

## MAJA HRABOWSKA

Up to the war my parents were living in Warsaw, where my father, a very educated man with PHD in sociology and physics, was working as an Wolna Wszechnica professor as well as assistant professor in sociology at the Warsaw University, a co-worker of a famous professor Czarnowski, and a colleague of other, later famous scientists, Nina Assorodobraj and Stanislaw Ossowski. We have a nice modern apartment on Ludwiki 1 apt. 60, in Wola part of Warsaw, and I have a good friends in that area. One of these friends, Lena Lifszyc (now Strzelecka) is now living in Paris, and I am still in touch with her. We often played in Jordanowski Garden which was also located on Ludwiki Street, across my house, or on the empty yard at back of our house. However, the university salary for assistant professor was meager, and beside, my mother wanted to be independent. She was always interested in social work, and wanted to help the poorest, especially children. She decided to go back to school, to get a degree in social studies in the Lwow College of Social Studies, a 2-year, post-graduated school, with a good reputation. During this time I was to stay with my grandma in Wloclawek. I took the news with pleasure; I always liked Wloclawek household, and in grandma's house was also living my young aunt Ania, whom I adored. Ania had an unhappy marriage with Szlajfsztajn, divorced him, and with her little daughter Lenka she was staying in her mother's house, and she took care of me. I was very happy. I liked my school, where I had many new and old friends. It was a modern, private, Jewish school, where good education was provided. I adored little Lenka, who was as a sister to me. I often drove in a horse car with my grandma to the factory, where my uncle Benek's family was living in modest private house with garden. He has three daughter, Niunia, Judyta and Stela. His second daughter, Judyta, a year older than me, was my best friend, and we spent plenty of time together, playing, reading, talking, and confiding in each other.

In the summer, Ania, Lenka, and I often went to the forest on the other side of the Vistula River, to the place named Szpetal. To get there, you had to walk across the very long bridge, but it was fun, too. Once in Szpetal, we were playing in the forest, or going to the neighboring swimming pool, where I got my first swimming lessons, and in a short time became a seasoned swimmer. Wloclawek was smaller and friendlier for child than Warsaw; I could go outside alone, or meet friends at walking distance. Dr. Forbert, our family doctor, rode the horse car with a white horse, and we cheered him from the sidewalk. Dr. Forbert perished during the war, but his daughter, Jasia, a doctor herself, is now living in New York, and I am in touch with her. She survived in hiding, after ghetto was destroyed. On the next street to Grandma lived Rasia Grobman, my mother's old, good friend, with her scholar husband, and 2 sons. The older one, Rafal, was my good friend, and a schoolmate. I met them later in the Warsaw ghetto; they perished in Treblinka. Very tall professor Stamm, a good educator, and his very short wife, were also my mother's school friends, and they became my good friends, as well. At that time I discovered the pleasure of reading, and became a true addict; most of the world's literature I read during my stay in Wloclawek. The town had a big, public library and I was visiting it almost every day. In school, other students accepted me, I was doing well. I liked my teachers, and I had many friends. My best friends were Ruth Tchorz, who escaped Poland with her parents at the last moment, survived, and lives presently in Australia, and Hanka Gutman, who died in ghetto.

My Grandma's household was liberal. On Fridays we had traditional, Sabbath food, and Grandfather would say a prayer in Hebrew. My Grandparents belonged to Shul, and celebrated all major Jewish holidays. On Thursdays every beggar, who came to the door, received money. Grandma was a member of the board of Jewish orphanage, and other philanthropic organizations and causes. Nevertheless, she tolerated different life styles, and approaches of her children, and never tried to impose her opinion. She always helped her children, and was a person you could count on.

In 1938 the persecution of Jews in Germany became acute, and Hitler's government threw out Jews over the border to Poland. They were staying in Zbaszyn, with no place to go. Poles did not want them in their country, either. Polish Jews took these unfortunate people to their houses, even when their own situation was bad, with anti-Semitism on the rise. My Grandma took one older man to her house, and he was staying there up to the war. I don't know, what happened to him later.

In the summer of 1939 my mother graduated from her school, and came to take me to Warsaw with her. I was looking forward to the new school year, and to renew my friendship with my close neighbor, Basia Lejman. The Lejmans later, signed so called Volkslist, and became supporters of the German occupants. But at this happy time I didn't expect anything terrible to happen.

As early as in November 1939, a decree was issued, requesting that every Jew, even children over some age, was obliged to wear a white band with a blue Star of David on a right arm. In October 1940, the Jewish quarter, located in a poor, traditionally Jewish part of Warsaw, was officially declared. All Jews, who were living elsewhere, were obliged to move to this quarter within 14 days, on top of these 200,000 Jews who already lived there. Poles living in this area received, by the same decree, order to move out, and they were given former Jewish domiciles, scattered in other parts of the city. Many Poles benefited from this situation, becoming tenants of previously Jewish-owned apartments, and taking over the profitable enterprises. Some of them were honest people, who simply took advantage of the state of affairs, in which they found themselves.

The big relocation began, and streets were full of scared people, loaded with children, sick, and disabled, pushing handcars, prams, or anything on wheels, and moving into the designated area, most of their possession abandoned, or lost on the way. To find any room inside the ghetto was hard and cost money; these with no money just wandered around for weeks, before they settled in some hole, or in a cellar of a demolished house. Most of the area was in a bad shape, several houses were in ruins, after the September bombarding, and were never repaired, because of lack of money; windows were nailed down, for security reason, also. Dzielna St., which was part of the ghetto, faced the famous Pawiak prison, where political prisoners were tortured, and killed, and it was strictly forbidden ever to look on this side of the street. Often terrible moaning, and screams, and shooting were heard. Chlodna St. divided ghetto into 2 parts, the southern part on Leszno St. was named Little Ghetto. The circumference was patrolled by German and Polish Navy (from the color of their uniforms) Police. Trams from Aryan side of the city went through the narrow corridor, but didn't stop there. Some people risked a jump (after the driver was bribed to slow in a particular place), to go to the Aryan side, and to bring bread for their families. Rickshaws pulled by poor, but still strong enough people were the means of transportation within the ghetto, but only the rich were using this humiliating transport.

Some Jews still had money, doing black-market transactions, or collaborating with Germans. One, who still had money, jewelry, or furs, could buy food in excess of pitiful, official ratio for exorbitant price; the rest of the population was just dying from hunger. Inhuman scenes could be seen, such as little children sent out of the ghetto to beg on Aryan streets, and smuggling a loaf of bread to feed the family. They often were gunned down by the guard on their way back. On the ghetto streets children were begging for even a small piece of bread. On top of this inhuman condition, many people were dying from diseases spread in overcrowding, unsanitary environment. More and more people were compelled into the ghetto, from distant communities. People dead and dying were lying on the streets, and bodies were wheeled out of the ghetto on handcars.

In mid-November, 1939 the ghetto was sealed, and all access roads were barricaded. Barbed wire, replaced later by high fences, and, in 1941, by brick wall 3 m. high, surrounded the whole area, trapping people inside. The area was proclaimed dangerous for reason of infectious diseases, and Jews were declared "varmints", or useless animals needed to be destroyed. Germans did occasional raids in ghetto, chasing people along the streets, laughing at, and shooting them.

