrs.
Anna Kazimirski
5795 Decelles Avenue
P.Q. H 3 S 2 C 4
Montreal
Canada

Reference: Criminal Proceedings versus:

- 1) Wilhelm Westerheide and
- 2) Johanne Zelle nee Altvater,
about suspected murder, ghetto Wladimir-Wolynsk.

here: summons of a witness by the Assize Court in Dortmund

Dear Mrs. Kazimirski,

I refer to your hearing on the 10th of February 1982 by the consulate general of the Federal Republic of Germany in Montreal when you stated being prepared to give evidence as a witness before the Assize Court in Dortmund.

I thank you for your readiness.

Your examination by the Assize Court shall take place on

Tuesday the 13th of July 1982 at 9 o'clock

hall 130 of the Dortmund Regional Court at 34 Kaiserstrasse.

You are summoned to attend the hearing.

An interpreter for the English language will be at your disposal.

I would be very much obliged when you produce the documents from the ghetto Wladimir-Wolynsk in your possession when becoming examined by the Court.

Financial reimbursement will be effected pursuant to German Law about compensation for witnesses. You are advised to bring along all proof of loss of income, travelling-expenses or any other expenses for calculation of your indemnification. The journey to the Federal Republic of Germany is considered by airway.

Execution of the journey will be effected by the travelling - agency Hapag-Lloyd at 7 Hansastrasse in Dortmund. You'll be informed in time about handing-over respectively depositing of flight tickets, the date and time of departure and transfer from the terminal to Dortmund, and your accommodation in a hotel.

During your stay in Germany the society for Christian-Jewish co-operation of 15 Beurhausstrasse in Dortmund will take care of you.

Most respectfully
The President of the Assize Court

signed: Müller
Presiding Judge at the Regional Court.

Translated by:

H. Bruchmüller



Landgericht Dortmund

4600 Dortmund.
den 16. März 1982
Postfach
Kaiserstraße 34
☎ Durchwahl (02 31) 54 03
☎ Vermittlung (02 31) 5 40 31
Fernschreiber, 08 22 481

Geschäfts-Nr.: Ks 45 Js 32/64
Bitte bei allen Schreiben angeben!

Frau
Anna Kazimirski
5795 Decelles Avenue
P.O. H 3 S 2 C 4
Montreal
Canada

Betrifft: Strafverfahren gegen:

- 1) Wilhelm Westerheide und
- 2) Johanne Zelle geborene Altvater,
wegen Verdacht des Mordes, Getto Wladimir-Wolynsk.

hier: Ladung als Zeugin vor das Schwurgericht Dortmund

Sehr geehrte Frau Kazimirski!

Ich nehme Bezug auf Ihre Vernehmung vom 10. Februar 1982 durch das Generalkonsulat der Bundesrepublik Deutschland in Montreal. Sie haben sich bereit erklärt, zu Ihrer Vernehmung als Zeugin vor dem Schwurgericht Dortmund zu erscheinen.

Ich danke Ihnen für Ihre Bereitschaft.

Ihre Vernehmung vor dem Schwurgericht soll am

Dienstag, den 13. Juli 1982, 9 Uhr

im Saal 130 des Landgerichts Dortmund, Kaiserstraße 34 stattfinden. Ich lade Sie hiermit zu diesem Termin.

Ein Dolmetscher für die englische Sprache steht während Ihrer Vernehmung zur Verfügung.

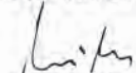
Ich wäre Ihnen dankbar, wenn Sie die in Ihrem Besitz befindlichen Dokumente aus dem Getto Wladimir-Wolynsk dem Gericht bei Ihrer Vernehmung vorlegen würden.

Ihre finanzielle Entschädigung wird nach dem deutschen Gesetz über die Entschädigung von Zeugen vorgenommen. Ich empfehle Ihnen, daß

Sie Belege über Verdienstaussfall, Reisekosten oder sonstige Unkosten zur Berechnung Ihrer Entschädigung mitbringen.
Für die Reise in die Bundesrepublik Deutschland ist der Luftweg vorgesehen. Mit der Durchführung der Reise ist das Hapag-Lloyd Reisebüro in Dortmund, Hansastraße 7 beauftragt. Sie erhalten rechtzeitig Nachricht über die Aushändigung oder Hinterlegung der Flugkarte, den Abflugtermin und über die Weiterreise vom Ankunftsflughafen nach Dortmund und Ihre Hotelunterkunft. Während Ihres Aufenthaltes in Dortmund werden Sie von der Gesellschaft für Christlich-jüdische Zusammenarbeit in Dortmund, Beurhausstraße 15 betreut.

Hochachtungsvoll

Der Vorsitzende des Schwurgerichts



(Müller)

Vorsitzender Richter am Landgericht



**Der Leiter der Zentralstelle im Lande Nordrhein-Westfalen für die
Bearbeitung von nationalsozialistischen Massenverbrechen
bei der Staatsanwaltschaft Dortmund**

Geschäfts-Nr.: 45 Js 32/64

Bitte bei allen Schreiben angeben!

Frau
Anna Kazimirski
5790 Rembrandt, # 702
Cote St. Luc, Que.-Canada
H4W 2V2

Canada

4600 Dortmund 1, 30.10.1990

Postfach 18 25 46
Hans-Litten-Straße 1
(ehemalige Straßenbezeichnung,
Saarbrücker Straße)
☎ Durchwahl (02 31) 54 03 521
☎ Vermittlung (02 31) 5 40 31
Fernschreiber 09 22 451
Telefax: (02 31) 55 14 87

Betr.:
Strafverfahren
gegen Westerheide und Zelle

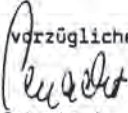
Bezug:
Ihr Schreiben vom 16.10.1990

Sehr geehrte Frau Kazimirski!

Zu meinem Bedauern sehe ich mich nicht in der Lage, Ihnen Kopien aus den Akten des oben bezeichneten Strafverfahrens zu übersenden. Nach Nr. 185 Absatz 4 der Richtlinien für das Straf- und Bußgeldverfahren ist Privatpersonen grundsätzlich die Akteneinsicht versagt. Entsprechendes gilt für die Überlassung von Aktenteilen bzw. Kopien davon.

Ich bedauere, Ihnen nicht weiter behilflich sein zu können.


Mit vorzüglicher Hochachtung


(Schacht)

Oberstaatsanwalt

Falls Sie eine Kopie des Urteils benötigen, müßten Sie diese bei der Staatsanwaltschaft in Düsseldorf unter dem Aktenzeichen B Ks 3/70 unter Angabe der Gründe, die Ihr berechtigtes Interesse an der Einsichtnahme in das Urteil erkennen lassen, beantragen.

Mit vorzüglicher Hochachtung


(Schacht)

Oberstaatsanwalt

Generalmotoren
der Bundesrepublik Deutschland
Consulat Général
de la République fédérale d'Allemagne
Consulate General
of the Federal Republic of Germany

Montréal, P. Q., den April 4th, 1984
(Canada) H3G 2A3
3455 rue de la Montagne
Tel.: 514-286-1820
FS (Telex): 05-24483 (ConsuGerma Montreal)

RK 5 SEN/FRENZEL/WEWERIK

M. le Dr Howard Roiter,
Directeur du
Département d'études anglaises
Faculté des Arts et des Sciences
Université de Montréal
C.P. 6128, Succ.A
Montréal, Qué.
H3C 3J7

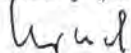
Dear Professor Roiter,

after the hearing of the witness Wewerik has been brought to an end, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you very much for your valuable assistance in this matter. Without your help, this hearing, with the participation of the Regional Court from Hagen/Federal Republic of Germany, would probably have never been possible.

