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# MY MEMOIRS

Uri Shmueli

26 May, 2013

## Preface to a revised version

Many friends and relatives, who know that I am a Holocaust survivor, wanted me to tell them about my experiences. When they heard them they asked why do I not write them up. For this and other reasons I decided to present a short summary of my memoirs in the following pages.

The main emphasis is placed on my experiences during World War II and many details of other periods have been skipped. As will be seen, some chapters have somewhat odd titles but these are explained and will become clear during their reading.

I wish to stress that these are only my memoirs with immediate background and many important events were omitted.

The first chapter mentions briefly some biographical details related to my childhood and environment. Some friends thought that I should have provided more details about that period, however, I thought that excessive detail about these happy years would come at the expense of the much more significant events to be described in the following chapters.

The second and third chapters contain my experiences during the first three years of World War II. The background of these experiences is the gradual evolution of the Holocaust in the town in which we lived, and finally the loss of most of my dearest.

The fourth chapter deals with my work-camp and concentration-camp periods - two years and nine months altogether. These were not extermination sites in the exact sense of the word but I was fortunate to belong to the small minority that survived this hell.

The fifth chapter starts with my liberation day from the last concentration camp, proceeds to describe my immediate post-war experiences and terminates with my arrival in Palestine, late 1947.

The sixth and last chapter covers very briefly the following sixty years or so of my life, including my new family as well as my scientific career. This chapter is concluded with a mention of some stimuli that led to the writing of these memoirs and, in particular, of one which led to a commemoration of the atrocities the description of which concludes Chapter 3 of these memoirs. I was tempted to increase this chapter appreciably but did not do so for the same reason for which I kept the first chapter so short.

This version of the memoirs also contains two family photographs I received in Israel

from Mother's relatives.

This version of the memoirs contains information about the fate of the family of Mother's brother Joseph Seidenfrau and his family as well as several updates throughout the text.

Tel Aviv, 26 May, 2013

Uri Shmueli



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# Chapter 1

## The fool's paradise (1)

The title of this chapter is a bit cynical and it could really be many different things. In retrospect, however, it is correct because our family and thousands others should at least try to leave Poland even if it might have been difficult. The Jewish community in Poland could be thought to consist of four classes: (i) Religious - a spectrum ranging from weakly observing to extremely religious Jews, (ii) 'Bundists' - usually non-observing, regarding themselves as a Yiddish-speaking minority of Polish citizens and with a variety of socialist orientations, (iii) 'Poles of Jewish faith' - secular just as the Bundists but trying to suppress their Jewish ties and habits and integrate with the Polish society, and (iv) Zionists - a relatively small group of idealists (of various political and mildly religious orientations) who were devoted to the idea of an independent Jewish autonomy or state in Palestine, with Hebrew as its language. The Zionists were largely unpopular with the rest. They were condemned by the extremely religious because they used Hebrew, the language of the holy scriptures and prayers, in everyday life, and moreover they wanted to be in Palestine before the arrival of the Messiah. They were detested by the Bundists because they used Hebrew rather than Yiddish and because their dream was to abandon Poland, the 'homeland'. They were respected by the 'Poles of Jewish faith' for intellectual reasons but had very little in common with them.

All four classes, briefly described above, as well as many Jews who were not associated with any, felt that a great part of the Polish population was simply antisemitic but emigra-

tion did not suggest itself to many because of poverty (could not afford it) or because of well-being (it was not worth it).

I started with this background of the Jewish society in Poland in order to define my own. My parents, Moshe Szmulewicz and Nina Seidenfrau, were teachers of Hebrew who after a romantic adventure found themselves in Jerusalem, where they married in 1925. The adventure was (in those years) somewhat unusual. Nina was about nine years older than Moshe, refused repeatedly Moshe's attempts to win her attention and finally 'escaped' to Palestine. Moshe followed, found her and won. I asked them many times why they returned to Poland; the answer was that a great part of their families was not well off and the economic difficulties in Palestine in those years were such that they could not be of any help. On the other hand, they could have much better jobs in Poland and help their relatives. Nevertheless, they always said that they wanted to return to Palestine and to my question: 'When?' the reply was 'Next year!'. That year, however, never came.

All that said let me return to my childhood. I was born on 13 May 1928 in Kraków, in the maternity hospital in the Garncarska Street, as an only son of Moshe and Nina Szmulewicz, duly named Uriel. The change from Uriel Szmulewicz to Uri Shmueli took place in Israel, in 1954. I cannot say much of my infant years except that I think I was very well taken care of. My parents came from different parts of Poland: Father was born and grew up in Krynki (nowadays Poland) near Grodno (nowadays Belarus) and Mother was born and grew up in Wieliczka, near Kraków (then south-western Poland). They were both fluent in Hebrew, Yiddish and Polish but used Hebrew as an everyday language. I was told that by the age of two I became bilingual: Hebrew at home and Polish with whomever did not speak Hebrew (Mother's family and others). Yiddish was reserved by my parents for use in matters that I should not understand. They succeeded in it as I first learned Yiddish at the age of eighteen. One of my earliest recollections was the visit of the Hebrew national poet, Chaim Nachman Bialik in our house. He came from Palestine for a tour of Zionist communities in Poland, visited the Hebrew gymnasium in Krakow, where my Father was teaching Hebrew literature and was also an active Zionist. I was taught to greet Bialik with 'Shalom, Mr. Poet' and when I did so Bialik asked 'What is a poet?'. To this I replied: 'Mr. Bialik is a poet' - all this mini-conversation being in Hebrew.

The early years were very pleasant and carry no bad memories. In retrospect, I know



that this was so because I was accompanied everywhere by some adult and was not exposed to interaction with Polish children of the same neighbourhood. Most of the children who lived in the same street as we seem to have been taught to hate Jews and I can remember many stones flying around when I went to school alone or had friends visiting me. Yes, the antisemitism in Kraków was quite significant in those pre-war years but there were also many good relations between Jews and Poles. I remember our very kind neighbours, Mr. and Mrs. Rybczyński, and their families whom I visited as a child very frequently and eagerly.

At the age of six I started going to the Hebrew basic school in Brzozowa 5 and liked it very much. As the years went by the encounters with Polish children became worse and my questions to my parents ‘When are we finally going to Palestine?’ became more frequent. Today, after having lived for 60 years in a free Jewish country our pre-war *modus vivendi* with the Polish population seems to me quite impossible, but the priorities must have then been different than they are now, and the most important must have been the economic situation.

Ours was indeed quite fair. My parents did not qualify as ‘rich’ but still, we spent several weeks each winter in a skiing holiday resort, about two months each summer in a summer camp, I took piano lessons from the age of 8 to the age of 11 and, in general, life - as I remember it - seemed to be rather comfortable. My Father taught Hebrew literature and language in the Hebrew gymnasium and my Mother gave private lessons of the Hebrew language (she was an expert in Hebrew grammar), Bible (Old Testament) and German. They were active Zionists and enjoyed meeting friends and family. My Father’s young brother, Katri, stayed with us for several years, completed his high-school studies and my parents helped him to go to Palestine in 1936. I did quite well at school, had plenty of time for reading (I read all of Karl May’s books and many others), which was a favorite pastime in the late thirties, and for playing with friends. How nice there was no television!

We had many photographs from the summer and winter camps but they were abandoned along with all our family photographs. Fortunately, Mother sent some photographs to her cousins in Palestine and I can show one in Fig. 1.1.