My first impression of the ghetto was unfavorable. First, it was terrible crowded. Inside the tall walls lived some 500,000 people, many of them deported from other cities, which became "Jude free". Maybe Germans already conceived their plan of extermination of all Jews, and it was more convenient for them to have all their victims in one place. The life in ghetto was far from normal. There were thousands of beggars, or people just dying from hunger. There was a terrible view of children lying on the street, too weak even to beg. Some were thin as a twig, some were abnormally swollen. I remember one man with a little girl, who was living on the street, and sometimes was offered something to eat (as hot water from boiling spaghetti) by my grandma. He was a teacher from one of the small towns, was relegated from his hometown with only his clothes on, and deported to Warsaw ghetto. His wife died during the transport, and he was left with a small child, and no means of support. I remember, that after a year, or so he became swollen, and sick looking, but was still very protective toward his child. He was taken as one of the first in the July "action". Our situation was bad, too. At that time, we were living together in one room, with many other, strange people. Ghetto was crowded; it had an average 10 people living in one room. We were staying at 26 Zamenhoffa St., in a very old house, with outhouse, and water from the well in the courtyard. Jews from Wloclawek were deported suddenly, and it was pure luck, that grandma was able to

take with her some money, and valuables. Grandparents, Ania with Lenka, and mother with me, we all had 3 beds, and almost no living space, no furniture. Grandma tried to start some business (she considered lumber), but she lost money, and we were forced to live from her meager savings. Food was scarce, and I remember, that we stayed long in bed, so we can eat only once a day. I was hungry all the time, and I remember dreaming of food. Once we managed to get an egg, and only Lenka and I ate it; later my mother ground the shell, so we can eat it, too, because it contained valuable calcium. Once a week we had Czulent, Jewish specialty, prepared with horse scraps and barley, and baked in a baker's Owen. During a hot summer Mother organized for me to attend an agriculture course, which allowed me to spend some time in the fresh air. This course was interesting and I found some good friends there. I found out, that there were several courses organized for children in the ghetto to teach them about trading, which was forbidden in regular schools.

The beginning of the war against USSR was a starting point in the mass extermination of Jews. Despite rigorous isolation, and forced removal of all means (forms) of communication, people somehow knew about mass executions of Eastern Jewry. At the end of 1941, people started to talk of the introduction of gas chambers, as a method to speed executions. We could not believe this talk. Nazi previously used this method of execution on mentally sick. Around this time, there was a sharp (rapid) increase of terrorist attacks against Jews, carried inside the ghetto. Wild shooting on the streets from passing Germans' vehicles became more often, and actions, such as taking hostages from Jewish community, started. Getting out was dangerous. Ghetto was living from one day to the next, praying for the end of the war, and the end of its misery.

At the end of 1941, and in 1942 people in the ghetto were dying from hunger, cold, and contagious diseases in an alarmingly high number. Unsanitary conditions created typhus, dysentery, and tuberculosis epidemics. But what was becoming the greatest menace for the population was deportation, or, so called, resettlement. Only few people then realized that the "final solution to the Jewish problem" entered the new phase, one of the direct homicides. Many believed that relocation meant new hardship, and a hard work, but never - extermination. Jewish Council issued a statement, that 60,000 workers were needed for an important construction work in the East. But suspicion about the fate of deportees started, when brutally performed "action" removed sick from hospitals, children, and other groups, obviously not fitted to do any manual/physical work. In the first days of "Action" several children and physically handicapped were taken to the ghetto cemetery and shot on the edge of mass graves. But "Action" in its full force started.

We still didn't have any news from my father. Somehow we got information about situation on the war front. Ghetto was sealed, and radios were strictly forbidden under the death penalty, but in spite of this the news was spreading out. We waited for the end of our siege, and it was the most important for us, but German army was still strong (they were pressing forward and approaching Moscow). Jewish Council, Judenrat, officially administrated ghetto but this people were powerless, (they were marionettes in German hands). Starvation, lack of space, inhuman sanitary conditions, and following those infectious diseases were insoluble problems.

People were trapped behind barbed wires, later replaced by 7 feet high brick wall. Typhus was a common occurrence, and the rate of death was rising. All around there were seen people-skeletons, people inflated from hunger, people covered with sores, all from starvation. They were apathetic, exhausted, and motionless, with burning eyes and one wish: to get a piece of bread. The long periods without food had a terrible effect on the soul and the body. The official food ratio was pitiful (1 kg of bread, full of sawdust, for a week, and 0.25 kg of sugar for a month), but even this was not for people with no address. Many were living entirely on watery soup distributed daily by Jewish charity.

And still more, and more people from other cities, which were declared "Jude free", were herded into the ghetto. Streets were filled with beggars in rags, wandering, orphaned children, begging for any food, drinking from gutter, dying people and dead bodies. Nobody helped, or responded to the living skeletons' piteous pleas. In this situation sharing a morsel (a piece) of bread with another was a supreme sacrifice. Corpses of dead were lying naked (because even rags had value for the poor) on the street for several days, before they were buried, because there were not enough workers to transport them to the cemetery. It was difficult even to think, that beyond the ghetto's walls ordinary people led their ordinary life. To keep an order in the ghetto was the responsibility of the Jewish police, wearing rubber trench coats. Later, this

police collaborated with German's death commandos, under an illusion that they would be spared. They were the last to go to Treblinka.

Not everybody was poor in the ghetto. Despite rigorous watching, ghetto's residents somehow managed to have outside contacts. Some tiny minority used their contacts to live in relative luxury, and obtained the goods from outside for ridiculous prices. They also (often) collaborated with Gestapo, and helped them to make millions in shady deals, handling forged documents, or special privileges. It was especially visible and appalling in situation, where 50% of population was dying from hunger, and the rest was just hungry all the time. But still the worst was ahead.

The past is always with me. It has long, cold fingers, and catches me unprepared, at night mostly, when I wake up in sweat. I'm part of the generation that survived the Holocaust – the total war on Jews, and particularly on Jewish children. We were hated, the first to suffer, the first to perish. I blamed myself. What did I do to deserve it?

At that time we didn't understand extent of horror of this the most hideous crime in history. We were looking at this as an isolated drama, which for some unknown reason befell us. For years we tried to retain sanity by silencing the scream, by hiding our memories deep in subconsciousness, and for some time it worked. We knew something that others didn't, and this secret was with us only; we carried this burden alone. The war was over, but we were different from other young people, quieter, more careful whom we talk to, feeling still unsafe.

Many years passed, and now unexpectedly I found that there are others with similar past, and hidden memories. It was a shock; it was as if I found the family I missed so much. It doesn't matter that not everybody is pretty and speaking nicely – the family can have its differences.

Thanks to this group I finally found the courage to speak of my past, which was a shock by itself, because up to now I was enveloped in silence. I decided that it would be selfish not to speak; that my family, which disappeared by Hitler's bloody hands, deserves some legacy, and I am the only one left to remember. I can't afford to stay silent, the time is pressing.