Furthermore, I would like to mention that this was not a public hearing, which means, the statements made by the witness Wewerik during those sessions, may not be published.

Thanking you once more for your cooperation which was indeed highly appreciated, I am,

Sincerely yours,


Dr. F.W. Conrad,
Consul



December 10, 1990

Dr. Michael Schmidt,
Consul General,
Consulate General of the Federal
Republic of Germany,
3455 Mountain Street,
Montréal, Québec H3G 2A3

Dear Consul General Schmidt:

I am no stranger to your Consulate as I collaborated closely with Dr. F.W. Conrad when he was the Consul here. I am enclosing a copy of the letter he sent me thanking me for my "valuable assistance."

Now I need your assistance. I am a senior professor at the University de Montréal and I am involved in a historical research project. One of my subjects, Mrs. Anna Kazimirski, was a witness many years ago at the war criminal trial of Westerheide and his wife. She has been unable to obtain any news about the verdict. There seems to be a deliberate wall of silence about this trial.

Mr. Schmidt, isn't a criminal trial a public matter? Isn't it necessary that justice is seen being done -- that is a basic premise of all Western judicial systems.

I am enclosing a copy of the letter which Mrs. Kazimirski received from Dortmund.

I really need your help now. Please look into this matter.

Sincerely yours,

Howard Roiter, Ph.D.,
Professeur agrégé,
Département d'études anglaises.

HR/md

Generalkonsulat der Bundesrepublik Deutschland
Consulat Général de la République fédérale d'Allemagne
Consulate General of the Federal Republic of Germany

Mr. Howard Roiter, Ph.D.
Professeur agrégé
Faculté des arts et des sciences
Département d'études anglaises
C.P. 6128, succursale A
Montréal, Qué. H3C 3J7

Montréal, den December 19, 1990
3455 rue de la Montagne
Montréal, QC H3G 2A3
Tel. (514) 286-1820
Fax (514) 286-0175
Telex 05-24483 aamt1 ca

Az.: RK 5 SEN/WESTERHEIDE
(Bitte bei Antwort angeben)

Dear Professor Roiter,

At your request contained in your letter dated december 10, I have studied our file concerning the testimony given by Mrs. Kazimirski in the trial against Frenzel and noted that Mrs. Kazimirski has obtained full information concerning the verdicts rendered against Herrmann and others.

Contrary to your impression, I do not believe that there should be a "wall of silence" around any trial and I suppose that in the case of Westerheide there may have been a misunderstanding (the letter speaks of "Akteneinsicht", that is transmitting copies of the file) or that perhaps the verdict is still pending. We have therefore asked the Regional Court in Dortmund to inform us about the verdict rendered in this case.

As soon as I receive an answer, I will contact you again.

Sincerely yours,



(Dr. Michael Schmidt)
Consul General

Generalkonsulat der Bundesrepublik Deutschland
Consulat Général de la République fédérale d'Allemagne
Consulate General of the Federal Republic of Germany

Montréal, den
3455 rue de la Montagne
Montréal, QC H3G 2A3
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Telex 05-24483 aamfl ca

Prof. Howard Roiter
Dépt. d'études anglaises
Université de Montréal
C.P. 6128, Succ. A
Montréal, QC H3C 3J7

01.02.91

PK 5E/KAZIMIRSKI
AZ.
(Bitte bei Antwort angeben)

De:

Dear Professor Roiter,

The Regional Court in Dortmund informed this Consulate General about the verdict in the war criminal trial against Wilhelm Friedrich Westerheide and Johanne Eleonore Zelle in which Mrs. Kazimirski was a witness in the year 1982.

A verdict of "not guilty" was pronounced on Dec. 20, 1982.

If you wish to obtain a copy of the verdict, please address your demand to

Leiter der Zentralstelle
im Land Nordrhein-Westfalen
für die Bearbeitung von
nationalsozialistischen Massenverbrechen
bei der Staatsanwaltschaft Dortmund
Postfach 10 29 42
4600 Dortmund 1.

Copies of the file, however, cannot be transmitted under German Law (no. 185 § 4 of the Rules of Procedure for Criminal Cases). Mrs. Kazimirski was informed accordingly by the Regional Court of Dortmund on October 30, 1990.

Sincerely yours,



(Hartwig Hars)
Vice-Consul

SEQUEL
1993 – 2001

CHAPTER NINE

Bearing Witness

Since *Witness to Horror* was published in 1993, I have had time to reflect on the book and on my life. There were a number of reasons for writing the book, but the most compelling occurred in 1991 when I received a brief telephone call telling me that SS Gebitskommissar Wilhem Westerheide had been pronounced NOT GUILTY of war crimes and acquitted of all charges. I had travelled to Germany to give testimony against him.

This was the man who had been in charge of annihilating the Jewish population of my home town, Vladimir Volynski, and he had succeeded. Only a handful of Jewish people survived after the War. Eighteen thousand citizens of the town, including one thousand innocent children, had been systematically murdered, under the direct orders of SS Gebitskommissar Wilhem Westerheide. To have this man be declared innocent was a terrible blow to me, and made me feel absolutely powerless in the face of justice. I decided that the least I could do was tell my story of what had really happened.

There were other reasons for writing the book. I would write it for my mother, who was killed in the Holocaust. She had predicted that I would be the one to survive and I had promised her that I would tell our story to the world.

I would write it for my husband, who had planned to write the story and had started to do research for it before he died in 1976. I would write it for the righteous people who had helped us during the Holocaust, to pay tribute to them. I would write it for my children and grandchildren, who deserved to know the story. I would write it in the name of those who cannot speak for themselves and offer the book as a form of *kaddish* for them. I would write it on behalf of my generation of survivors, for after we are gone there will be no more first-hand witnesses to the Shoah.

And finally I discovered that I was also writing the book for myself. I realized, as I went back in time and re-lived my memories and let the tears come and overwhelm me, that it was a form of healing for my own suffering. Not that I could forget the terrible things I had lived through, but having faced the memories, I could now talk about them to my own family and to others. And that is what I have been doing since my book was published.

When the book came out, I was still teaching at Talmud Torah School in Montreal; and I started to talk about it and read from it to some of the classes I taught. Other schools became interested through word of mouth and invited me to speak to them.

Eventually, I told my story of the Holocaust many times: at elementary schools and at high schools; at colleges and universities; and at synagogues, libraries, and

various associations. The book made me a public speaker, and launched me on my mission to preserve the memory of the Holocaust. There were also numerous interviews in newspapers.

For three years, 1994 to 1996, I spoke to students at the Annual CEGEP (Junior College) Holocaust Symposium in Montreal during Shoah Week each spring. In 1995, my daughter Heidi Berger and my grandson Jason joined me on the podium at Marianopolis College and three generations spoke of their views on this subject. I spoke about my experiences as a Holocaust survivor; my daughter spoke about her experience as the child of a survivor; and my grandson spoke about his perception of the lingering anti-semitism evidenced by the present activities of neo-Nazi groups.

From the beginning, I was struck by the very real interest even elementary school children took in the subject of the Holocaust. I came to realize that many of them had never been told about the Holocaust even though their grandparents had been victims. And I had to admit that I, too, had not discussed the Holocaust with my children when they were growing up, nor with my grandchildren. When I was working on the manuscript for the book, my grandson Jason read part of it and was astounded. He asked why he had never heard about any of this, and urged me to publish it.