The last summer vacation in Zawoja was cut short by some rumours about imminent war and the need to get gas masks and all kinds of stupid protections. This was the end of

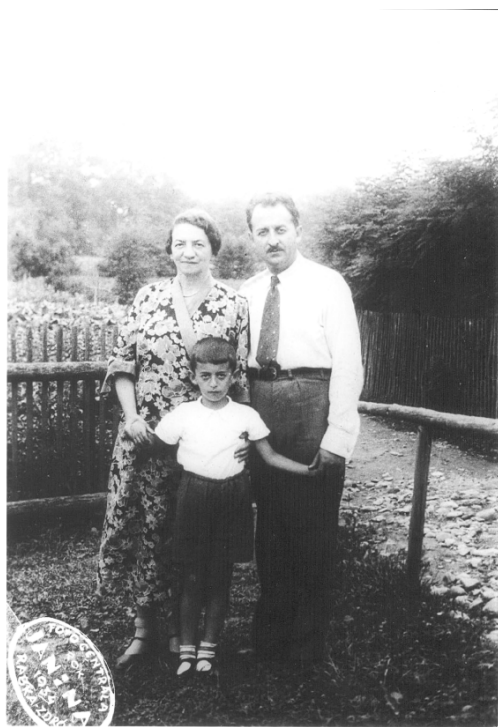


Figure 1.1: My parents and myself in Rabka, summer 1934.

the first fool's paradise. Another, a much more serious one, was to come already under the Nazi occupation. and will be described later.

## Chapter 2

# Sein Kampf

On 1 September 1939 a very well equipped German army invaded Poland, which was the first phase of the realization of his "Mein Kampf". We were shocked and frightened but one of the first steps was to lock the door of our apartment and run to the east. Mother and I got as far as Wieliczka (14 km from Kraków) but Father and Mother's brother Jakub who lived in Wieliczka continued to the east and arrived in Lwów, which was in the meantime occupied by the Soviet army. The reason for that separation was the belief that the Germans will not harm women and children but Jewish men are in grave danger. Although this was based on experiences from the first world war, there was something in it. A day or two after our arrival in Wieliczka the German troops were all over the place. A week later the Germans 'introduced' themselves. One of the first things they did was to look for Jewish men and round them up. Most Jewish men were on the run and the Germans, aided by Poles who became Volksdeutsche, managed to find only thirty two Jews. They were taken to the Jewish cemetery, shot there and left for burial. I do not remember the exact date but this was less than two weeks after the beginning of the invasion. The Germans did similar atrocities in several small towns and 'informed' thereby everybody that they have to be feared. This seemed to be spontaneous but I think it was carefully planned. Many Germans often behaved in quite a civil manner soon afterwards, when they had to take care of the local administration. They simply had to learn how to go about it!

As soon as it was possible, Mother and I said 'goodbye' to Hania, Jakub's wife, Bluma

(Mother's sister) and her husband David Horowitz, and made our way in a cart back to our apartment in Kraków. This had to be a cart because Jews were not allowed to travel in a train. We immediately found out that all the Jewish schools were locked out and Jews were not allowed to go to Polish schools. Next, Jewish owners of shops became salesmen and the ownership was turned over to German civilians, the so called "Treuhaenders". Often the Treuhaender had no idea about the business and had to be nice to the salesman (real owner) until he knew what it was about. By the end of October 1939 all the Jews, older than ten, had to wear white armbands 10 cm wide with a blue Star of David in the center. So everybody was turned into a Zionist! There were many more restrictions, such as a prohibition to live (and/or walk) in certain streets of Kraków, but everything was clearly printed in German and in Polish and after a little while it seemed that the Germans had everything under ordered control.

As soon as we came home and saw that we are relatively safe, Mother started to organize private lessons which could be some substitute for the non-existent school. Most teachers of the Hebrew gymnasium were then in Kraków and participated in the project. I was supposed to be in the sixth class of basic school but I think I got more from the private lessons than I would have had in school. Mother taught me Hebrew, Bible and German; Mahler taught me Polish, history and Latin; Meremiński taught me maths, geography and natural history; and Steinitz (a German Jew) taught me English. We were three or four children in a group. The lessons took place in the teacher's home and the Germans probably did not know about them.

By the end of 1939 we had some more or less detailed news from Father. He stayed in Lwów with Mother's brother Isaac, a very nice uncle. Since Father was not a citizen of Lwów, the Soviets could send him to Siberia as they did with many. However, he managed to remain in Lwów and became a teacher of Soviet Yiddish in a professional school. It must have been difficult but his regular Yiddish was so good that he managed to master the Soviet one in no time.

At that time we hosted a family of a teacher in the Hebrew gymnasium in Łódź who escaped to Kraków. Łódź was annexed to the Third Reich while Kraków was the capital of the Generalgouvernement. Our guests got in Kraków a visa to Italy, which was then neutral and suggested to Mother that she also try to get one and joins them. But Mother

did not want to go since she hoped Father would come back. Our guests went to Italy and from there succeeded to go to Palestine beginning 1940. I visited them in the early 1950's in Magdiel-Ramatayim (today Hod Hasharon) twice: for the first and last time!

The winter of 1939/40 was the coldest one I remembered. The temperatures went down to -30 Centigrade and we had enough coal for heating just one of the rooms. There was no warm water and I had to wash myself in ice-cold water, in the kitchen in which water was often freezing in the taps. I mention these trivialities since I remember that not a single time was I sick during this winter, while in previous winters - not nearly as cold - my flus and anginas were most frequent!

The year 1940 was not dull. The private lessons were so intensive that I almost did not miss the school. I used to meet my friends and an activity we liked was to 'cheat' on the Germans, take off the 'Zionist' armbands and make long walks in places where Jews were forbidden to show up. We may have been a bit stupid but we did it with utmost confidence and nobody suspected we were Jews in spite of the obvious 'semitic' appearance of some of us (e.g. mine!) During these outings we came across many German soldiers and officers. It was interesting to find out that not all of them were blond and had blue eyes. In fact, there were many with dark hair and eyes, thin hawk-like noses who looked like Jews! We were later told that these were probably Austrians. The Germans were busy issuing various announcements and confiscating Jewish property. One of the announcements which made us worry was the desire of the chief governor Hans Frank to make Kraków 'Judenrein' (free of Jews). At that time the Germans started to plan a Jewish Ghetto in the suburb Podgórze and made clear that it was intended for Jews whose work was of value for the war effort of the Third Reich. My Mother did not qualify, I was too young to do any 'useful' work and all that meant that we had to leave Kraków and most of our belongings would then be practically left behind. So, in the fall of 1940 (I do not remember the exact date) we packed some suitcases, rented a cart and left for Wieliczka, my Mother's hometown.<sup>1</sup> This was the beginning of Fool's Paradise No. 2.

In retrospect, we should have seen where all this was likely to end. The Germans are mur-

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<sup>1</sup>However, it is shown by a German form, deposited in the State Archive in Kraków, that Mother actually registered as Kraków inhabitant and the Nazi authorities' decision was that our stay in Krakow was denied. So, we could not go to the Ghetto even if we wanted to.

dering the Jews, they expropriate them and finally invent the horrible concept: "Judenrein". Would it not be logical to suppose that they want to have all their "empire" free of Jews? Much of Hitler's writings and speeches points in this direction and had we taken it seriously, we should have run and immediately so! However, the Nazis knew it, were probably not yet ready with the realization of their plans for "solving the Jewish question" and tried to maintain an almost 'normal' way of life in the occupied part of Poland. If we add the impossible optimism of the Jews, the firm belief in Germany's imminent defeat voiced by many intellectuals, it is possible to understand why the great majority of the Jews choose to remain in their homes and in those of their relatives. These homes were later seen to be a deadly trap.

## Chapter 3

# The fool's paradise (2)

Why again 'Fool's Paradise'? We were under a strict Nazi occupation and it seemed that our masters, while putting on us various restrictions, still let us live and, obviously, their war would be lost so why run, hide, and not try to live 'in peace'? This will be clear towards the end of this chapter and let us, in the meantime, see what it was like in Wieliczka.