One of my most terrible wartime experiences was our short stay in the Umschlagplatz – the assembly point in the Warsaw ghetto for people waiting to be sent to the Treblinka 2 death camp. Under the German occupation there were two types of camps: concentration camps, as Auschwitz, where not everybody died, and by miracle one could survive the hardship, and the other type – death camps, where nobody was meant to survive. Gas chambers were the only facilities there. People from the Warsaw ghetto were destined to this type of camp.

Summer '42 was hot. Situation in ghetto was getting worse, money was running out, food was scarce; there was nothing to sell, and no one to trade with. We were hungry all the time, and we were looking with hope/foreward to the Eastern front, where Germans were starting to loose. They were not able to take over Moscow, they were retreating on many fronts, and Stalingrad was a death sentence for the Paulus army. Living in ghetto was harder, and harder. I remember saying to my mom on the street: "Be careful, there is a dead body here, don't stumble on it." There were hundreds of corpses lying on the streets, covered with papers, or naked; once in a while they were loaded onto handcarts.

Streets stunk. People were dying from hunger, as well as from typhus. Lice were increasing in number, beyond measure, and after each return home we were checking very carefully our clothes, and also beddings. All of us, even Lenka, wore white armbands with the blue Star of David; leaving the house without one was punishable by death. We were surrounded by the wall, and felt isolated and threatened, but no one could have guessed what fate was being prepared for us.

This world - "Action" - will haunt me forever. At first, volunteers for the resettlement were called on, and the order was issued for Jewish Council to bring 7,000 people a day to Assembly Point - Umshlagplatz. Volunteers were promised a ratio of bread, and they could bring along their belonging up to 25 kg. When it became obvious that no one was willing to volunteer, SS, and Lithuanian, Ustash, Ukrainian and Jewish Police carried on the hunt to get/fulfill the daily "quota". At first, they combed the streets, taking homeless, and some passers-by, at random. Then, house searches started. They were conducted/carried out in this

pattern/this way: building after building was surrounded by troops, and with accompaniment of shooting and shouting all the residents were assembled in the courtyard, and hurried to join other groups selected for "resettlement", and marched to the assembly place on Stawki St., Umschlagplatz, where transports were formed. In the meantime the Lituianian troupes, helped by the Jewish police, were searching apartments, and bringing down those who tried to hide themselves. Barricaded doors were hacked down, families torn apart, gruesome noises could be heard. Apartments were ransacked in search of hiding places, down from torn pillows was flying around, shattered glass, broken furniture, torn mattresses were lying among bleeding bodies, streets were covered with blood. Some people tried to present work permit, or foreign passport, but it was no use.

At the beginning, if a work card stated that its owner worked for a factory essential for a war effort, that person was protected from deportation. But later, these cards lost their value, and everybody was vulnerable. Those who tried to resist, were shot or clubbed to death on the spot. Jews hurried through the streets in a desperate hunt for shelter, and were shot or herded into groups directed to Assembly Point, their journey punctuated with beating and whipping. Gunning down/gun shots silenced screams of unfortunates; children were torn from their mothers' arms, and killed on the spot. Buildings subjected for search and "Action" rounding seemed to be randomly chosen. After SS and Ustashes moved to the next block, those who were able to hide themselves emerged to look for families and relatives. Most didn't find anybody left. We somehow succeeded to find a sort of a hole in the attic, and hid during the search, in complete silence. There were 15 people there. We heard many shots, and guards roaring and roaming around. Then everything was quiet, and after hours of waiting we left our hiding place. The area was deserted, and some buildings were burning. We moved to the other building, and it was strange, to live in the vacant apartment, its original tenants already dead, leaving behind food, clothing, everything. Almost everyone lost some family in action. Next day our new building was cordoned, and this time we hid in the attic, under old hampers/basket

s. It happened that bedbugs invaded this place, a frequent occurrence in Poland. It was the worst hour in my life; being savagely bitten by hungry bugs, and unable to move for fear that I would be heard by SS-men. Other members of my family were in the same situation, but nobody moved, even little Lenka. After this experience I begged my mom to kill me rather, than hide in such a place. Shortly after, during next action our hiding place was discovered, and we were taken together with a long procession of other captives, clinging to their possession, to Umshlagplatz. Raw terror. We entered the hell. An action of loading people into the cattle train was proceeding. Screams of people being forced on the train, cries of small children, abandoned, lost, or surrounding their already dead mothers, shots fired around, bleeding bodies on the ground, orders shouted by militiamen and SS, all that created unbelievable terror. Our group being the last for this day was forced to the end of the line. Shortly later cattle trucks' loading ended, and the train was directed out to its destination, gas chambers in Treblinka. We were directed to the building of former hospital. In one corner uniformed men were shooting at the group of children, torn away from screaming mothers, practicing their skills. Blood was flooding the ground. Mother found some abandoned rags in the corner, and we hid ourselves under them. Suddenly Ania screamed. She recognized one of the Jewish policemen, who helped Germans loading the train, as her former husband, Max Szlajfsztajn. He recognized us, too, decided to save us (Lenka was his daughter), and showed us where to hide. Later in the night he came back, to take us by the service exit out of Umshlagplatz, to the ghetto street. On our way out his superior, who started to scream at him, requesting our return to the waiting group approached us. This officer even threatened to remove Szlajfsztajn from the force. But at last he accepted a bribe from my grandmother, and we left by the back door. I never saw Szlajfsztajn again, but I know, that Jewish policemen were exterminated, too, only couple of months later. I would like to point out, that Umshlagplatz was hermetically sealed, and ours was one of very few escapes from this terrible place. I heard (maybe I saw?) of another case, when prisoners were sneaked out of Umshlagplatz in ambulance, or in a wagon transporting dead bodies.

I am confused, remembering the time after our escape. The time after our escape is all mixed up in my mind, now. We never returned to the house on Zamenhofa where we stayed before. We moved to the other building, and shortly after we moved to the other part of the ghetto. It was September 13, and the action was halted. Remaining part of the Jewish population was squeezed together into so called Little Ghetto, on Leszno Street, at the northeastern corner of the original ghetto. All survived Jews were to work in one of German's war factories, located in the ghetto. I remember the names of Shop Scultza, and Shop Tebbensa. We got job, and worker's ID cards in Shop Shultza, everybody, even Lenka, and we were busy

all day sewing buttons to uniforms. It was non-paying job, but no complain was ever made. It meant life, even temporarily. But the atmosphere was tense. By this time we already knew about the fate of deportees, and about the Treblinka extermination camp. I believe it was in August, when some escapees from the camp returned to the ghetto with tales of gas chambers. It was hard to believe, and we still clung to our hope; however after our experience on Umschlagplatz no more hope was left. Every day we heard about people committing suicide. Poison was highly prized. I heard of one of my mama's friends, who before the war had several operations to have a child, and now she killed this dream baby, and committed suicide. We knew that the chairman of Warsaw Judenrat, Adam Czerniakow, committed suicide at the beginning of the deportation campaign. Couple of Jewish policemen, who knew about the fate of their people, also committed suicide. There were some wild talks about resistance, but we knew that we were condemned, and it was only a matter of time, before the final liquidation of the rest of the ghetto. After that 10-week period of slaughtering and deportation, ghetto population shrank to only one-tenth of its pre-action size, mostly young and healthy remained. They ate excessively, drank, had unrestricted sex, they wanted to try everything before dying. Beggars, small children,