It seemed to be a liberating experience for the children to be able to listen to someone talk about this subject, especially someone who had been there, and to be able to ask questions and discuss it openly. And the children continue to amaze me. I receive letters from them after every lecture. For many it is the first time they have seen an acknowledged Holocaust survivor. They invariably call me “courageous” and thank me for giving them a lesson in history.

The questions they most often ask are: Do you believe in God? Will you ever forgive the Germans? Did the people of the world not learn a lesson from the Holocaust? How did it feel to be liberated after the War? And always: Why are atrocities continuing today in other countries, such as Bosnia and Croatia?

High School students are more shy about asking questions, but always after each session a number of them come up to me and say, “Ann, I didn’t want to ask you this in front of everyone, but... .” After speaking to a political science class at Concordia University in Montreal recently, one young black man came up to me and said, “I don’t know how to say this — would you just let me hold you and give you a hug?”

Often children will write or tell me that my story makes them proud to be Jewish, and that makes me feel wonderful.

One particularly moving experience occurred when I was speaking at Camp Kadimah, a children's summer camp near Halifax, Nova Scotia. Both of my sons were there and it was the first time they had heard me speak on the Holocaust. After I spoke, a teenage boy rushed up to me, hugged me, and cried. He said his grandfather was a Holocaust survivor, but he had never asked him questions about it because he did not want to cause him pain. My son Mark, who is now 52, took the boy's face in his hands, and said, "I felt the same way about my parents."

Then I discovered that the grandchildren and even many of the children of survivors knew nothing about what life was like in the old countries before the Second World War. So I told them stories of my childhood in Vladimir Volynski and about the simple but happy environment I had known until the Nazis arrived in my hometown when I was 17 years old.

And I spoke also about the aftermath of the Holocaust, for many people do not realize how difficult life was for survivors immediately after the War. The declaration that the War was over was not an end to the suffering. I spoke of the hardship my husband and I encountered when we were making our way from Poland to Munich, Germany to reach the help of the United Nations Refugee Relief Association. We were still faced with anti-semitism. When we stopped off in Krakow on our way to Berlin, we found ourselves in the middle of a pogrom organized by Polish

neo-Nazis who were determined to kill the Jews who had survived. And there were other incidents, which I mention in my book.

I spoke of how I wept with joy when in 1948 we arrived at the port of Halifax in Canada to see a huge sign that said, "Welcome to Canada." I explained that although our new life here was not easy and demanded hard work and sacrifice, we were safe and we prospered. Yet we were not entirely removed from anti-semitism, for there were hotels in Ste. Agathe, where we settled, that had signs saying "No Dogs or Jews Allowed".

After about two years of speaking about my book, I did some research on the treatment of women during the Holocaust. I learned about how the indignities and atrocities of the concentration camps were particularly hard on them. The objective of the Nazis was to kill them or sterilize them in order to end the Jewish race. I also did research on children in the Holocaust. I discovered that most audiences found it very difficult to accept the facts of the brutalities committed against women and children. Even at this point in time, it was still too painful.

Yet there now seems to be a sharing and openness that was not there for many years after the War. I think this was helped by Steven Spielberg's movie, *Schindler's List*. Suddenly, it became acceptable to talk about the Holocaust. I believe that by giving such a vivid background to the events, the movie helped to answer some of the difficult

questions, often asked by children, such as “why didn’t the Jews fight back?” I saw the movie with my children and grandchildren and we discussed it together. It is almost as if the movie helped Holocaust survivors to come out of the closet.

Steven Spielberg has undertaken to film and document the oral history of all the Holocaust survivors still living, as part of his Shoah Foundation Project. When I visited Miami in January 1995 some members of his staff came to my hotel and filmed five hours of my testimony. I have also recorded my testimony with the Montreal Holocaust Centre.

* * *

In the fall of 1996, fifty years after leaving Poland during the aftermath of the Holocaust, I had a burning desire to see my native country. I travelled to Poland with my daughter, Heidi Berger. Born in Canada, Heidi wanted to see the country where her parents were born and where an extended family of eighty-two relatives had perished in the Holocaust.

Our first stop in Poland was the city of Warsaw. It is now a prosperous metropolis, not the war-torn, bombed out city I had left.

We visited the building where my dentist husband had had an office. We also visited a Jewish cemetery where I

believe my husband's father might be buried. It could not be verified and I was disappointed. I had pinned my hopes on finding one identifiable grave where I could mourn, because so many of our relatives were buried in mass graves or incinerated. On a more optimistic note, we attended a performance given in Yiddish at the Ida Kaminski National Theatre, which I remembered from pre-War years.

But then I was brought back to the reality of my memories by a visit to the Umschlagplatz. This square was a roundup place in the ghetto where Jewish victims were herded into cattle trains to be taken to the concentration camps. The square remains intact and a plaque identifies it and the purpose it served.

We then went on to Krakow, which was not badly damaged during the War and remains a beautiful, old-fashioned city. The old Jewish quarter, Kazimierz, has been preserved and the old synagogue has been made into a museum. The city is close to Auschwitz and Birkenau.

I visited the Hotel Francuski where my husband, my oldest son and I had stayed briefly in 1946 when we were making our way out of Poland. The lobby was as I remembered it, but when the kind concierge offered to let me see the room we had occupied, I could not remember the number. What I recalled vividly was the sounds of the violence outside in the street where there was yet another pogrom against the Jews although the War was over.

My visit to the Auschwitz concentration camp made a deep and lasting impression on me. No matter how many documentaries you see on TV or how many books you read about it, it's not the same as seeing it with your own eyes. It is a place where one can commemorate the martyrdom of all peoples: Jews, Poles, Gypsies, Soviet prisoners of war, and victims of many nationalities.

What affected me especially was to see, among the piles of artifacts left behind by the victims, a blue enamelled pitcher with a red flower on it. It was chipped at the spout, just like the one we had in my home when I was a child. It brought my own childhood back to me with an emotional intensity which I could not control. I broke down in tears.

Auschwitz is perhaps the most widely-known of the camps. Thousands of visitors, including students, come here daily to see the torture cells, the gas chambers, the crematoria, the gallows for hanging in the yard, and the Wall of Death where some of the inmates were lined up to be shot. The piles of personal artifacts preserved here — shoes, hair, ashes, dentures, suitcases, combs, crutches, dishes — are also a gripping testimony to the victims. What I found particularly sad were the items that had belonged to children, their clothes and toys. I wondered how these children had gone to their death. Were they crying? Were they simply traumatized into silence? Can one possibly imagine how their parents felt?

We went on to Birkenau, an extermination camp three kilometers from Auschwitz. The barracks here were originally horse stables, the blocks were not partitioned, and there were no windows. Through the small openings near the ceiling rain and snow fell and the wind howled. The prisoners were exposed to the elements and hundreds of them died every day.

We visited Maidanek, a concentration camp located near Lublin, where we were greeted with the memorable sight of a group of 150 students from Israel, *Ramat Hasharon*, who had come to Maidanek to pay homage to the camp's victims. These high school boys and girls were standing on the steps of the mausoleum with lighted candles in their hands. They sang mournful songs, accompanied by a guitar, and recited prayers and poems. Their teachers, faces covered with tears, carried Israeli flags. I thanked God for granting me the privilege of being there to see our sad history being remembered and honored.

I spoke to a Polish man who lives nearby and who was gathering clover for his rabbits on the now-green fields of the camp. He said that he was too young to remember the atrocities committed at Maidanek, but he assured me that his parents and neighbors were aware of what was happening. He said they all remained silent; there was nothing they could do.

We visited Plaszow, where the movie *Schindler's List* was filmed. The barracks are all gone but there is a huge

monument on a hill which marks the burial place of the dead.