First, some family history. I start from an old photograph, Fig. 3.1, of the "golden wedding" of my grandparents. I know its date to a fair approximation: my cousin Helusia, sitting on the knees of aunt Sarah, was about my age so the meeting took place about 1930. I do not know why they left me behind at home - I must have been ill.

I can introduce everybody because there were many mutual visits of the families.

Standing, in Fig. 3.1, from left to right: (1) My Father, Moshe Szmulewicz, (2) My Mother, Nina Szmulewicz (born Seidenfrau); we lived in Kraków, (3) Abraham Seidenfrau, Mother's brother, I think he was still single, (4) Chaja Seidenfrau (born Englender), (5) Joseph Seidenfrau, Chaja's husband and Mother's brother; Joseph and Chaja lived in Oradea, Romania (during the war annexed to Hungary), (6) Bronia Seidenfrau (born Pipes), (7) Isaac Seidenfrau, Bronia's husband and Mother's brother; Isaac and Bronia lived in Lwów, (8) Jacob (Kuba) Seidenfrau, Mother's brother, I think he was still single.

Sitting, in Fig.3.1, from left to right: (1) Bluma Horowitz (born Seidenfrau), Mother's sister, (2) Dawid Horowitz, Bluma's husband, (3) Gizela (Gitl) Seidenfrau, my Grandmother, Mother's mother, (4) Dawid Seidenfrau, my Grandfather, Mother's father; my



Figure 3.1: "Golden wedding" of my grandparents, Wieliczka, about 1930.

grandparents lived in Wieliczka, (5) Sarah (Sala) Lifschitz (born Seidenfrau) with her daughter Helusia, Mother's sister, (6) Meier Lifschitz, Sarah's husband.

Four girls are sitting on a carpet: the "grown up" ones, the first from left is Zitta and the first from right is Rozsi - these are daughters of Joseph and Khaya Seidenfrau. The second from left is Helusia, my favourite cousin, and the third from left is Musia, a cousin but not favourite since she used to beat me when she had the chance. Helusia and Musia are daughters of Isaac and Bronia Seidenfrau.

The 'tribe' of these Seidenfraus increased during the coming years (till 1939). Jacob Seidenfrau married Hania (born Silberman) and they had a son, Rafi. Jacob, Hania and



Rafi lived in Wieliczka. Abraham Seidenfrau married Basia (born Kling) and they had four children. I never met these cousins because they lived in Brody which was, in those years, a long journey. Sarah Lifschitz had another child, a boy named Henio, some years younger than Helusia.

Grandfather and Grandmother passed away about 1935. So, including members of the family absent from Fig. 3.1, in Mother's family there were by 1939 thirty one members. I included here two daughters and two sons of uncle Joseph Seidenfrau, who did not come with their parents to the "golden wedding" of my grand parents. They will be mentioned below<sup>1</sup>.

Mother, her two sisters and four brothers were probably all born in a suburb of Wieliczka called Lednica Górna, in a house known then as "Podoleniec". In the thirties of the 20-th century only the grandparents, Bluma and Dawid Horowitz and Jacob with Hania and Rafi remained in Wieliczka. However, Wieliczka remained the meeting point of these Seidenfraus and families until the war in 1939 broke out. I refer to "these Seidenfraus" because Grandfather had brothers and sisters of whom I am only vaguely informed.

I know less about Father's family but shall try to summarize what I know. Grandfather Kalman Szmulewicz, Father's father, was a widower for many years. He lived in Krynki with his sons: Moshe, Shmuel and Katri, and his daughters: Tsipora, Sheinke, Dvora and Rosa. At the end of 1940 he lived in Krynki with his three daughters and their husbands and children. The others were my Father, who was at that time in Lwów with Mother's brother Isaac; Shmuel, who lived in Argentine since the late twenties, married there and had two children: Alfredo and Zuly; these cousins live in Buenos Aires with their families; Grandfather's youngest son Katri, who came to Palestine in the thirties, married and had two children: Kalmi and Leah; Katri is 96 years old when this version of the memoirs is being written; he is in a medical institution and Leah also takes care of him. Leah lives in Kfar Vradim (Israel) and my cousin Kalmi also lives in this location; Grandfather Kalman's daughter, Sheinke lived with her husband Max Abramsky in New York since the twenties; they had a son, Herman, who lives nowadays in Florida.

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<sup>1</sup>All the information about the family of Joseph Seidenfrau was obtained from Rabbi Joseph Perlow, a grandson of uncle Joseph Seidenfrau. Joseph Perlow contacted me after having read the previous version of these memoirs. We also met during his visit in Israel.

I never visited Krynki and did not meet Grandfather and the three aunts who were living there with their families and also do not remember them visiting us in Kraków. But I do know I had in Krynki my Grandfather, three aunts, uncles and cousins. They were living in Krynki end 1940 under the Soviet occupation.

Unfortunately, this summary of my Father's family cannot be accompanied by any photograph showing most or many.

During the first years of the war only Jakub left Wieliczka for Lwów, and my Mother with me came to live with Hania and Rafi in the fall of 1940. The others stayed, in the meantime, in their homes. I shall write later what became of all the aunts, uncles and their families.

Our life with Hania and Rafi was rather pleasant. Uncle Jakub's house was nice, had a beautiful garden with flowers, berries and vegetables, and we felt there at home. The Germans did not bother us except that part of the house (a warehouse and Jakub's study) was occupied by a Polish-German firm. Fortunately, most of my teachers also found themselves in Wieliczka and regular private lessons started soon. As before leaving Kraków, Mother taught me Hebrew, Bible and German, Mahler taught me Polish literature, Polish and general history and Latin, and Meremiński taught me algebra, Euclidean geometry, geography and natural history. All these subjects belonged to the usual curriculum of study in the (non-existent) gymnasium.

In May of 1941 I had my 13th birthday and was getting ready for my Bar Mitsvah. The corresponding religious ceremony would be normally performed in a synagogue but there was no such thing under the Nazi occupation. However, the Jewish religion allows to hold a prayer when at least ten men, older than thirteen, are participating (this is called a Minyan). There was such a Minyan at our neighbours, the Atterman family, and they said that I was welcome for my Bar Mitsvah. The ceremony includes reading a chapter of the Bible (I had Prophet Isaiah) with a proper intonation. Of course, my Mother had me well prepared for this performance. When the day came I went to the Minyan and was called to the Torah in the appropriate part of the week's chapter. I said my prayer loud and clear in good Hebrew and read all of the accompanying chapter, also in Hebrew with a sephardic accent. When I was done, and the prayer was over, I was approached by one of the Attermans. He asked: 'Why are you praying in such a funny manner?' I said: 'I do not find it funny, this is how

we speak at home.’ He was indignant and asked again: ‘So you are using the holy language Hebrew in everyday life?’ I did not know that my speaking Hebrew was a kind of a crime! In spite of that, I kept coming to the morning prayer daily and to the same Minyan. I found it nice and understood every single word of the prayer. They again reproached me for not using their pronunciation but I could live with it. However, one day I was told that I was no longer welcome because I was a sinner: they saw me walking on the street with my head uncovered. I said ‘goodbye’ and started looking for another Minyan. I found one but it was still more extremely religious than at the Attermans and was in no time declared unwelcome. This is how I became secular in my own behaviour.