old, and sick - all disappeared. We were the lucky ones. We got a small room in one of the empty houses. After years of unbearable overcrowding, now it was plenty of space in the ghetto. Streets were deserted, windows - empty. People were acting strangely, and were clinging to their families. Somehow we heard the better news from the front, German army was retreating, but we had no hope to survive. It was colder, food was scarce, and no coal. Around this time we got news about tragic death of uncle Benek in Wloclawek, and of deportation of his family. Next day we learned of fate of my cousin Niunia and her young husband, shot in the forest in the East. Grandma was crushed and crying uncontrollably. We all were stunned by this news. Even in isolation of sealed out ghetto, suddenly, we received news from my father, who never entered ghetto, and was in hiding on the Aryan side. He somehow found that we survived, and he sent the message to us to join him outside the ghetto. It was our last chance to survive. Mother hoped that once on the other side of the wall, she'd be able to bring the rest of the family there, using her Polish connections. We were to be transported through the hole in the wall, and we started the same day. Man, who knew where the hole was, went with us, but we got spot by the guard, who tried to shoot us, and we retreated.

Next day we tried again, and almost made it, but again we were driven out. The third day we tried and this time a guard fired a gun, and my mother were lying on the ground dead, blood rushing from her. I don't remember how I got back to grandma. I never saw mother again, and I don't know where her grave is. Two days later grandma bribed a man, who was driving a truck from ghetto to deliver materials from a factory. He hid me under the seat and this way I crossed the wall. I heard voices of wall guards asking my driver about his trip, and getting satisfactory answer. I knew I was in mortal danger, but at this point I was over the fear of death. I was however afraid of torture and suffering, which often accompanied the death sentence. The Aryan part of Warsaw looked strange for me. People walking on the street, children playing, nobody run. Woman come to take me to strange apartment. It was in Zoliborz part of Warsaw. I don't recall how I found myself in the company of my father, whom I didn't see for years. His first question was "Where is mama?" When father learned about her death, he cried. I was immediately transported to the Polish family, the Hofmans, mother and daughter, living in WSM in Zoliborz.

It was one of the first working class housing cooperation, built just before the war by socialist group, to which my father was connected. Life in hiding was even more dangerous than life in ghetto. Hiding Jews was strictly forbidden and punishable with death. But it was not only the threat to be discovered by Gestapo, but also by some Poles, who made blackmail one of the country biggest private businesses. They could almost smell the Jews hidden among Poles, and if there was any money left, they got it; if not they would turn Jews to Gestapo, getting some premium for it. These varmints approached my father once, and as he had some money on him he gave them everything and they went away. He was very careful. Blackmailers and extortionists were everywhere and they got, in general, social approval and a name of "patriot" for their actions. I believe that a price paid by Gestapo for a Jew was 100 zloty. Polish society was, as a whole, anti-Semitic, and it stayed this way after hearing news of Jewish behavior during the Russian occupation of Eastern Poland after September 17, 1939. Many pro-communist oriented Jews helped Russians in pacification and russification of seized part of Poland; however Jewish participation was often overestimated. Additionally, life for Poles under German occupation was hard, and they were struggling to survive on small food rations. Random round-ups of civilians on the streets and house searching often ended with taking people to concentration camps, or to Germany as forced laborers.

Taking hostages and punishing civilians was a German's way of using collective responsibility for acts of sabotage by the Home Army, and other underground organizations. Also closing schools and other educational institutions, as well as persecution of intelligence, all of it created an atmosphere of constant threat. In these circumstances providing help for Jews was truly heroic. After Germans started "actions" in ghetto the new organization, ZEGOTA, was created to help Jews to survive in hiding. I believe it was this organization, which found me several safe places and pay Poles to keep me. I was never longer then 3 months in one place. I was not permitted to go on the street because of my Jewish look. After couple of weeks with Mrs. Hoffman I was transferred to the other apartment and was living there for several months alone, because the owners, the Skibniewski family, were staying temporarily with relatives in the country. Once a week I got/received food from an unknown woman. Being alone was hard, with nothing to do, no books, no one to talk to. I did not know how to help the family still left behind the walls of ghetto. My mother had some plans before we left, but she was no more with me, and I felt helpless.

In June 1942 round-ups of Jews started on the streets, and in the houses of the ghetto. Seized people, with or without luggage, marched in the procession along the streets in the direction of the Umschlagplatz at the Stawki Street. They were surrounded by cordons of back dressed "Ustasz" (Croatian troops collaborating with the Germans), or Latvians (also working with the Germans). At first they were given a loaf of bread, and were told that they would be sent east to work for the army.

It was during that hot summer 1942. The action in the Warsaw ghetto was proceeding/in progress. "Action" – this word will haunt me forever; it has a special meaning for these, who were there. I remember thinking with envy of G. Wells' "Invisible Man" and fantasizing of remaining invisible, and not just hidden in the cellar, a hole in the ground, under the bed, in the closet, or behind the furniture.

From the beginning of the "Action" my family worked hard to find the shelter, even while not knowing at first the final destination of cattle trains leaving daily the "Umschlagplatz" on Stawki Street. Day after day the Germans were carrying the brutal, human hunting, combing block after block for the whole month. The action was proceeding with a lot of shouting, screaming, beating the helpless, firing at them, and using all kind of abuse by the uniformed German troops. Even surviving the first wave, it left us frightened and terrorized.

For simplicity, I am using the term "Germans" because any other name doesn't sound adequate, even if I know, that there were not only Nazis there. Latvians, Ukrainians, Lithuanians, and representatives of other nations participated enthusiastically in the ghetto liquidation, and behaved even more brutally during the mass killing. There were many nations, which collaborated with Nazi, and even more of these, who refused to help, and remained unmoved in view of this tragedy. From the start of the "Action" our small, family group: mama, and I, my grandparents, and my aunt Ania Szlajfsztajn with 6 years old Lenka, moved several times, because our first temporary home at 26 Zamenhoff Street was searched couple of times, and left deserted. Those who were not successfully hidden were taken to the "Umschlagplatz" and perished.

My immediate family was then still intact. In the apartment on the Zamenhoffa Street, where we spent the previous two years, there were many more people; the ghetto was crowded, and the average was 13 persons per room. We didn't know them, and they disappeared at the beginning of the "Action". I don't remember any of them. In each house we moved into, first thing to do was to find the hiding place, an attic, or cellar, or some wall closet, which we could disguise. The ghetto – so crowded not long time ago – was almost empty; houses were abandoned, apartment doors wide open. In succeeding rooms we entered there was still food on the table, clothing and toys around, not made beds. Tenants disappeared, probably already gassed in Treblinka. We slept in crumpled beds, hugging each other. But this time our luck ran out. Shortly after we moved in, the next round up began, and our hiding place in the attic was discovered.

Together with hundreds of other people from this, and neighboring buildings, we were assembled on the street. Some people carried their possessions in valises or bundles, but most of us (like our family) lost everything during previous escapes, and were clinging together. Mothers carried children; our hope for survival was dim. The long procession was formed, and with accompanying shouts and screams of the Germans we were led to the Umschlagplatz, a couple of streets ahead. Of course we heard about this place, but curiously, didn't know what to expect.