While visiting the monument, we saw twenty Polish schoolboys who had come on a five-mile Peace March from their school to pay tribute to the victims. When our guide told them I was a Holocaust survivor, they asked to have their picture taken with me and Heidi. Then they lined up to say prayers.

Everywhere we visited we were told that children from many backgrounds come to visit the sites of the concentration camps. They are being taught the history of the Holocaust in a meaningful way, because no account of this tragedy in a history book can compare with the experience of standing in the places where these events took place. This gives me hope for the future.

When I was asked a few months after my return to Montreal if I was glad I had gone back to visit Poland, I had to say yes and no. Yes, because it seemed necessary, almost like a pilgrimage, to complete a cycle of my life. No, because it was painful. But I see it as part of the promise I made to my mother before she died, that I would be a witness to the horror of the Holocaust. And I hope that because she was with me on this journey, my daughter Heidi will now feel that she is part of her grandmother's legacy. Heidi says that having visited Poland she now finds that for the first time in her life she has a sense of the physical place where her parents and grandparents lived.

In reality, I was happy that I had made the journey back; I felt a sense of accomplishment. I believed that this part of my life was now behind me.

* * *

The following winter I was invited to accompany a group of teenage students to Poland and Israel on the 1997 March of the Living, as one of the adult chaperones and as a Holocaust survivor. My initial reaction was that I was still too emotionally and physically drained to face such a trip so soon after my own visit to Poland, but this feeling lasted only for a very brief time. I could not refuse the honor and privilege of accompanying a group of Canadian Jewish students, some of whom had been my pupils at Talmud Torah School, on their pilgrimage to the sites of the Holocaust.

I had gone to Poland in the fall of 1996 for myself and my family; now I would go on the March of the Living in the spring of 1997 for the children. I had been so moved to see students from Israel and Poland visiting the camps when I was there; now I would have the opportunity to be with my country's students on their pilgrimage.

We left Montreal for Warsaw on April 30th, a group of 84 eleventh-grade students and 15 adults. From May 1st to May 7th we visited Warsaw, Krakow, Auschwitz, Lublin, Bialystok, Tekochyn, and Treblinka. In each city

we toured Jewish quarters, old ghettos, museums, monuments and other places of interest. At each stop we had guides who told us the history of each place. For example, on our way from Warsaw to Krakow we visited the shtetl of Chechiny. We noticed an indentation in the doorpost of each house where there had once been a mezuzah. Now the empty spaces are painted over. All the Jews of this ghetto were rounded up and taken to Treblinka for extermination.

On the Shabbat, May 3rd, we participated in the Leil Yom Hashoah Ceremony at a Cultural Centre in Krakow. I gave a speech to the group and it was a very emotional experience for me. I felt as if all my speeches and lectures so far had been preparing me for this moment.

On May 4th, we arrived at Auschwitz, where we joined other groups of student marchers from other cities in North America. In all, we were about 2,500 marchers.

After a guided tour of the Auschwitz concentration camp, we started on the March of the Living from Auschwitz to Birkenau, in the footsteps of so many of the victims of the Holocaust. All 2,500 students and their adult chaperones walked the distance of three kilometers. I walked too. I was exhausted at the end and my legs were badly swollen, but I did it. It meant a great deal to me and somehow G-d gave me the strength.

When we arrived at Birkenau at the end of the March, a very moving ceremony was held in homage to the victims who died at Auschwitz-Birkenau. As we walked into the ruins of the crematoria, we lighted the Yiskor (memorial) candles we were carrying and a reverential silence descended on the group. Several people spoke on behalf of the millions of victims and prayed in their names. Then the marchers and their *madrichim* (chaperones), many of us wrapped in the Israeli flag linked arms and sang *Zog nit keynmol az du geyst dem Letstn Veg* (Never Say that you are Walking your Last Walk) and *Ani Mammin (I Believe)*. Afterwards, it started to rain as we walked back to the bus and somehow this seemed appropriate, as if the sky were weeping with us.

This ceremony was the centerpiece of the trip and perhaps the most emotional moment of the pilgrimage. Seeing the evidence of the Holocaust in the concentration camps and the deserted ghettos and the monuments was a reality shock for almost all of the children and the adults. To read about this was one thing, but the events were far removed from them in Canada. To see this evidence first-hand was shocking. And many of them cried and questioned G-d's mercy. Then at the ceremony after the March, there was an opportunity to truly grieve for the dead.

The reactions of the students throughout the trip in Poland were heartrending. Many of them wept. Many of them felt a sense of helplessness in the face of such evil.

Some asked, if you know you are going to be killed, how can you cooperate? One student said she could not stand near the dome of ashes at Maidanek and sing *Ani Mammin* (I Believe). Some asked, how could the leaders of the free world remain silent? Some asked, how could they pray to G-d, after what was done to their people? Others felt they could still derive comfort from religion. The reality of the ashes, their physical presence, made one student remark that someone's mother was in the ashes.

The emotions ran the gamut. From the young man who refused, who could not pray, because he said, where was G-d when all this happened? To the young woman who said she came out of the experience with more respect for religion. She said she was inspired by Rabbi Mordechai Glick, because when he prayed it was with such *kavana* (devotion and feeling) that she felt he had no doubt in the existence of G-d and His goodness. But I noted that when someone asked the Rabbi how can there be a G-d, he replied that even he sometimes had to ask himself that question.

Every evening after dinner there was a de-briefing session with the *madrichim* (chaperones), when the marchers could freely express their reactions and feelings and discuss them with others. They were made to understand that everyone's reaction, no matter how different from the others', was valid and deserved to be expressed.

While all the students were Jewish, they came from diverse cultural, economic, educational and social

backgrounds. It was very rewarding for me to hear them express the view that while on the trip their different backgrounds became unimportant. What mattered was their common heritage and how the Holocaust had tried to destroy that heritage. These young people are the Jewish leaders of tomorrow. I truly believe that the experience of participating in the March of the Living will influence them as Jewish people for the rest of their lives.

On May 8th we left Poland for Israel, where we stayed until our departure for Montreal on May 13th. This was a chance for the marchers to visit and get to know Israel, their spiritual homeland. Poland was an unhappy and depressing experience for the marchers, but Israel was a positive and happy experience for them. As one of the students said, it was like passing out of darkness into sunshine. The children danced, sang and acted like exuberant teenagers all over the world, which it is their right to do. I was happy to note that for many of them among the lessons they learned was that life and freedom must be appreciated and celebrated. Life is precious.

We visited cities and the countryside, youth hostels, kibbutzim, and even an archeological dig at Beit Guvrin. I was especially pleased when we were given the opportunity to each plant a tree in the Judean hills.

We commemorated *Yom Hazikaron* (Memorial Day) in *Armon Hanatziv*, in memory of the soldiers who gave

their lives to defend the freedom of Israel. And we attended the *Yom Ha'atzmaut* (Independence Day) celebration in *Mevasseret Zion*, in honor of the independence of Israel.

We prayed at the *Kotel Amaravi* (the remains of the western wall of the old Temple in Jerusalem), and for the first time, after fifty-two years, I said *kaddish* for my mother, father and brother who were killed by the Nazis. This was a tremendously moving experience for me.

I know that my father and brother were killed by the Nazis not long after they were taken away in one of their roundups of Jewish men. I do not know what happened to their bodies. On December 15th, 1943, from my hiding place in a ghetto attic, I saw my mother and four other people mercilessly shot to death. I could do nothing, not even scream because to do so would have revealed the hiding place of about a dozen people. And I still wake up at night screaming at the sight of my *Mame's* blood gushing from her neck and dripping on the white snow. When I returned to Vladimir Volynski after the war, I learned that all the bodies of the third pogrom were piled up in *Zarzece* (on the outskirts of the town), gasoline was poured over them and the bodies burned to ashes. The farmers said that the smell of the flesh seeped through the walls of the houses for months after, to a point where they could not even eat.