The regular studies did not satisfy me or my Mother. I took to algebra and geometry and came across two sweet books by Szczepan Jeleński: ‘Lilavati’ and ‘In the footsteps of Pythagoras’. I liked them tremendously and used my Bar Mitsvah present from Mother: a professional set of compasses and dividers (Richter) to make all kinds of nice constructions. A more advanced project was the book by Egmont Colerus: ‘Vom Einmaleins zum Integral’ (from one times one to the integral). I had this book in a good Polish translation. So at the age of 14 I had some idea what calculus is about, and this proved later to be very helpful in my studies for an external high-school diploma. Mother was glad that I kept myself busy but she did not think this was enough. She sent me to Mrs. Gehorsam for lessons of the English language already beginning 1941. I took these lessons with Edith Merin who was born in Germany, did not speak Hebrew and her Polish was poor; our common languages were English and German. We spoke mainly English. The lessons of English were most intensive. A typical homework was, for me, to translate from a newspaper a Polish article to English and, for Edith, to do the same with a German article. I had never any English courses at school and what Gehorsam taught me is the basis of what I know. This was most instructive but Mother thought that I should also know something about traditional interpretations of the Bible. So she sent me to Mr. Flachs for lessons of Talmud and Mishnah.

In the fall of 1941, that is well after the beginning of the German - Soviet war and occupation of Lwów, Father and Jakub returned to Wieliczka. We were very happy with this reunion of the families and it seemed that some equilibrium under the Nazi occupation of Wieliczka had been reached. There were, of course, the usual restrictions. That is no

schools, no synagogues, severe fines for using the train, the entrance to the salt mines of Wieliczka was strictly forbidden for Jews and armbands with a blue Star of David in the center were strictly obligatory. Also, food was poorer than in the pre-war years but as soon as one got used to all these restrictions and did not know real hunger or physical maltreatments, it seemed that all this was temporary and 'the war will soon be over'. I remember hearing, and have also read some published testimonies about the life of Jews in Wieliczka (as long as there were any Jews there), that this relative 'equilibrium' was achieved by heavily bribing the Nazi mayor of Wieliczka and his associates. There was also some forced labour from which many suffered but I was too young to qualify. Naturally, all my activities and interests described above effectively overshadowed the various hardships and I also found enough time for limited social activities of a teenager.

In January 1942, when quite a few Jews were leading in Wieliczka an almost normal and comfortable life, "simple" and more sophisticated mass murder of Jews in other localities was already taking place. A meeting of senior representatives of the Nazi authorities was convened in a Wannsee (a suburb of Berlin) villa, the purpose of which was to discuss practical problems which arose in the realization of the "solution of the Jewish question", that is in the implementation of the extermination of European Jewry. Of course, we did not know anything about all this. Even when we heard that there was beginning June 1942 a large deportation of Jews from the Kraków ghetto in an unknown direction, we did not suspect what this deportation meant.

Mid-August 1942 an announcement was issued by the Nazi authorities ordering all the Jews from Dobczyce, Niepołomice, Gdów and other localities to come to Wieliczka and take along all their belongings they could carry. There were rumours about a ghetto being planned in Wieliczka, strengthened by the order to take 'all the belongings'. I do not know the exact number of Jews in Wieliczka but it should have been of the order of ten thousand (published estimates range from eight to twelve thousand Jews after the above concentration). Then, a Jewish hospital was established which again was intended to put our minds at ease. On 26 August an announcement, directed to all the Jews, was issued about a resettlement of all the Jews from Wieliczka, to take place the next day. Whoever would not obey this order was about to be shot. There was also an announcement directed to the Polish population, saying that hiding Jews was a criminal offense with death penalty.

<sup>2</sup> Wieliczka was tightly surrounded by German and Polish police, so that nobody could get out.

On early morning of August 27, 1942 we found ourselves assembled at the large square in front of the commercial railway station of Wieliczka and a selection process started. I do not remember the exact order of the selection but only its outcome. About six hundred men were selected for work in Nazi war industry. My Father was chosen for work, took me by the hand and told me to come with him (I must have looked fairly healthy, because the SS selector did not object). I hesitated a bit but Mother told me in Hebrew: 'Go with Father'. I kissed her and went as told. Next, about seven hundred old and weak people were separated from the crowd, put on lorries and were taken to the forest of Niepołomice, where they were shot over pre-prepared graves. The rest, at least eight thousand people, were pushed into freight wagons, reportedly over hundred people in a wagon and, as I learned later, taken to the extermination site, or death camp, Bełżec.

It has to be added here that the great majority of the huge crowd present in the deportation area did not know that the final destination of the train which patiently waited in the railway station were gas chambers in a death camp. This explains the rather quiet and seemingly 'passive' behaviour of the Jews that were assembled there. Had the real destination been known, most of the 'passivity' would probably give way to suicides, general disorder and massive shooting by the SS men and their non-German aides. The explanations of the SS men that "work camps are awaiting you in the east". would then not convince even the most naive deportees.

. I think that the life of Jews in Wieliczka and its dreadful end for all but six hundred amply justifies the title of this chapter!

The "fortunate" six hundred men were put into a huge barrack to wait for 'customers'. About one hundred (including Father and myself) were chosen for work in 'Kabelwerk Krakau' (the factory existing till this very day and called 'Fabryka Kabli w Płaszowie') and taken away to the camp called 'Julag' (Judenlager) in Płaszów. The remaining five hundred, or so, were taken to an ammunition factory in Stalowa Wola. This turned out to

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<sup>2</sup>These announcements were on display in the exhibition of announcements, posters and other documents from the Nazi period which took place in the Kraków Historical Museum at the Old Synagogue in Kazimierz, in year 2003.

be very much worse than Kabelwerk. However, the majority of the "fortunate" six hundred eventually perished in various work camps and concentration camps.

The aftermath of the Wieliczka tragedy. Many Jews tried to find some hiding place, in their homes or with Polish neighbours. However, the number of survivors was very small and there was a lot of shooting in the streets during the following months. Uncle Jakub and his wife Hania sent Rafi to uncle Isaac to Lwów and prepared a hiding place for themselves under the floor of Jakub's study. They used it on August 27 and managed to stay there for a few weeks. However, when Jakub left the hiding place one night, in order to find something to eat, he was apprehended by a 'friendly' policeman who did not shoot him and Hania but instead sent them to the Kraków ghetto, where they were immediately 'accomodated' in the prison of the Jewish police, the Ordnungsdienst. This was a delayed death verdict since people in the police prison were meant to join the subsequent deportation to Bełżec or to Auschwitz. Father and I visited them in the prison while they were still there (see below).

The fate of my aunts and uncles from my Mother's side was closely similar to that of Mother. Bluma and David Horowitz were deported to Bełżec from Wieliczka; Sarah, Meier, Helusia and Henio either went to Bełżec from Rzeszów in 1942 or perished there in 1943; Rumek, Basia and the children either went to Bełżec from Brody in 1942 or perished there when the Brody ghetto was liquidated in 1943; Isaac, Bronia, Helusia, Musia and probably also Rafi perished in Lwów in 1942 or in 1943. Joseph, Chaja with the two daughters Zitta and Rozsi, and the sons Shalom and Abraham were deported to Auschwitz in the summer of 1944, and did not survive the Holocaust<sup>3</sup>. However, Lula, the oldest daughter of Joseph Seidenfrau, spent the war in Budapest as a Hungarian, with appropriate Aryan documents and the second oldest daughter of Joseph Seidenfrau,(and grandmother of Joseph Perlow), Rachel, emigrated to the USA in 1939. It follows, that from the 32 members in Mother's

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<sup>3</sup>Joseph Perlow told me that Joseph Seidenfrau was very ill and was taken to Auschwitz on a stretcher. Zitta with her two children were taken directly to the gas chamber, while Rozsi was pregnant on arrival to Auschwitz and gave birth to her child in the camp. However Rozsi and the baby were taken together to the gas chamber and when Rozsi's husband, Dr. Tibor Gruenfeld who served as a doctor in the camp, heard this he fell into a deep depression, stopped eating and died soon afterwards of starvation. This detailed information was obtained from Zitta's husband, Chaim Katz, who survived the horrors of Auschwitz and Joseph Perlow met him in the United States. Joseph Perlow was also told that Abraham - Joseph Seidenfrau's son - survived the selection and the death march, was seen a week before the liberation in Bergen-Belsen and somehow perished.

family in year 1939 only Rachel, Lula, Chaim Katz and I survived the Holocaust.