We entered the hell. If the ghetto during the "Action" was the vestibule of hell – this place was the hell itself. When our group entered, the loading of cattle wagons was in full swing. The long lines were formed in the yard, with the Germans running around. Hundreds of people were pushed into the railcars, and these who were not fast enough were beaten, or shot. Screams of mothers who lost their children in the melee, wailing/moaning of injured or dying, shouting, and sounds of rifle firing blindly into the crowd by black uniformed guards, filled the court with inhuman noises. Jewish policemen participated in this action, under the German guidance, pushing people and creating the incessant terror.

It was already the late afternoon, and the last train was full; the Germans exceeded their daily quota for this day. We were the last in the long line waiting for our turn. But the train could not accommodate more people, even with all those pushing. At last some guard came to our group and told us to enter the nearby building (I believe that it was originally a hospital), and wait overnight for tomorrow's train. The last train left leaving on the platform dead and dying people. I heard horrifying screams. Blood was flowing so profusely, that it was pouring into the building. The corpses were brought in, to be later removed for sanitary reason. The German guards were laughing obviously excited by so fine attraction. Some of them went looking for food, some started to escort the remaining group to the building. We entered the big, empty hall, and sat in the corner. There were some rags on the floor, and Granny and my mom hid the children, Lenka and me, under the rags in the corner.

I was still there, still thinking of my family still trapped behind the ghetto's high walls, and not knowing how to help them out, when in April 1943 I woke up to the loud noises coming from the ghetto direction. It was the beginning of the final liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto, carried out on the Himmler's order. Remaining Jews were to be immediately transported to the Treblinka's gas chambers. But this time Jews were desperate and prepared. They knew they had no chance to survive, but decided to fight to the end, taking with them Nazi enemies. When Stroop's troops entered the ghetto on this Easter day of April 19, 1943 armed with pistols, artillery, and tanks, they met desperate resistance, and were forced to withdraw. The next day they entered again. The heroic resistance was continuing, and Germans had to fight for every house, using artillery, tanks, flame-throwers, explosives, and a big army of thousands of "SS" soldiers, Polish police, and Latvian and Lithuanian troops, against handful of inexperienced men, armed with homemade grenades, and some pistols of Polish, or German origins. Nazis dynamited every house, and set them on fire. Black cloud of smoke and smell of burning flesh enveloped Warsaw. It was going on for almost 4 weeks. As I read later, on May 16, 1943 Stroop sent a telegraph to General Frank in Cracow, that the resistance was finally crushed, and the Warsaw ghetto ceased to exist. Most remaining Jews were killed during the uprising, and these who were taken alive were shot on the spot, or sent to Treblinka. Later on Germans demolished completely the whole area. No house remained. However when 1.5 years later, the Russian army liberated Warsaw, I heard that still handful of Jews were found hidden in the underground basements.

I was frantic. Sitting in hiding, with no connections, and no experience, I felt helpless. Looking from the window I saw the black smoke rising, and heard the laughing of Polish girls, who went on the roof terrace "to look as they were making cutlets from the Jews." I was stunned, and appealed by this attitude. Jews in view of many Poles following their church lectures were not real human beings. They were suspicious creatures using Christian children blood in their rites, and it was all right to have them destroyed. The strong anti-Jewish sentiment of the pre-war period was enforced by fear of eventual restitution of confiscated Jewish properties, now in Polish hands, and reinstatement of Jews in their jobs. Poles were satisfied with the rejection of Jews from their economy, and their lives.

After the scenes we just witnessed, we were desperate and terribly frightened. We expected some period of quiet, but the group of Germans entered the building looking for more fun. In one of the corners there was a group of about 20 people, mostly women with small children. The Germans approached them, and picked out the children from their mothers' arms. They pushed the screaming children against the wall, and began shooting randomly at them. Women went hysterical, screaming, and shouting, and trying to reach their children. They were brutally pushed back by Jewish policemen. Several children were lying in the pool of blood, others were screaming shrilly. We looked at this scene with horror. At last the laughing guards left, leaving behind this terrible scene on the floor: blood, parts of the flesh, dead children, and screaming mothers.



Everything went quiet; it was late, and we expected it to be our last night. Suddenly aunt Ania shouted: "Max, Max!" She saw her estranged husband Max Szlajfsztajn, whom she divorced in Wloclawek just before the war, because of his cruelty. We didn't see him in years. Now he was moving freely around, dressed in policeman uniform, obviously serving in the Umschlagplatz unit.

Six years old little Lenka was his daughter. Max saw us, and realized immediately the danger we were in. He told us not to move, and stay there, and he went away to find the way out. Deep into the night he came again, and ordered us to follow him. We went through the cellar/basement to the back door and Max took out the key.

We almost made it when, suddenly, other Jewish policeman of higher position appeared. He started to shout at Max trying to push us back into the main floor. I don't exactly remember what happened next. The other policeman threatened Max, that he would remove him from the force for insubordination, and would send him with the next transport.

I believe that my grandmother, or maybe Max, bribed this policeman with some money, or the ring, and he finally left. Max quietly opened the back door leading to the deserted street and let us out. The ordeal was over.

We were completely exhausted and half conscious after the scenes we witnessed. Our problem was not finished, and we could be shot at any time on the ghetto streets during curfew at night. Somehow we were not afraid. Quick and possibly painless death looked good. Anyway, after a short walk we found an abandoned house, where we spent the rest of the night. I don't remember how we survived the next couple of days.

The "Action" in the ghetto was suspended shortly after our miraculous escape. However, this time we knew what was awaiting us/planned for us, and we just lived from day to day. We started to work in the factory Shopa Shultza on Leszno Street, where we sew German's uniforms. We were hoping for some documents, which could exclude us from deportation. We all were working there, even Lenka. During control visits we were hidden in the cellar under the stock of fabrics. It was a dark room; I don't remember much more. Other people working there were all young; elderly and children mostly disappeared. We used/took food and clothes from deserted apartments, but most of the time we were hungry.

The ghetto was sealed tight, but obviously some contact with outside world existed. One day we got a letter from my father, who was living in hiding on the "Aryan" side of the wall. Before the war he was active in the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), and his friends from these circles helped him to hide. Father found out that we were still alive, and started organizing for us a place to stay with his Polish friends. Mama didn't want to leave her mother, and sister in the ghetto, but she realized that it could be our only chance for survival. She planned that with the help of the Polish friends she could later organize an escape for the rest of the family.

The big problem was how to cross the over 6 feet tall, brick wall surrounding the ghetto. All the gates were guarded, and we were trapped inside. We tried our escape three times, but we were spotted and turned back. During the third try I lost my mother, who was shot by a black-uniformed guard. I lost the rest of my family too, because without my mother I was unable to organize the escape for them. They all died during the final ghetto's liquidation, at the ghetto uprising, in April 1943.

After my mother was shot I came back to my family and I told what happened. My Granny was devastated. She already learned about the fate of her son Benek Berglau, who was killed in Wloclawek around the same time. His wife Mania and two of his daughters (Judyta and Stella) were sent to Treblinka. His older daughter Niunia tried to escape to Russia, but later was caught near the east border and shot in the forest. My dearest aunt Ania told me that from now on she would be my mother. We never recovered my mother's body. The next day my grandma contacted the truck driver commuting between the ghetto and the Aryan side, and organized my transfer with me hidden under some rags at the back of the truck.