There had been nowhere for me to recite the *kaddish* for my family until now, at the *Kotel Amaravi*.

I was enriched by my experience of participating in the March of the Living with these wonderful young people. They are the ones who must carry the torch now that the memory of the Holocaust is represented by fewer and fewer of the generation of survivors, and I am confident that they will do so. There were some especially poignant moments during the trip when we met people in Poland and Israel who were themselves survivors; this meant a great deal, I felt, to the children.

I had an almost unbelievable experience myself, when we visited the cemetery in Lublin, Poland. I had been told during my visit to Poland last fall that one man had managed to escape from Maidanek. He had bribed a Polish man to let him hide in one of the barrels of human waste which were taken out of the camp every day. The Polish man had taken him home and hosed him down but told him he could not hide him. Somehow this man had managed to escape discovery until the end of the War. When we arrived at the cemetery in Lublin we were admitted by a gatekeeper and I started to chat with him. He said he had been in Maidanek and I asked how he had managed to survive. He said he had escaped, but that I would not want to know how. Of course, I did want to know, and he was Josef Honig, the man who had escaped from Maidanek in a barrel of human waste. (See photograph, page 185.)

On my way back to Montreal, I reflected on how privileged I was to have been invited to participate in the March

of the Living. It was a memorable experience for both the marchers and the adults, although at times very difficult for both. The children were obviously hurting; they experienced sadness, grief, anger, depression. I tried to maintain a positive attitude, to show strength and compassion, and I often hugged them or put my arms around their shoulders. But I feel confident that while the March of the Living was emotionally draining for the students, it was ultimately a dynamic and empowering experience for them. And this gives me hope for the future of the Jewish people.

* * *

I am comforted by the interest taken by my sons Mark and Seymour and my daughter Heidi in helping me to keep the memory of the Holocaust alive. Seymour, who is a business man in Hawaii, has started a project to build a Holocaust research center in my honor on that island. As a result of his energetic promotion and the cooperation of interested people both on the Island of Hawaii and on the mainland, as well as in Canada, plans for the center have been made, and approved by the authorities of Yad Vashem.

The Hawaii Holocaust Center, on the grounds of Temple Emanu El in Honolulu, will be a *Mishkan of Memory* for the Holocaust. My village of Vladimir Volynski, in Poland, will be featured as a typical shtetl

destroyed by the Nazis. At the entrance, visitors will be greeted with the following inscription on a piece of Jerusalem stone: *Iniquity lies alluringly at the door waiting to dominate you, but you may prevail.* As they leave, the visitors will see on another stone a parting message from the prophet Mica: *Man, what is good and what does God want from you but to act with justice and loving-kindness and to go in humility before your God.*

The aim of the Center is not only to preserve the memory of the Holocaust, but also to remind people of other atrocities in modern history such as Rwanda and Croatia, and to serve as an educational tool for children and people of all ages. I feel blessed. The project is now in the fund-raising stage.

* * *

I continue to give speeches and lectures and feel more than ever committed to my mission to preserve the memory of the Holocaust. The two other activities which have given meaning to my life are teaching and music.

I taught English as a second language to immigrant children at Talmud Torah School for a number of years and found this very rewarding. It is especially gratifying when I meet former students, as I did on the March of the Living, and they tell me that they were inspired to do the March because of hearing me talk about the Holocaust.

And, invariably, when I meet former students, they all ask, how is Shlomo? Shlomo was a little bird, a finch, who became a legend in my classes. This is the legend of Shlomo:

One day I heard something moving in my closet and asked my husband Albert to see what it was. He found a little bird hiding between my dresses. We took a towel and tried to chase him out, but he just flew from one side to the other as if playing a game with us. The only way to get him out of there, I thought, would be with food. I crushed some cornflakes into a little dish and poured some water into a bowl. The little bird was watching us carefully and sure enough he flew right toward the dish. He ate some of the cornflakes and took a bath in the bowl of water instead of drinking it. We were astounded, and admired him for being so brave. Then he flew out the window. We were sorry to see him go and hoped he would return. And he did, the next day and every day after. And he came at the same time every day because he knew I was ready to feed him with bird seeds. I told my pupils the story of my finch and we decided to give him a name. Not knowing if he understood Jewish, English, Hebrew or French, the children decided to give him a Hebrew name, Shlomo (as in Solomon the Wise). Every day, the children asked me about Shlomo's visits to my house. Once I told them that he perched on my shoulder and sang to me as I stroked his head. And then one day Shlomo surprised me by arriving at my house with a partner. I could not be sure if it

was a "he" or a "she", but the children decided that it must be Shlomo's girlfriend and named her Tzipora ("lady bird" in Hebrew).

My former students, even those who are teenagers or older and married, never fail to ask about Shlomo, the little bird who was the hero of a legend in our classes.

I am proud of the fact that I went back to university after my husband died in 1976 and earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Early Childhood Education, with distinction, and later a diploma in Teaching English as a Second Language. My years of teaching were very happy ones for me. While I was going to university, I met a man called Albert Bereznik, who encouraged me and supported my studies. We were married in 1980.

As I approached retirement age, I knew I would need some project to replace teaching and keep me busy. (I did not realize how much time I would be giving to speaking about the Holocaust as a result of my book!) So I turned to music; it was one of my early passions and was always part of my life. As a result I formed a choir at the Golden Age Association, becoming its leader and musical director. The Golden Age Choir has developed into a group of 45 senior men and women, ranging in age from 65 to over 90.

The Choir has a large repertoire of songs, combining traditional European and North American music, and we

sing these songs in seven languages — English, French, Yiddish, Hebrew, Spanish, Chinese and Russian. The program for each performance is designed to suit the audience, and may include old-time favorites, songs from Broadway shows, western songs, or songs on ethnic or religious themes. It is always a variety show, including solos, duets, dancers and comedy skits.

We have performed in hospitals, nursing homes, social clubs, schools, churches, synagogues, and for various organizations. The singers are dedicated and enthusiastic, and share their happiness in performing with their audiences. Music is a universal language and it is inspirational and therapeutic, for both young and old, and for both performers and audience.

A highlight of our past year was an Interlink Concert we gave together with a children's choir from the Elizabeth Ballantyne elementary school in Montreal, when the seniors and children paired off as pen-pals. The Interlink Concerts bring together intercultural and intergenerational choirs.

The Golden Age Choir gives over thirty concerts a year, sometimes with a reduced choir of 30 if space is limited. With rehearsals and concerts, it requires a lot of time and dedication. But I enjoy it very much and I feel that it is my way of giving back to the community in Canada. We give a concert at the Veteran's Hospital in Ste Anne de

Bellevue each year to celebrate Canada Day, and I always thank the veterans from the bottom of my heart for their part in winning the war. We also perform at the Golden Age Association on July 1st. I am proud to celebrate Canada's national holiday for this country has been so good to me.

And so I give to my past and my heritage when I speak on the Holocaust and the Jewish people; and I give to my community in Canada by bringing joy to seniors and others with the music of the Golden Age Choir. I feel that every minute of my life is precious and not to be wasted. I try to live my life to the fullest each day, and I hope that I may inspire others of all ages to do the same.