Of the family of my Father all those who did not leave Krynki, that is Grandfather Kalman and his three daughters with their families shared the fate of the Krynki Jewry. This was a total deportation to the death camps Treblinka and Auschwitz. None of them survived the Holocaust. Father himself perished in the concentration camp Gusen II a few months before the end of the war. More details will be given in the next chapter.

This chapter and the previous one illustrate the evolution of the Holocaust, mainly in Wieliczka. Although it was certainly not identical everywhere, history has it that the final outcome was closely similar in all the locations occupied by the Nazis.





## Chapter 4

# Arbeit macht frei

The title is a bit misleading as we were not in Auschwitz or in Sachsenhausen, where this title decorated the entrance gate to a concentration camp for the very first time. However, this chapter is devoted to my camp period and the Nazi lie in the title applies. The Julag we were sent to, with its camp commandant Mueller, was just like any concentration camp with the difference that we left for work in the Kabelwerk in the morning, returned in the late afternoon and had to do some chores in the camp. Another difference was that we wore our own clothes and not the striped pyjamas. Because of these differences it was called ‘camp of forced labour’ rather than concentration camp; a semantic difference. I shall describe our work and conditions in the Kabelwerk later on. Most probably the management of Kabelwerk decided that our productivity would be increased if we went over from the Julag to the Kraków ghetto. Indeed, after a couple of weeks we found ourselves in the Kraków ghetto which was an improvement not only for the management of Kabelwerk but also for us.

Father and I were allotted a place in a room in the building on Józefińska 30. Each room in an apartment was subdivided by blankets into several cubicles and each of these hosted a family. I remember some neighbours to our cubicle but one of them was very special. It was Mr. Kreisberg with his daughter Eva. Mr. Kreisberg served in the Austrian army during the first World War, won many distinction medals but lost in combat both legs. He had a wheel chair and spent most of his time sitting on his bed. I still remember his

bitter expression. His daughter Eva was a beautiful young lady, a well-known ballet dancer who, however, devoted all her life and energy to taking care of her handicapped father. His end was tragic. On October 28 the Nazi authorities decided to arrange for a deportation to Bełżec of people who had no clear work assignment. On that day the management of Kabelwerk decided to keep us in the factory until the deportation horrors are over. The director of Kabelwerk, Boehme (not Schindler!) must have been a kind man or cared very much for cheap labour. One way or the other, Boehme (or maybe also his deputy Koeller) saved us. When we returned to the ghetto we heard the following story. Kreisberg put on his military uniform with all the distinction medals and sat in his wheel chair. The SS-men found him during the screening of the apartments, shot him and pushed the wheel chair down the staircase. Another neighbour, Janek Kurtz saw it and wrote up this story. Mr. Kreisberg was confident that nothing would happen to him because of his service to the Emperor Franz-Joseph. On that day, about five thousand people were deported to Bełżec from the Kraków ghetto and a large number of hideouts and latecomers were murdered in their homes and in the streets.

A few weeks before the above deportation Father and I went to the police prison and met there Jakub and Hania. We were happy to see them and I remember that they were very sad. They probably knew more than we did what is ahead. After the deportation the prison was empty, awaiting further convicts.

An incident which was very disappointing is worth mentioning. One evening after returning from the Kabelwerk I met one of my best friends, Julek Hochwald. It was a very happy reunion of friends, we remembered our school, class, teachers, and Julek's library of Karl May to which I had access. He told me that they lived just around the corner and invited me to come along. I did, met Mrs Hochwald whom I knew and who was very happy with my visit. She invited me to stay for supper and I gladly accepted. When we sat down to the table Mr. Hochwald entered. We exchanged some greetings but I noticed that he was in the ghetto police uniform and had the letters SD on his sleeve. I think they stood for 'Sonderdienst' but I am not sure. In any case, they showed that Mr. Hochwald was in the group of policemen who were walking around Kraków in civil clothes and were hunting for Jews who were living there with Aryan documents. This was the lowest degree of meanness! I excused myself and said that I forgot I promised Father to be at home, and never saw the

Hochwalds again. Maybe Hochwald thought he would save himself and his family by this collaboration with the Nazis. If he thought so, he was wrong. I shall comment on this later on.

This is a good point to comment on the Judenrat - The Council of Jews. There were Judenrats with decent and understanding members (for example, the Judenrat in Wieliczka), there were also Judenrats full of crooks and collaborators (for example, the Judenrat in Kraków). In my opinion, however, the behaviour of the members of the Judenrat was of a marginal importance to the final outcome. All the Germans really wanted from a Judenrat was to register all the Jewish population in a way which would allow them to know exactly where the Jews could be located. Both the kind and the mean Judenrats performed this function to the Nazi's satisfaction.

I did not yet describe our work in the Kabelwerk and will content myself with saying that we worked hard and the march from and to the ghetto was not pleasant. However, we were happy with this situation because it was clear from the previous deportations that people who had no work assignment were in a big trouble. Our Kabelwerk company was increased to 150 men and 150 women. Early 1943 all the Kabelwerk company was transferred to a working camp on the Jerozolimaska street which was to become the Płaszów concentration camp. We lived in large barracks and continued to walk to the Kabelwerk from the new location. Sometime in February 1943 the camp commandant was replaced by a new one, Amon Leopold Goeth. This was a Viennese 'gentleman' and one of the most horrible monsters. Although I did not 'enjoy' his company for more than a month, or so, he deserves some comments. He was, reportedly, fond of good music, beautiful women and good food, but what the inmates of Płaszów saw was a ruthless murderer, shooting people most usually without any reason. He was a devoted Nazi but also a corrupted one. A fairly complete portrait of Goeth is provided by Johannes Sachslehner in the recently published comprehensive biography: "Der Tod ist ein Meister aus Wien: Leben und Taten des Amon Leopold Goeth" (the death is the master from Vienna: life and deeds of Amon Leopold Goeth). There are, of course, many testimonies of Płaszów inmates on Goeth's killings, tortures and 'selections' - many of these are presented in Sachslehner's book. Goeth's murderous instincts were related to his personality, however, he had a very 'appropriate' preparation to this job: his previous assignment was with 'Operation Reinhardt' in Lublin

which was responsible for the operation of the death camps Belżec, Treblinka and Sobibór. An exhaustive summary of the inmates' testimonies is also contained in the proceedings of Goeth's trial in 1946 in Kraków, in which he was sentenced to death.

Of course, we knew nothing about all this in February 1943. A few weeks after his arrival he 'introduced' himself by ordering a hanging execution of two girls, for a reason I do not remember but which was certainly unimportant. All of us, inmates, were assembled on the Appellplatz and ordered to watch it. It was said that the belt or rope used for hanging one of the girls was torn and a repeated hanging was ordered by Goeth. This procedure was repeated later in several cases. One of them was the hanging of Henek Haubenstock and Engineer Krautwirt and I wish to quote the testimony of the late Judge Moshe Bejski, given at the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem and reproduced in many websites. Judge Bejski said:

"All those people stood on the ground and the two persons were brought to the gallows: a lad of 15, Haubenstock, and the engineer Krautwirt, and an order was given to hang them. It was said in the camp that young Haubenstock had sung a Russian tune. The boy was hanged and something happened which occurs once in many thousands of cases - the rope broke.

The boy stood there, he was again lifted onto a high chair which was placed under the rope, and he began to beg for mercy. An order was given to hang him for the second time. And then he was raised a second time to the gallows, and hanged, and thereafter that same Amon Goeth, with his own hands, also fired a shot.