I don't remember the last/hasty farewell. I felt suffocated with all the stuff over me, then I heard the German guards' voices, and at last I was standing in the entrance of the apartment house. There were

people on the street, walking, talking; everything looked strange. The woman was waiting for me, and we entered the apartment, where my father was waiting. He asked about mama. It was the only time in my life when I saw him crying, after I told him what happened. I was placed with some worker's family, where I spent the next couple of months. My life in hiding began.

## **Wspomnienia z tamtego sierpnia**

W lipcu 1942, gdy Himmler wydał rozkaz wysiedlenia Żydów do obozów zagłady. Kierownictwo akcji "likwidacji" objął Odilo Globocnik, dowódca SS, oraz jego pomocnik do spraw obozów - Christian Wirth. Zazadali on od przewodniczącego Judenrat Adama Czerniakowa (który później popełnił samobójstwo) aby od tego dnia policja żydowska dostarczała dziennie określona ilość ludzi (chyba 7,000 osób dziennie) do Umslagplatz, skąd będą oni wywiezieni na Wschód. Na początku od wysiedlenia byli zwolnieni członkowie Judenratu, robotnicy pracujący w przedsiębiorstwach niemieckich, lekarze, i ich rodziny. Każdy "przesiedleńiec" miał prawo zabrać 15 kg. bagażu i żywność na 3 dni. Czerniakow to wezwanie podpisał. Wkrótce jednak w

Tak się złożyło że 1-go sierpnia 2010 byłam w Warszawie, po raz pierwszy po 40 latach nieobecności. Wracaliśmy z kuzynami z wizyty. O godzinie 5 po południu zawyły syreny i ustal cały ruch na ulicy. Przechodnie zatrzymali się na chwilę a w oknach pojawiły się nieruchome postacie, jak w teatrze żywych obrazów. Była to 65-ta rocznica wybuchu powstania warszawskiego, które doprowadziło w rezultacie do śmierci 250,000 głównie młodych ludzi, wywiezieniu do obozów koncentracyjnych, na roboty przymusowe w Niemczech lub innych rejonów kraju pół miliona mieszkańców i całkowitego zniszczenia miasta.

Do dziś trwa w Polsce ożywiona dyskusja czy powstanie było potrzebne, i czy można było uniknąć tej kosmicznej katastrofy, czy warto było poświęcić tyle - by w rezultacie osiągnąć - nic. W pół roku później Armia Czerwona pod dowództwem Rokossowskiego (i jej polskie jednostki) wkroczyła do wypalonego do szczytu i pustego miasta, i ustanowiła tam urządzenie, które choć zniechęcony przez większość mieszkańców, utrzymał się przez następne 40 lat. Dlaczego tak się stało?

Patrząc wstecz, przypominam sobie to gorące lato 1944. Ludność Warszawy była u skraju cierpliwości. Młodzi Polacy w 90 procentach byli zaangażowani w taką czy inną działalność podziemia. Nienawisc do Niemieckich okupantów była powszechna i narastała z każdym dniem. Ci ludzie mieli za sobą 5 lat uciemięczenia, które wprawdzie nie dało się porównać z polityką eksterminacji w stosunku do Żydów, ale było wystarczająco trudne do zniesienia. Szkoły były zamknięte, młodzi ludzie uczyli się pod groźbą śmierci na tzw. "kompletach", w prywatnych mieszkaniach u dobrej woli nauczycieli. Jazdy koleją a nawet spacerować po mieście były niebezpieczne z powodu częstych "łapanek" które kończyły się wywiezieniem do obozów koncentracyjnych lub "na roboty" do Niemiec, chodzenie po ulicy po godzinie policyjnej groziło natychmiastową śmiercią, żywność była na kupony tzw. "kartki", brak było najpotrzebniejszych rzeczy, wieczorami świeciły się lampy naftowa lub "karbidówki", ubrania nicowało się i reperowało bez końca, gospodynie smażyły konfitury z buraków i marchwi, panowała nuda i brak perspektyw.

Żydzi byli przeznaczeni od razu na śmierć, ale Polacy byli traktowani jako gorszy gatunek ludzi, przewidziany w przyszłości do obsługi wyższej rasy. A tymczasem ludzie patrzyli na dumne postawy, odprasowane mundury i wypolerowane buty Niemców "panów życia i śmierci". Nagle tego lata pojawiły się inne obrazy. Brudni i obdarci uciekinierzy z wschodniego frontu wlekli się przez Warszawę w drodze na zachód. Ze wschodu jechały zarekwirowane furmanki wypakowane skradzionymi meblami, pościelą, i walizkami uciekinierów i Volksdeutów którzy parli na zachód. Wieczorami niebo na wschód od Wisły paliło się czerwono i grzmiały coraz bliższe odgłosy armat, dochodził huk bitew toczących się coraz bliżej Warszawy. Wyzwolenie zdawało się bardzo bliskie.

Nagle ci dumni panowie władcy stali się skurczonymi uciekinierami. Młodych Polaków w Warszawie aż kusilo by im przyłożyć, zemścić się za te lata nędzy i poniewierki. Sądzi się że nawet gdyby nie było rozkazu ze strony dowództwa okręgu warszawskiego AK, to powstanie przeciwko wrogowi wybuchłoby samorzutnie. Tymczasem Armia Czerwona i front zatrzymał się na granicy Wisły. Niestety, zarówno zapalczywa młodzież Warszawska jak i dowództwo AK nie zwróciło uwagi że Niemcy, dowodzeni przez SS Obergruppenführer Von dem Bach postanowiliścią sięgnąć posiłki, artylerię, czołgi, lotnictwo, i zatrzymać natarcie Czerwonej Armii na linii Wisły. Dowództwo AK które powinno było porozumieć się z Armią

Czerwona co do ich planów natarcia, nie zrobiła tego przez polityczne rozgrywki. Wynikiem Powstania była straszna masakra ludności i zburzenie stolicy kraju. Na marginesie należy wspomnieć że zarówno Von dem Bach, gen. Fiedler, i 30 innych dowódców Niemieckich, odpowiedzialnych za straszne zbrodnie popełnione w Warszawie, nie doczekali się sprawy sądowej za te morderstwa. Von dem Bach był wprawdzie w 60-tych latach sadzony, ale za swoje inne wyczyny, popełnione jeszcze przed wybuchem wojny na Niemieckich obywatelach.