* * *

I have long ago stopped thinking of myself as an individual. I consider myself, spared by G-d, fate and luck, as the representative of the thousands of Jews from Vladimir Volynski who were annihilated by Nazi butchers. After what I have seen and experienced, I could have withdrawn into bitterness. However, I felt that my vanished brothers and sisters merited something more than withdrawal — they merited remembrance and the education of future generations. That is why I am reaching out to others, in words and songs, to help build a better world. That is the best form of *kaddish* (prayer recited by mourners) for all those we lost during those terrible years when a conflagration engulfed our people.

*A few of the letters received from students
on the March of the Living 1997*

Dear Bubbie Ann,

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for everything that you have done for us. You have put life into this trip by having lots of strength, and supporting everyone by telling stories of your childhood. Your stories brought color and sometimes sadness and tears, but it made everything seem real again. I was able to picture the communities in Poland. We spoke about many things, but most importantly I would like to promise you that I will do everything I can to keep the memory of the 6 million innocent people alive. They will be remembered. The Jewish people will remain united from now until forever. Love,

(Michael Assaraf)
Bialik High School

Dear Ann,

I just wanted to thank you for making this trip an exceptional one. Your strength and courage helped me get through the hard times. I want you to know that I will never forget the stories that you told us, because I will forever be telling them to my children. Once again I thank you for helping me through this and showing me why I really came on this trip. I love you. Love always,

(Andrea Cutler)
Herzliah High School

Dear Ann,

I recently finished reading your book, *Witness to Horror*. Your book had a profound impact on me, especially after having had the honor of participating with you on the March of the Living.

While reading your book I followed you closely through the memorable moments and the all too many ordeals you endured. I felt as if I knew the city of your youth and the people who shared it with you. Your attention to detail and incorporation of feelings gave your book the special 'human touch' which made it easy to relate to.

I would like to thank you for writing *Witness to Horror* because that is precisely what it is. It is a personal testimonial of the horrors inflicted upon us, the Jewish people. It is not just a history book, listing facts and events but it is a record of the experiences and emotions during those times. It holds the stories of those who can not tell them and it is a way for us to cherish their memories. It shows how those who considered us inhuman were truly inhuman themselves. It is an attestation that despite the atrocities that were imposed upon our people, our families, Israel lives.

Ann, you represent a generation I never had a chance to know, the generation of my grandparents. I love you for your courage, determination and your strength. You survived and told "the world about the murders and atrocities committed by the nazis." You were chosen to live and truly are special.

Yours with the deepest of gratitude, respect and love,

(Miri Rosenek)
Hebrew Academy

Dear Mrs. Ann,

You are the most incredible person in the world. I admire your courage and your strength. You've been incredible on this trip. I don't know how we would have done without you. You explained everything to us, you made everything seem more realistic and you helped us to understand. Thank you.

Ann, you remind me a lot of my grandmother (she passed away more than a year ago). She was as cute and adorable as you. That's maybe why I loved you since the first preparatory session. Now that I know you, I love you even more. Ann, stay strong and keep shining and keep smiling! Love always,

(Audrey Alloul)
Ecole Maimonides

Dear Ann,

By joining us on the March of the Living, you really helped me to understand the Holocaust a lot better. Your stories will always remain with me, and I can assure you that I will do my part to pass on what you told me to others. It has truly been an honor to be with you here in Israel and in Poland.

(Stuart Frenkiel)
Bialik High School

Dear Ann,

How can I hope to describe my feelings on this trip without describing how your presence and participation made this March of the Living the most memorable trip of my life. You were a testimony to human courage and endurance. I envy your children and grandchildren, because they are graced with your presence so often. I am so glad that I met you and I applaud your efforts to educate the world about the trials of your life during the Holocaust. Love,

(Rob Rosenfeld)
St. George's School of Montreal

PHOTOGRAPHS



Leaving the crematorium at Auschwitz with student marchers.



In Lublin, speaking with Josef Honig, who escaped from Maidanek.



The March of the Living 1997 Montreal Group in Warsaw at the Rappaport Memorial.

On April 11, 1999 I gave a speech at JPPS (Jewish People's School & Peretz Schools), commemorating the Holocaust Yom Ha Shoah. The assembly was held for the grades five and six students, their parents and invited guests. The theme for the event was, "Unto every person there is a name." On the following day, an article entitled *A Survivor's Story* appeared on the front page of The Gazette (Montreal). A copy of the article follows.

THE GAZETTE, MONTREAL, WEDNESDAY, APRIL 14, 1999

The Gazette

MONTREAL

A survivor's story

Children told there are lessons still to be learned

YVONNE ZACHARIAS
Gazette Education Reporter

Fifty-six years later, Ann Kazimirski still remembers the blood on the snow.

Red on white. The crack of rifles. The whispered cry for mercy.

She saw it all through a crack in the attic wall of an abandoned house near Vladimir Volynski, Poland, where she was hiding from the Nazis.

Among a group of Jews being ordered by German soldiers to stand against a wall, she spotted her mother. "She knew that she would be shot and she begged the German as she lay down and kissed his boots. And she said, 'Help me, save me, let me live.'"

All around 77-year-old Kazimirski, the Grade 5 and 6 students sat listening yesterday morning, the horror of her story mirrored in their eyes.

Kazimirski choked out the conclusion. "All I heard was the machine gun. And they were all dead."

For a moment, all you could hear in the auditorium at the elementary school on Van Horne Ave. was the sound of crying.

To mark Holocaust Memorial Day, the children, their parents and grandparents came to hear Kazimirski's story, to light candles of hope, to remember and to reflect on another bloody event

unfolding halfway around the world.

People are still persecuted on the basis of their ethnic identity, vice-principal Adina Matas reminded students, referring to the war in the Balkans.

Driven by Serbian soldiers and police from their homes, hiding in the hills and forests of their shattered part of the world, as many as 700,000 ethnic Albanians could be on the verge of starvation inside Kosovo. It's a story familiar to Jews.

It shows, Matas said, that despite the Holocaust, there are still lessons to be learned. "Prejudice is the result of one thing - ignorance," she told them.

And it's a lesson that children attending one of the private Jewish People's Schools and Peretz Schools aren't likely to forget.

Hollywood has popularized the story of how 6 million Jews died in World War II. There has been Schindler's List and more recently, that touching fable told through the eyes of a father in the Italian film *Life is Beautiful*. But somehow, the simple story of one woman's survival brought it all home for the children at a school in Montreal.

First, Kazimirski's father and her brother perished, on Sept. 1, 1942.

"All I heard was the machine gun. And they (the group of Jews) were all dead."

'The world has to know'

HOLOCAUST

Continued from Page A1

After they were rounded up, her mother tried to follow them. "A German hit her with the butt of the rifle. She started to bleed." To stop it, she tore off a bit of her skirt. "She wanted to see where her son and husband were being taken. That was the end of them. We never saw them again."

During a second pogrom, Kazimirski, a young bride of 18, her husband and her mother were allowed to hide in the attic of a German dentist. "He sent up three loaves of bread, three blankets, a pail for water and a pail for human waste."

And through the attic window, Kazimirski saw a scene she will never forget.

"I saw big trucks scattered all over the place. I could hear the loud shouts. There were men wearing prayer shawls." As they were being herded by Nazi soldiers into the back of trucks, "some raised their arms to the sky as if appealing to the heavens."

Perhaps the hardest part for the young audience at the private Jewish school was the description of what happened to the children.

Children clubbed. Children screaming. Children pushed into the trucks. Children clutched by their mothers.

In response, the Nazis only shouted "faster, faster." Jews trampled Jews. Some were shot on the spot.

Then through that attic window, Kazimirski noticed a gradual weariness set in. "After some time, the Jews became more passive and the trucks kept loading all day long."