The engineer Krautwirt, throughout that time, stood on the second chair, and here the perfidy went even further. SS-men, with their guns and machine guns passed through the ranks, and gave orders to all those standing on the ground to watch.

Engineer Krautwirt cut the veins of his hands with a razor blade, and in this condition went up to the gallows. And in this way he was hanged".

Returning to our story, about mid-March 1943 the Kraków ghetto was 'liquidated'. All the

inhabitants of the ghetto who had some work assignments were marched to Jerozolimska (that is, to the Płaszów camp) and the remaining ones were deported to Auschwitz or killed on the spot, mainly by Goeth and his killers. The whole process of liquidating the ghetto was supervised by Amon Goeth himself. Sometime later, the Jewish police of the ghetto including the SD informants with their families were brought to Płaszów and executed on the order of Goeth. By the way, Goeth was also instrumental in the 'liquidation' of the ghettos of Tarnów, Rzeszów and Przemyśl, major Jewish centers in southern Poland.

I must point out that I did not know then that the final destinations of the deportations were extermination sites. I learned this much later and perhaps as late as winter 1944, when people came to the concentration camp Linz from Auschwitz via Mauthausen and told us exactly what this death industry looks like. Nevertheless, we knew that the deportation is not what the SS-men said: 'work camps are awaiting you in the east'.

The terror in the camp, the loss of time for going to and from work and the desire of the management of Kabelwerk to enhance the efficiency of our work led to the construction of a small camp on the grounds of the factory and associated with the central camp in Płaszów. We did most of the non-professional parts of the construction work after usual working hours. I do not remember the exact date of our transfer from Jerozolimska to the camp in the factory but it was close to that of the liquidation of the Kraków ghetto. We started to understand how lucky we were in leaving Jerozolimska.

The small camp was guarded by Ukrainians in SS or SA, the so-called Werkschutz, with one German officer as their supervisor. Once the camp was ready we started to work in two shifts, twelve hours each. Whatever we did, we had to fulfil a norm which was strictly controlled by the Polish foreman. I shall give some examples later.

Let us now make some digression to the actual work I was doing and the conditions in the factory. The main product were cables of all kinds, from thin three-wire ones to drums of thick multiwire cables which served communication purposes (wireless communication was in its infancy in those years). A separate department, where I was working, dealt with a variety of bakelite products such as mains sockets and plugs, lamp holders, radio boxes, and some specialized connectors for military use. The production was completely self-contained. It started from an acid-catalysed synthesis of the phenol-formaldehyde resin. The resin was very brittle and could be readily crushed into powder which, in turn, was

used to make several kinds of pellets. The pellets were placed between hot steel templates which were shaped to the desired objects. The templates were mounted on hydraulic presses and were locked under a pressure of about 300 atmospheres for a few minutes, whereupon bakelite objects were formed. A possible explanation of this process is the formation of many additional crosslinks between the polymer chains of the resin. The resulting piece of bakelite is really a single crosslinked polymer molecule. So far the science. The work at the presses was quite hard. A person was usually told to serve two presses. When one was 'baking' the bakelite the upper template of the other had to be raised, the objects retrieved, new pellets supplied and the press closed. So that there was practically no time for resting a while. A predetermined number of objects had to be produced on both presses and these were counted by the foreman or someone on his behalf. The production norm of a new product was determined by a production engineer who stood by a working press with a stopwatch and calculated the norm. Wherever possible, the worker 'under examination' tried to work more slowly so that the norm could be more easily fulfilled. Often the bakelite object produced contained metal conductors (bakelite itself is an excellent insulator). These were inserted into the template before the pellets stage. However, the product that came out of the press was surrounded by thin films of bakelite which had to be removed by a final touch. This was done in a separate department where I spent most of my time in the Kabelwerk. There too was the norm that had to be fulfilled. A final workaround was done in a department called 'installation'. In the latter department all the necessary conductors were supplied and inserted into the finished product.

Most of the workers in the Kabelwerk were Poles. Their relation to the Jewish coworkers was typical of the relations of Poles to Jews: quite a few showed hostility, the majority were indifferent and some were real friends. In the 'final touch' department there was a variety of jobs and I did pretty well in all of them. This showed itself in my coping with the various norms. On the average, I could finish my daily output in six hours and was often told by the foreman that 'he sees me where I should not be'. In the remaining time I used to help others by solving small problems with their machines, and became an informal apprentice of the department's mechanic. The foreman, Michalik, and the chief mechanic, Pawełek, tolerated me and Czesio Gwiazdowicz, a mechanic, became my friend. I was also on good terms with some 'senior' Polish workers, in particular with Iskra. Iskra used to bring some

leaflets of the socialist underground (AL), told me to hide behind a huge construction and was watching out while I was reading. We were very careful because should a Ukrainian Werkschutz catch me reading underground leaflets, I would be sent to Goeth and that would be my end. Perhaps the best Polish friend I had was Mietek Gunia. Mietek ran single-handed a huge machine which produced very hard plates of varying thickness, made of linen sandwiched with resin. He was also in charge of the synthesis of the phenol-formaldehyde resin and asked my foreman to let me help him. We had very interesting conversations (the synthesis took some time) and I visited him when I could. One day Mietek told me that he had something interesting for me and wanted me to come to his plate-making lab. When I came, he gave me a little book and told me to hide behind the machine. This was a book on the introduction to theory of sets! I was immensely grateful.

My Father also started his work at the presses but was later transferred to the mechanical workshop where he was operating a milling machine. Since I had enough time thanks to my coping so well with the norms I could visit Father while pretending that I am on an errand. We were very happy to have each other and Father used to tell me many things while not pretending that he was teaching me.

In a small number of cases people could not cope with the norm. This was brought to the attention of the director of the bakelite plant, Bajko, who was a nasty little man and a Volkdeutsch. In addition, one of the Polish technicians at the presses, a declared antisemite, complained to Bajko on a sweet Jewish girl, Paula Meisels (it was said that she turned him down). Bajko made up a list of 'undesired' workers, it was confirmed by the management and sent to the central camp of Płaszów. A day later fifteen friends, including Paula, were escorted to the central camp and immediately executed.

On 1 January, 1944, Płaszów was formally converted from a camp of forced labour into a concentration camp. Everybody got 'pyjamas' which were from now on our only clothes, and our small camp was also guarded by an SS-man. However, this was largely a formality because we kept on working as before and Goeth on Jerozolimska kept on shooting and torturing people as before. Our 'dolce vita' ended beginning August 1944, when the Soviet front approached central Galicia and the Germans started to evacuate whatever they could to the west. There was an internal selection in the Kabelwerk camp, production workers were 'fired' and part of them were left for helping in the evacuation. Father and I

were marched with many others to Jerozolimska and the same day about 4500 men were marched to the railway station and pushed into freight wagons. There were 135 people in our wagon. The train moved and stopped after a few hours. It did not move for the next day and night and we were told later that the train stopped in Auschwitz but the site was 'overworked' with the arrival of Hungarian Jews most of whom were exterminated, and we could not be received. Then the train moved on. The heat was horrible, we did not get a drop of water and the feeling was close to a suffocation. Three people died in our wagon and more suffered heart attacks. Finally, on 10 August, 1944 the train arrived in the pastoral village of Mauthausen. The journey lasted three or four days and nights. We were 'downloaded' (I think this is a good term) from the train, arranged in neat rows of five men each and proceeded to the concentration camp.

During an uphill walk which lasted one or two hours I saw that the inhabitants were closing the windows and the window shades. They were presumably told to do so or did it because we were not particularly nice to look at. When we arrived in the camp we were directed to quarantine blocks, were registered, and distributed among the blocks (I think there were four or five blocks) while being beaten by the Kapos and the Stubenaeltstes. I do not remember the first day's schedule but the 'lodging' is unforgettable. There were three-stories beds with straw mattresses, and on each mattress four people were squeezed in a sardine-like fashion. I heard later that the quarantine was nicknamed 'Sardinenlager' which was most appropriate. Food was awful but this does not matter if one is hungry.