A co z Żydami? Ich już w tym czasie w Warszawie właściwie nie było. Z blisko 500 tysięcy mieszkańców ghetta w 1942 roku (oprócz oryginalnych mieszkańców Warszawy było tam paraset tysięcy Żydów ściagniętych w ramach "konsolidacji" z okolicznych miast i miasteczek, wypędzonych z swoich domów prawie bez niczego) pozostało tylko pare tysięcy osób, ukrywających się jak szczury na "aryjskich papierach" lub koczujących nielegalnie wśród Polaków, którzy bohatercko narazili własne życie ukrywając tych niedobitków. Tych bohaterów było niewiele, głównie wśród Polskich socjalistów i lewicowców. Za przechowywanie Żydów groziła natychmiastowa kara śmierci dla całej rodziny. Na ulicach grasowali "szmalcownicy", którzy bez zmożenia oka rozpoznawali Żydów i donosili o nich do Niemców lub "granatowej" policji współpracującej z Niemcami. Niektórzy robili to bezinteresownie, tak aby się popisać, ale można też było coś zarobić, bo władze niemieckie dawały 2 kg. cukru a czasem i innych produktów za każdego złapanego Żyda. Ludzi tych rozstrzeliwano na miejscu, lub osadzano na Pawiaku, albo dokładano do towarowych pociągów kierowanych do Treblinki. Tak zginęła 18-letnia siostra Lilki Elenbogen, która wskazała jako Żydówkę jej dawną koleżankę z gimnazjum.

Ja w tym czasie przebywałam na Powislu, w mieszkaniu państwa Taflinskih, u których zostałam ulokowana kilka miesięcy wcześniej przez "Zegotę". Była to robotnicza rodzina, z trudem utrzymująca się przy ówczesnych dużych ograniczeniach. Jedliśmy głównie brukiew, wodę nosiliśmy ze studni. Syn był gdzieś "w lasach" a dwie kilkunastoletnie córki, w wiele razy nicowanych i reperowanych sukienkach, roznosiły harcerską pocztę polową i nielegalne gazetki. Ponieważ mój pobyt groził śmiercią całej rodzinie, nie pozwalano mi pokazywać się w oknie a w razie jakiejś wizyty chowano mnie w szafie.

Prawie od pierwszego dnia Powstania, nasz dom był narazony na ciągłe wizyty Niemców, którzy szukali powstańców, a także przychodziły oddziały powstańcze by zarekwirować żywność i przygotować się do kolejnego natarcia. My, ludność cywilna, spędzaliśmy większość czasu w piwnicy, gdzie zostałam przedstawiona jako kuzynka ze wsi, która nie może wrócić do domu ze względu na zamknięte dojazdy i akcje bojowe. Do mieszkania na pięttrze można było wchodzić tylko pomiędzy atakami niemieckiej artylerii i lotnictwa. Luftwaffe krążyła nad miastem rzucając bomby, których świst oznaczał jak daleko od nas padły. Miasto płonęło, widok ten przypominał mi płonące ghetto które obserwowałam rok wcześniej z innego mieszkania na Żoliborzu.

Na ulicach stały barykady. Ulice były ostrzeliwane non-stop przez Niemców, i wielu przechodniów których powstanie zaskoczyło w tej części miasta dołączyli się do oryginalnych mieszkańców koczujących w piwnicy-schronie. Sytuacja tych "bezdolnych" była jeszcze gorsza niż nasza, bo nie mieli kółder do przykrycia ani miejsca do spania. Mimo że większość mieszkańców gromadziła pewne zapasy żywności typowe w okresie wojny, zdobywanie żywności było wielkim problemem, głód był powszechny, jedliśmy co można było zdobyć w tych warunkach. Sklepy oczywiście były zamknięte, a chodzenie po ulicy groziło zastrzeleniem przez snajperów czyhających na dachach domów.

Raz ktoś z sąsiadów zdobył worek przezroczytych kiszek w które lokalny rzeźnik wkładał kielbasy. Te kiszkę gotowaliśmy na ogniu i jedliśmy, choć do dziś pamiętam jakie to było obrzydliwe. Niemcy koncentrowali ataki sięjąc śmierć i zniszczenia. Na podwórzach (ówczesne Warszawskie domy posiadały w większości część frontową, i kwadratowe brukowane kamieniami podwórza, otoczone oficynami. Na tych podwórzach stały trzepaki do czyszczenia dywanów, często studnie lub urządzenia kanalizacyjne. Było to ulubione miejsce zabaw dzieci, a w czasie wojny koncentrowało się tam życie sąsiedzkie) kopano groby, w których kładziono zarówno zabitych powstańców jak i coraz liczniejsze ofiary cywilne.

Pamiętam pogrzeb jakiejś sanitariuszki AK, młodziutkiej dziewczyny zabitej przy przechodzeniu przez ulicę. Ponieważ coraz trudniej było wychodzić z piwnicy, na podwórzu wykopano prowizoryczną latrynę, z której korzystali również bezdomni przechodnie koczujący w naszej piwnicy. Wode trzeba było nosić w wiadrach z hydrantu na ulicy. Elektryczność została odcięta. Zanim to się stało, dowiedzieliśmy się z radia że Rosjanie zajęli Pragę. 14 września obudził nas straszny huk: Niemcy wysadzili mosty na Wiśle. Radio

podawalo ze Rosjanie "wyrownuja linie frontu" i nie spiesza sie z pomoca plonacej Warszawie. Koniec wojny ktory zdawal sie byc juz bliski, oddalal sie coraz dalej.

Początkowy entuzjazm i bezgraniczne poparcie dla powstańców zaczęło zanikać w miarę przedłużania się bombardowania i mordów na ludności cywilnej. Ludzie - nawet ci oryginalnie niezbyt pobożni, stali się bardzo religijni, szukając opieki nieba w beznadziejnej sytuacji, która pogarszała się z każdym dniem. Każdego ranka na podwórzach odbywały się msze katolickie i pobożne śpiewy, przy użyciu prowizorycznych ołtarzyków. Msze odprawiali klerycy lub nawet przypadkowi przechodnie. Ofiar: zabitych i rannych, było z każdym dniem coraz więcej. Na sąsiednim Starym Mieście dochodziło do zaciętych walk w których Niemcy użyli ciężkiej artylerii i pocisków rakietowych, zwanych przez ludność "krowami". Dzielnica za dzielnicą zostawała obrocona w gruzy.

W końcu sierpnia powstańcy opanowali budynek PASTy na Zielnej (Stacja Telefonów - najwyższy budynek w Warszawie) co powitalismy z radością. Jednakże sytuacja robiła się coraz cięższa, początkowy entuzjazm przerodził się w niechęć do ludzi którzy doprowadzili do takiej sytuacji. Sąsiedzi w naszej piwnicy zaczęli bojkotować obcych przybyszów których ilość zwiększyła się gdyż przybyli tam również ocaleni z zbombardowanych i walących się okolicznych domów, gdyż zabierali nam miejsca w piwnicy i zjadali nasze skąpe zapasy żywności, których ilość zmniejszała się gwałtownie. Wiadomości dochodzące do nas w naszym ciągle jeszcze stojącym budynku na Solcu były przerażające. W końcu sierpnia na Woli oddziały niemieckie Reinefartha rozstrzelaly lub spaliły żywcem ponad 40 tysięcy ludzi. Reszta popędzono na Dworzec Zachodni a stamtąd do obozu przejściowego w Pruszkowie, skąd wywożono tysiące na roboty lub do obozów. Chorych, rannych i nie mogących chodzić Niemcy mordowali na miejscu. Doskonale wyposażone i wspierane artyleria i lotnictwem oddziały Niemieckie opanowywały kolejne dzielnice Warszawy. Po zdobyciu Starówki, skąd większość mieszkańców uciekła kanałami do Śródmieścia, wściekłość wroga skierowała się na Powiśle.