After three days in the attic, they were told by the German dentist they had to leave. It was a touching moment. "He didn't look at our faces,"



TEDO CHURCH, GAZETTE
Ann Kazimirski tells children about horror.

Kazimirski recalled in an interview. She still wonders why she resisted the urge to give the dentist a hug. There is still that tug, that regret. Instead, she tried to thrust her wedding ring at him, not as payment but as a gesture of thanks. He refused it.

They spent two months hiding on the upper floor of the home of a Polish woman who kept their presence hidden from her anti-Semitic husband. But her four children knew they were there and took them food. One Sunday, when the husband stayed home from church because he had a cold, he heard them moving around. Once again, they were on the run.

On Dec. 13, 1943, the inevitable happened. They found themselves inside the Jewish ghetto, surrounded with barbed wire. Desperate to get out, they tried to climb the fence, but couldn't make it. They fell back down into a sea of dead people. Kazimirski still remembers the feel of their "warm guts" under her.

Her husband was crying "my feet, my feet."

Kazimirski at first thought he had been shot but noticed he had no shoes and his feet were freezing.

Searching for some sort of footwear, the couple found an abandoned house inside the ghetto. Once inside, speaking to each other in hushed voices, they searched on the floor in the dark for a pair of boots — anything for his feet.

Her mother's best friend, who was hiding upstairs, recognized her voice.

"'Hannah, Hannah,' she called out to me, using my Jewish name. 'Come up here.' It was like voice from heaven."

Using a stepladder which they later pulled up behind them, she and her husband climbed to the top floor where they found a group of Jews huddled. They were starving, breaking off icicles to try to fend off their hunger. It was from here that she witnessed her mother's death Dec. 16, 1943.

Such was Kazimirski's story, told to a group of children sitting on folding chairs in a school in Côte des Neiges.

It took Kazimirski years before she could tell it, years before she could tell her own children why they have no grandparents.

Some parents at the school wondered whether it was too terrible for children's ears, but they and Kazimirski believe it must be told. Children must know the truth.

For many who perished more than 50 years ago, Matas explained, there is no one left to light a candle or tell their story.

The children at the school did that yesterday. Their faces seeming far too cherubic for the subject matter, they recited poems in many languages — Hebrew, Yiddish, French and English — telling the stories of uncles, grandparents, of people like Kazimirski.

As Kazimirski told them, "the world has to know."

APPENDIX

I do not like blanket condemnations of people; there were in fact some German people who were decent human beings.

During the war, my husband Henry's mother, sister, and her twelve-year-old son were living — if it could be called that — in the Warsaw ghetto. Henry had discussed his nephew, Yasio, with me; he wanted to try to save him by placing him as a shepherd at a remote farm. The boy had a "good" face, that is, he was fair and did not look Jewish. The problem was how to arrange for him to travel from Warsaw to come to us.

Henry had done some fine dental work on a German soldier we knew as Bernhard. He asked Henry if he could do him a favor in return. Henry knew that Bernhard was transporting cattle from the Ukraine to the German forces in and around Warsaw, and that he carried other loads to and from that city. He asked Bernhard if he would bring the boy Yasio to us and Bernhard agreed to do it. He said, "Give me a letter to your sister. I can go into the ghetto anytime I want." So Henry wrote a letter in Polish to his sister, sealed it and gave it to Bernhard.

But when Bernhard went to the ghetto and gave Henry's letter to his sister, her reaction was immediate: "No way!

My son stays with me. Whatever happens to us will happen to him!" She sent Henry a letter in reply, enclosing a photograph which was signed and dated on the back as proof that Bernhard had visited them. This good German intended to bring the boy to us, probably at great risk to his own life. Even at a time when one was surrounded by evil, there were moments when some people still acted with decency.

Henry's mother, his sister and Yasio all perished in the death camp of Treblinka.

Children were rarely seen in the ghetto because they were a primary target of the Germans. Moishele was one of the few surviving children. He was about ten years old. His appearance was comic and tragic at the same time. He was dirty. He wore shoes that were much too large for him and held on with ropes. He had a cap with a big visor and an oversized jacket. The belt holding up his pants had a metal canister attached to it, in which he used to store food if he was lucky enough to scrounge some. There was of course very little food in the ghetto because the rationing was so severe.

Moishele was a phenomenon: a live Jewish child! People wanted to save him but they did not know how since they themselves were barely hanging on. I had told my husband Henry that if he saw Moishele to bring him to us for a meal, and one day he brought Moishele home with him. "Home" was one room, a kitchen that the Jewish council had assigned to us. I had managed to

scrape up some pathetic vegetables and cooked a bean soup that day.

Moishele sat down, but before he touched the soup, he took a spoon and ladled spoonful after spoonful of it into his canister. There was not much left in his bowl, so I added more soup to it until it was almost full again. As I did this his eyes lit up. He did not take off his cap, just lifted the visor and started to eat. Later, I asked him in Yiddish about his parents. He explained that they had been killed by the Germans. He said his father had been a candy maker and that he, Moishele, was his chief candy taster. He said with pride that his father trusted his sense of taste. I asked him: "Where do you sleep, Moishele?" His answer was brief: "Here and there." He was so filthy. I had water, but I did not wash his face and to this day this bothers me. I should have washed his face. My greatest regret is that I did not have a candy to give him — just one candy.

After he had finished, Moishele got up, thanked me effusively and left, glancing to the right and left before he went into the street. I looked out and saw him melt away into the shadows, a small defenceless Jewish boy who had become the prey of vicious German masters.

Since the publication of the first edition of my book, I have been invited to speak about my experiences as a Holocaust Survivor at many high schools, colleges, universities and veteran associations in Canada and the United States.

At the invitation of the United States Army, I spoke to over 1000 soldiers at Schofield Barracks in Honolulu, as well as to students of the University of Hawaii and to 600 students at Punahou and La Pietra Schools.



At the request of an American psychologist, I spoke to a class of psychotherapists in training at Antioch University in Keene, New Hampshire. I focused on the many ways that I have learned to overcome traumatic experiences and my philosophy that life should be lived to the fullest with hope, perseverance, love, and humanity.

Following this presentation I appeared before the entire student body of Rice Memorial High School in Burlington, Vermont, to share my story about the Nazi invasion of Poland with over 700 students and faculty members.

I feel privileged to be able to enlighten and educate audiences about the horrifying chapter of history which should never be forgotten. **The world has to know.**

METROPOLIS

«Toi, tu survivras!»

Rescapée de la Shoah, Ann Kazimirski avait juré à sa mère qu'elle témoignerait un jour de l'horreur. Investie de cette mission, cette conférencière fort appréciée change la vie des centaines d'élèves du secondaire qu'elle rencontre annuellement entre les concerts de la chorale qu'elle dirige.

CLAUDE ANDRÉ
COLLABORATION SPÉCIALE

« Elle apporte sa magie, son courage et donne de l'espoir à nos jeunes décrocheurs qui sont souvent aux prises avec divers problèmes, explique Judy Leonard de l'école alternative de Saint-Lambert. Je crois qu'à travers son témoignage et ses rencontres intimes qui suivent les conférences, plusieurs d'entre eux ont trouvé la force de changer de vie. »

C'est que l'octogénaire pétillante qui se dresse droit devant le journaliste a transformé une tragédie historique en leçon de courage. Et cela, on en conviendra, est plus éloquent que n'importe quelle leçon de morale.

Comment y parvenir? « Il faut se bâtir, dans notre tête, dans notre cœur, un système d'autodéfense afin de combattre le chagrin et la douleur. Malheureusement, nous n'y arrivons pas tous. Il y a des gens qui font des dépressions ou des tentatives de suicides. Moi, je me suis dit : ma vie recommence. Depuis, chaque nouvelle journée est un cadeau de Dieu », explique Ann Kazimirski, qui maîtrise sept langues.