After a day or two many of us were taken to work in the Mauthausen quarry (called 'Wiener Graben'). This was most memorable. We were marched to the quarry, went down 186 steps and each of us was told to pick up a stone. The Kapos and SS men in the quarry saw to it that the stones were heavy enough and we had to mount the 186 steps with the stones on our backs. We were arranged in rows and carefully controlled by the SS men standing on top of the quarry. If they saw that someone got rid of his stone or managed to take a small stone, they took him out of the group and threw him into the quarry, where he died immediately. The 186 steps were known to oldtimers as 'Todesstiegen' and the quarry as 'paratrooper's quarry'. We were new and were not aware of these nicknames. We were then marched a couple of kilometers, with the stones on our backs, told to get rid of the stones in some ditch, marched back to the quarry and so on. We made three such rounds



before lunch and three after lunch. As far as I remember I was only three or four days on the quarry assignment but this seemed to me very much longer.

After a few days there was a more detailed registration of all the inmates of the quarantine. Each of us was also asked what is his profession. I said I was a 'Schlossergehilfe' (an apprentice metalworker) and Father said he was a 'Lehrer-Arbeiter' (a teacher and a worker). Possibly because of this difference in declared professions we were separated. I learned later from the Austrian Ministry of Interior, which has access to most Mauthausen camp documentations, that Father was sent on 23 August, 1944 to the subcamp Gusen II and died there on 22 January 1945, and that I was probably sent with 436 prisoners from our transport on 27 August, 1944 to the subcamp Linz III. I was also informed that a total number of 4,590 persons coming from the concentration camp Płaszów was registered in Mauthausen on 10 August, 1944. The majority of our transport was probably transferred to Gusen II and very few survived this horrible subcamp. I had only a vague idea about these numbers while in the quarantine and, of course, had no idea what awaited my Father. I shall comment on this later.

A word about Mauthausen. As I learned some years ago from various links related to the Mauthausen Memorial website, the concentration camp Mauthausen was established immediately after the 'Anschluss' (1938) and existed as such till May 6, 1945. During these seven years or so Mauthausen 'accomodated' about 200,000 prisoners of many nationalities and about 100,000 prisoners lost their lives in a great variety of manners. So, Mauthausen was not a declared extermination camp but it seems to have been one of the worst in 'Greater Germany' during this period. Mauthausen had 49 subcamps in the districts of former (and later) Austria. Everybody (except the Kapos, Blockaeltestes etc) was miserable but I think that the worst treatment was awarded to the Soviet prisoners of war and the Jews. The conditions in the various subcamps differed depending on their staff, location and other factors, The worst seems to have been Gusen II, which rather successfully competed with the central camp at Mauthausen. Information about Mauthausen and its subcamps is contained in a great number of websites and the various pertinent documentations from the Nazi era are carefully collected by the Austrian Ministry of the Interior and departments of history at Austrian universities.

The concentration camp Linz III was located on an elongated island almost in the middle

of the river Traun, south of Kleinmuenchen, a suburb of the city of Linz in the district Oberdonau (upper Austria). The island was linked with Kleinmuenchen by a wooden bridge over the Jaukerbach, which was the name of the narrower part of the Traun. The camp was surrounded by an electrified fence and a number of towers with armed watchmen. There was a large Appellplatz on which we were counted daily, a long row of barracks, two successive ones forming a block, a shorter parallel one and several common barracks: the kitchen, the camp secretariat, the hospital and a smaller one named 'Totenkammer' in which bodies of the deceased prisoners were (temporarily) deposited. There were about 5,000 prisoners in the camp and a staff of about 500 SS-men whose barracks were outside the camp. The camp commandant (Lagerfuehrer) was SS-Hauptsturmfuehrer Schoepperle, the responsible for the important prisoner count (Rapportfuehrer) was SS-Hauptscharfuehrer Sturm and the responsible for subdivision of working columns (Arbeitsdienstfuehrer) was SS-Unterscharfuehrer Winkler. In addition there were several non-commissioned SS men, each responsible for several blocks (Blockfuehrers). Schoepperle was an architect who spoke the Schwabisch dialect and his words had to be translated. Sturm lost one eye in combat (they said he was in Stalingrad), was huge, had a formidable appearance but he seemed to be rather kind. At any rate, he did not shout and did not raise his hand on a prisoner. Winkler, on the other hand, was a terrorist. It was best to keep away from him at a large distance. Each block had a 'Blockaelteste', usually a German oldtimer with a green triangle (arrested for a criminal offense), and a 'Blockschreiber' (a secretary), not always German and not always 'green'; however, he had to be an oldtimer. Each of these two had an office and a room for himself. There were four 'rooms' in a block, each shared by about hundred prisoners. Most often the prisoners occupying such a 'room' (Stube) had a common work assignment and when leaving the camp for work they were accompanied by SS-men and a Kapo. As it happens with people, there were Kapos who could beat the prisoners as long as was possible, there were nice Kapos and anything between these two types, The largest work assignments were to various departments of the complex of metal industry called 'Hermann Goering Werke'. A smaller but significant work group was the 'Lagerkommando' which was busy building new barracks, renovating old and with all kinds of earth work.

So far a brief description of the KZ Linz III. It is perhaps in order to give a brief definition of the locations we consider. Linz lies a short distance to the west of the common

point of the borders of Austria, The Czech Republic and Germany, while Mauthausen lies some twenty kilometers to the south-east of Linz.

As said above we arrived in Linz III on 27 August, 1944. I was sent to Block no.9, which seemed a real improvement after the horrible quarantine in Mauthausen. The Blockaelteste Willy seemed to be a nice man, and he seemed to appreciate where we came from. Accommodation was not very comfortable, 'only' two prisoners on a mattress in a three-stories bed and food was bad. I do not remember what my first work assignment was other than it was something in the 'Hermann Goering Werke'. After a couple of weeks I developed a bad inflammation under the skin of my left leg. It was diagnosed as phlegmon which was not infrequent in KZ camp conditions. It may have originated during my work in the Wiener Graben quarry but I do not know that for sure. In any case, phlegmon was often fatal as it led to deterioration of the system and I was sent to the Revier (the camp hospital). I stayed there for some time and the thing did not improve; it got worse. The man who probably saved my life was the Revier Kapo, Kaufmann. He was a priest and an oldtimer in the KZ. He operated the phlegmon and treated it with Ichtyol ointment. Miraculously, in a few days the horrible thing subsided and I was ready to leave the Revier. However, I was now transferred to Block no.1 and assigned to the 'Lagerkommando'. After some time I met people who were active in the Warsaw uprising and heard from them for the first time what were the real destinations of the deportations in Poland. I met there Janusz Bialostocki, a Pole from Warsaw, who was my neighbour and became a good friend. We had very interesting conversations in which Janusz explained to me the basis of Renaissance philosophy, and how it led to Emanuel Kant's synthesis of rationalism and empirism. In those days I was 'promoted' to the kitchen commando and my job was to carry boxes with potatoes and bring them to the potato peelers. It was a very hard work but (i) the food was edible, and (ii) I could steal some potatoes, which was a non-trivial risk. Janusz was assigned to the Lagerkommando and worked close to the kitchen. Sometimes I could throw him some potatoes and we were baking them in the evening, which was a gourmet dish! However, this was too good to last much longer. One day I was searched when leaving the kitchen and the kitchen Kapo found two potatoes in my pocket. What followed was a serious beating, a shameful expulsion from the kitchen and a transfer to Block no.8, to some hard work. Before I come to that I want to mention Janusz's significant promotion. Sometime later

the camp management decided to establish a 'Kuenstlerstube' (room of artists). There was a violinist, Splewiński, a painter, Seidner, and a graphic artist, Janusz Białostocki.