W wyniku nieustannego bombardowania, w pozarach i pod gruzami walących się domów ginęło tysiące ludzi, reszta była kierowana do obozów. Chorych i rannych dobijano strzałami i biciem na miejscu. Często odbywały się łapanie cywilów w okolicznych domach, po to by ich pedzić przed czolgami skierowanymi przeciwko powstańcom. Okazuje się że tej metody nie wymyślili wcale Arabowie w Gazie, lecz przejęli ją gotowa od Hitlerowców. Pod koniec września Niemcy pojawili się w naszym domu którego połowa jeszcze ciągle stała, mimo nieustannego ostrzeliwania, i przy pomocy Ukraińców wyciągnęli wszystkich mieszkańców kierując ich na ulice i ustawiając w długim szeregu do marszu. Odbywało się to przy akompaniamencie dzikich wrzasków, bicia i popychania przerażonych ludzi. Naokoło stali umundurowani Niemcy z pistoletami i psami na smyczy. Akcja ta bardzo przypominała mi sytuację z lata 1942, gdy inni Niemcy i ich pomocnicy, wtedy to byli Lotysze czy Estonczycy, wyciągnęli całą naszą rodzinę z domu na Zamenhoffa 26, i pogonili nas na Umslagplatz, skąd cudem uratowalismy się. Tylko wtedy byłam tam z rodziną, a teraz byłam zupełnie sama, bo moi gospodarze, państwo Taflińscy, gdzieś się w tym tłumie zgubili. Wreszcie zebrano całą kolumnę ludzi i ruszyliśmy w drogę. Szliśmy bardzo długo w kierunku Dworca Gdąńskiego, gdzie wsadzono nas do podmiejskiej kolejki w kierunku Pruszkowa, gdzie był główny oboz przesiedleńczy dla Warszawiaków.

W Pruszkowie, na zatłoczonym placu, przeczekalam całą dobe, zanim wciągnięto nas do bydleczych wagonów. Wagony upchane do ostateczności ruszyły - nikt nie wiedział dokąd jedziemy. Po drodze zatrzymywalismy się wiele razy, i często mieszkańcy okolicznych wiosek czy miast podawali nam żywność i wodę. Ludność była bardzo przychylnie nastawiona do zrywu w Warszawie i wszyscy chcieli pomóc nam. Pociągi nie były tak strzeżone jak te które z Umslagplatz jechały na Trebлінkę, i co jakiś czas ktoś z nich uciekał.

Po 2 dniach okropnej podróży, zobaczyłam dwóch ludzi którzy naradzali się nad planami ucieczki, i zaczęłam się ich trzymać. Gdy pociąg kolejno zatrzymał się gdzieś w polu, ci dwaj mężczyźni oderwali deskę z boku i uciekli, a ja pobiegłam za nimi. Oni zniknęli mi z oczu, a ja szłam bardzo długo aż w końcu dotarłam do jakiejś wioski, jak się okazało około 50 km od Krakowa (nie pamiętam nazwy). Weszłam do pierwszej z brzegu chaty i przedstawiłam się jako Maria Szmigielska (moje okupacyjne nazwisko) z Warszawy, która uciekła z pociągu od Niemców. Sympatia dla walczącej Warszawy była powszechna, i ci ludzie mnie przyjęli do siebie.

Był to koniec października 1944. Byłam u tych ludzi do stycznia 1945, pomagając w gospodarstwie i karmiąc bydło. Front zbliżał się, każdego dnia słychać było coraz głośniejsze wybuchy i artylerie. Nocami niebo na wschodzie płonęło czerwono, ziemia się trzęsła. Ostatnie dni przed wyzwoleniem przesiedzieliliśmy w schronie gdzie w normalnych czasach przechowywano zimą kartofle. Front się zbliżał, odgłosy walk były coraz głośniejsze. W pewnym momencie rozległo się walenie w przykrycie naszego schronu. Przerazeni ludzie zaczęli się naradzać: wyjść czy udawać że nas nie ma. W obawie że jeśli nie odpowiemy, Niemcy wrzucą do środka granaty, ludzie zdecydowali odsunąć górne zabezpieczenie schronu. Przerazeni mieszkańcy czekali: kobiety tuliły dzieci, my młode dziewczyny, byśmy wszystkie pomalowane brudem i węglem, żeby odstraszyć ewentualnych gwałcicieli, Nagle usłyszeliśmy głośne rozmowy po rosyjsku. Nasi wybawiciele! Bardzo zmęczeni wielotygodniowymi walkami, brudni ale zwycięscy.

Byłam wolna! Wkrótce nasi wybawiciele zostali nakarmieni i napojeni samogonem, którego zapasy były

Po wyjściu z getta mieszkałam prawie cały czas na terenie kolonii WSM (Warszawska Spółdzielnia Mieszkaniowa), ale nigdzie dłużej niż 2-3 miesiące w tym samym mieszkaniu. Najpierw mieszkałam z rodziną tramwajarza, starszego Polaka, żyjącego z 5-osobową rodziną w dużej biedzie, w jedno-pokojowym mieszkaniu. Jednakże przyjęli mnie też do siebie. Jakąś organizacja załatwiła mi "kenkarte", ważny dowód identyfikacyjny, na który też można było dostać kartki na produkty żywnościowe. Otrzymałam nazwisko Maria Szmigielska. Potem byłam przechowywana u państwa Skibniewskich, a następnie u starej pani Hoffman, która mieszkała razem z starszą już 50-letnią córką, i była dla mnie bardzo dobra. Potem już nie pamiętam. Byli to przeważnie biedni ludzie, socjalisci. Od wiosny 1944 mieszkałam u państwa Taflinski (ojciec, matka, dwie kilkunastoletnie (bardzo dla mnie niedobre) córki, mocno zaangażowane w akcję roznoszenia nielegalnych gazetek AK) na Powislu, blisko mostu Poniatowskiego (gdzie w czasie Poestania, 14 września, Niemcy wysadzili mosty na Wiśle, aby zatrzymać szybko posuwającą się Armię Czerwoną, huk był okropny). O ile mi wiadomo, Żegota płaciła tym ludziom za moje utrzymanie. U państwa Taflinski przebyłam aż do wybuchu Powstania Warszawskiego. Zgubiłam ich w czasie ewakuacji do Pruszkowa, i nigdy ich potem nie spotkałam.















Podpis osoby p. Marek

Jan Grelba zameldowanego/jej

w domu Nr. 16 przy ul. Kra-

sińskiego w dniu 3 XII 1942 r.

fotografią stwierdzam.

22 XII 1942 r.

OKRĄG KRAKÓW  
UL. KRASIŃSKIEGO  
NR 16-11a. 8351  
Komisarjat













1- Babcia (Sara Jablonka, born Offenbach), born ok 1875, died in Warsaw ghetto





2- Dziadek - Jakub Jablonka





3- Babcia z corkami: Mira, Stella, Tosia (moja mama)



4- Tosia (moja mama) z siostrami i bratem (Benek z zona Mania, zgineli w Wloclawku w 1942)