Survivante de la vérité

Imaginez le film *Le Pianiste*, de Polanski et vous obtiendrez, en substance, le parcours qu'a connu l'auteure de *Witness to Horror*, éditions Devonshire Press. Son père, son frère de 18 ans, son grand-père et sa mère ont été tous à tour exécutés par les Allemands.

Elle a 17 ans quand la guerre commence. De 1939 à 1941, les troupes hitlériennes s'activent en Pologne. Avec sa mère et son mari, Henry, dentiste, ils décident de se réfugier chez une amie, se souvient-elle avec émotion.

Puis, le 13 juin 1943... Solution finale. Les cris de la mort et l'odeur des cadavres se répandent comme une traînée de poudre. Les trains vers les camps deviennent de plus en plus réguliers.

Entre l'abdication et la foi, M^{me} Kazimirski a choisi la seconde. « Je n'ai jamais pensé un seul instant que j'allais mourir. Pendant la guerre, je n'ai jamais perdu l'espoir. Pourquoi? Parce que ma mère m'a toujours dit : ils vont tous nous tuer, mais toi, Anna, tu survivras. Tu dois raconter au monde entier ce qu'ils nous ont fait, voilà ton destin! En regard du pessimisme de mon mari, qui conservait sur lui une capsule de cyanure, elle disait : laisse-le parler, tu vivras, je te le promets », raconte-t-elle.



Ann Kazimirski, rescapée de la Shoah, auteur *Witness to Horror*, pose devant une photo de ses parents.

Fuir le ghetto

De fil en aiguille, de refuge en refuge, le couple parvient à survivre tant bien que mal en dépit du froid hivernal, de l'absence de nourriture, des poux et de la maladie. Un jour, tous deux réussissent à s'enfuir en empruntant les égouts.

En sortant, discrètement, ils aperçoivent au loin des Allemands. Un ange passe, ils se mettent à chanter des cantiques de Noël et trompent ainsi la vigilance des soldats au poste frontière.

Finalement, les Russes viennent délivrer la Pologne. Puisqu'il ne reste pratiquement plus de survivants juifs, le couple passe pour des espions aux yeux des Russes. Cependant, grâce à un dirigeant de cette armée qui parlait le yiddish, ils ont pu rétablir les faits. « Apportez de la soupe, vite, ils sont juifs ! »

Puis, ils embarquent sur un paquebot, direction Halifax, Canada. « J'ai embrassé la terre en arrivant à bas »,

Ils se retrouvent plus tard à Montréal, mais l'époux, dentiste, ne peut exercer sa profession en raison de l'absence de reconnaissance de ses compétences de la part des autorités locales.

Notre vaillante rescapée de l'horreur lave donc des planchers pour des émoluments dérisoires.

Jusqu'à ce qu'un jour, grâce à la bienveillante intervention d'un médecin au patronyme de Groulx, qui avait transmis des lettres de recommandations à l'hôpital Sainte-Justine et au Jewish General, le mari obtient un poste. « Depuis ce temps, j'embrasse quotidiennement ces lettres... Il avait mis une chemise blanche et une cravate pour la première

journée de travail et il a pleuré, se souvient la dame. Dans la vie il ne faut jamais désespérer mais s'accrocher à ses rêves.

« C'est ce que j'enseigne aux enfants que je rencontre. Ensuite, je les exhorte : *Quand vous partirez d'ici, allez voir votre maman. Dites-lui que vous l'aimez et remerciez-la de vous avoir donné le plus beau des cadeaux : la vie !* », murmure celle qui est retournée à l'université, à 53 ans, afin d'obtenir un diplôme d'enseignement de l'anglais.

Aujourd'hui à la retraite, M^{me} Kazimirski dirige néanmoins une quarantaine de concerts par année du Cummings Jewish Centre Chöre. « La musique est un médicament. Elle permet de soulager toutes les douleurs que nous portons. Elle est en quelque sorte l'âme de la vie. Souvent, je chante des berceuses en yiddish et en polonais que ma mère me chantait, histoire de tromper la mort. Ces mêmes chansons, je les ai chantées à mes enfants et à mes petits-enfants. »

Et si, par pudeur, elle a mis longtemps avant de parler de la guerre à sa progéniture, c'est pour laisser sa mémoire en héritage à ses petits-enfants qu'elle a enfin décidé d'écrire son premier manuscrit.

Et sans doute aussi pour qu'ils sachent que le responsable des atrocités commises dans sa ville natale de Vladimir Volynski a été reconnu non coupable devant les tribunaux. Après tout, il ne suivait que les ordres...

M^{me} Kazimirski dirige un concert du Cummings Jewish Centre Chöre à 19h30 ce soir au centre commercial Côte-Saint-Luc.

TRIBUTE

After a courageous struggle and surrounded by her children and grandchildren, Ann Kazimirski passed away on August 20, 2006. My grandmother, Gammy, as we called her, was an exceptional and inspirational woman whose energy and enthusiasm for life touched all who knew her. As of the writing of this Tribute, Ann is survived by three children, seven grandchildren and six great-grandchildren. Not a day goes by that we do not think and reminisce about our Gammy. There are not enough adjectives to describe how amazing a person my Gammy was. You could put her in any time and in any place and she would succeed by sheer determination of will and love for her family and friends.

When our family, friends, acquaintances or anybody that remembers Gammy get together, the conversation always revolves around how she affected our own personal lives. In each case, there was a profound and touching moment we all remember that make us smile at the memory. One particular instance, was at Gammy's memorial Shiva where a man of 25 years old came in and sat down. None of us knew him and we asked him how he knew my grandmother. He said "she changed my life". He explained he was a very shy boy and at 12 years old, his mother asked Gammy to give him piano lessons. Over the course of the next year, Gammy

taught him and gave him the sense of pride and accomplishment that he never had before. He was finally able to stand tall and repeat Gammy's mantra: "TO THE KING - YOU CAN DO ANYTHING."

Gammy was also fond of saying: "I won the war and beat Hitler. I am here with my children and grandchildren and the Nazis are no more." Gammy's family carries-on her memory and legacy to this day, speaking at various schools, institutions and symposiums in Montreal and Hawaii. Her memory is also memorialized with a plaque at the Cummings Jewish Centre for Seniors in Montreal, Quebec where her Golden Age Choir continues to perform a delight audiences of all ages. Every summer year since Gammy's passing, the Choir holds a memorial concert dedicated to Ann Kazimirski.

Out of all of the happy episodes of Gammy's life growing up in Volodymyr-Volynskyy (as the town is now spelled), I think her favorite one was her trips to her Zaide Aaron's apple orchards on Friday evenings, sitting in his lap and listening to his stories and parables. Gammy carried those childhood feelings of love, selflessness and devotion with her through the horrors of the Holocaust and successfully transmitted them to all of her children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, students, colleagues, and friends. Her love and presence is still felt by all of us today. I find it incredible that such a warm and loving person was able to overcome such tragedies and struggles in her life, not only in Europe but when she

arrived in Canada as well. It is simply another testament to how great a person my Gammy was and how missed she is.

Jason H. Berger
New York, New York
May 5, 2010

Before Gammy passed away, she gave my mother Heidi a stack of blue cards to be handed out at her funeral. Each card read:

A Message from Ann Kazimirski

I stood the test of life and I tried to keep those who died alive in my mind and heart. Every day I prayed for strength, hope and love.

Every day is a gift, a new beginning. I never gave up and we must not look back. We must move on and on because life is beautiful.

I celebrate life !





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