In my 'room' in Block no.8 there were about eighty prisoners from all the republics of the U.S.S.R, about fifteen Poles, a Frenchman, an Italian and two Jews: Mietek Monheit and myself. The relations between the prisoners were usually fair, except some antagonisms within the Soviet majority. For example, Russians often detested those from outer Mongolia, Ukrainians disliked Russians, and some others. All the Soviets were prisoners of war while the others came to the camp for various reasons. I made some friends, a Polish officer Marian Skuza, several Russians and an Armenian major, Misha. Actually, Misha was my best friend and also sort of took care of me. I learned Russian rather quickly and my spoken Russian in the camp was quite good. This was important because I could speak almost with everybody. I used English when I spoke with the Frenchman Louis, and German for the Italian Giovanni. My Polish was as good as ever. Our work assignment was called 'Federkommando' and the work consisted of producing springs for tanks and all the machine work associated with it. My experience from Kabelwerk proved useful and I had good instructors among my fellow prisoners, especially Marian Skuza. The work was rather demanding, the food awful and scarce and the long march from and to the camp tiring. However, I was over sixteen years old and not yet a classic 'musulman'. I also received a very thoughtful support from Janusz. He was preparing New Year wishes for all the VIPs of the camp and suggested that I distribute them personally. I did and most of the recipients tipped me with some cigarettes. Cigarettes were a treasure in the camp and I did not smoke!

Early 1945 the 'Hermann Goering Werke' were severely bombarded and the factory in which we worked was badly damaged while we were sitting in the shelter and heard everything. Our next assignment was to participate in repairing all the damage until production could be resumed. We did our part, the machines started to run again and after a few days the plant was bombarded and destroyed so that no repairing was possible. The Americans must have had very good intelligence, that is informers. By the way, the Allies also knew exactly where the gas chambers and crematoria were located in the extermination camps but did not do anything to prevent their orderly operation.

We were assembled daily on the Appellplatz, usually just for counting and hearing trivial

orders. I recall, however, two hanging executions which took place on the Appellplatz. One of them was the hanging of a German Kapo who probably tried to smuggle something into the camp. The man was weeping when taken to the gallows. The other execution was the hanging of three Russians who escaped from the camp, were caught and returned to the custody of the SS. When going up the gallows they shouted together: "Za Stalina, za rodinu" (For Stalin and for the fatherland). They probably did not know what Stalin did to his people but were certainly patriots.

Winter was hard, food even more scarce and of worse quality and many prisoners died from dysentery and deterioration of the system. I was also on my way but still held on. Bombardments became more and more frequent and our work assignment gradually changed to cleaning the rubble and putting the rails in place so that some trains could run again, until the next bombardment. This work was usually done at night and we were in the camp during the day. Incidentally, the bombardments had their routine: several reconnaissance planes used to come at night, illuminate the area and take photos; the next day a large number of flying fortresses used to come, some of them took care of Linz and others went further to the north to take care of other cities and objects. They were flying fairly low and I once counted over thousand of them. We had no shelters in the camp and given the accuracy of bombing they were really not necessary. These bombardments were welcomed by the prisoners since the reaction of the German anti-aircraft artillery became rather weak and this meant that the end of the war and of the suffering was in sight. So, Linz III was relatively a 'mild' camp but still only 100 to 150 of the 436 Jews, who arrived in Linz III, survived it. The next chapter will start with the liberation from this prison.



## Chapter 5

# The way to Palestine

### **The Liberation Day from KZ Linz III**

KZ Linz III, one of the biggest subcamps of the KZ Mauthausen, is said to have been liberated by the American army. I am an ex-inmate of Linz III and did not see during the liberation a single American. However, in what follows are my recollections from what happened during this day, the date of which I regard as my real birthday. The camp commandant, SS-Hauptsturmfuehrer Schoepperle, informed us on the 4th of May 1945 that the next day all the prisoners and guards will leave the camp because he wanted to protect us from the approaching American artillery. So, the war seems to be over !!! To this excellent message he added another one: each prisoner will receive a loaf of bread and a can of meat. As it turned out later, this was a dangerous gift especially for the ‘musulmans’ or ‘near-musulmans’. I belonged to the latter class.

In fact, the next day the prisoners (except those who were in the hospital) and the guards left the camp in the direction of the Danube. When the first few hundreds crossed the bridge the whole column suddenly stopped. Since I was in one of the first hundreds (twenty rows of five men each) I could see that Schoepperle was talking to a civilian. I heard later that this was the Gauleiter (district chief) of Oberdonau (upper Austria, with capital at Linz). Whatever was the subject of their conversation it seems to have caused our changing direction from right to left. It was said that this change saved us since our

'protectors' were about to get rid of all of us. This was logical but I cannot prove it.

The hills beyond the Danube are fairly low, covered with trees and bushes and have very spacious caves in which the Austrians used to keep apple wine, called 'Most'. The caves were called 'Merzenkeller'. The camp commandant and his aids told us to enter these caves 'in order to protect ourselves from American artillery'. In that moment a group of prisoners appeared before the entrance to the cave and blocked it. These were Spaniards who remembered well the civil war. They told the SS-men we would go in if they came with us. They suspected, of course, that the cave was undermined but I do not know if they said it in so many words. In any case, the SS-men agreed immediately and we spent in the cave a few moments. This did not last long since white flags appeared in several parts of Linz and Schoepperle told us to form 'for the last time' neat rows because he wants to take us to the Americans.

The way back to the camp appeared shorter. I noticed that the SS guards were mainly old (in my eyes) reservists. One of these 'grandfathers' asked me how old I was. I said 'seventeen' (it was 5 May 1945 and my birthday is on thirteenth of May). 'And what do you intend to do after the war?' asked the old man. 'I think I shall not return to Kraków because there is no one to go to but I shall try to reach Palestine' I replied. He liked it ...

After some kilometers we saw the power station of 'Hermann Goering Werke'. This was close to the camp and maybe to freedom! But here something unexpected happened. A man in a black Bahnschutz uniform, with a hand machine gun in his hands, jumped from the power station, pointed the gun at the leading SS-men and shouted: 'Waffen abgeben!' (surrender arms). Our 'protectors' looked in surprise one at another, the 'Bahnschutz' took advantage of this and fired a round, probably hitting some of them. When their colleagues heard the shooting (they could not see anything since the column was long) they dropped their rifles immediately. Soviet prisoners from our camp – they were many and well trained in combat – picked up the guns and in a short while all the SS guards were standing with their hands on their heads, neatly arranged in rows and around them armed guards in 'pyjamas'. I shall never forget this sight! And when people ask me who liberated me: Americans, British or Soviets I usually say that Americans because otherwise I would have to tell the whole story. There were no Americans present but everybody knew that they were close.



Some answers to obvious questions. Who was the 'Bahnschutz'? This was an Armenian, named Boris, who came to the concentration camp together with other prisoners of war. In the camp he was 'promoted' to the rank of Kapo and performed his function as was expected from him. Boris escaped from the camp about two weeks before the liberation and reappeared again as the 'Bahnschutz'. Most probably all liberated prisoners forgave Boris his 'career' in the camp. And what did the new guards do to the SS-men? Nothing special. Maybe some of them caught cold because the new guards kept them on the Appellplatz overnight and took them in the morning to the closest American camp. It was said that the Americans first of all disarmed the guards and then took care of the prisoners that were supplied. And who took care of us, the ex-inmates? For the time being nobody and each of us took care of himself. Only after some weeks were displaced persons camps organized and the interim period was difficult for some and lethal for others. For example, the gift of Schoepperle<sup>1</sup> (bread and meat) killed many liberated prisoners who took advantage of the so freely available food.

### **After the liberation from Linz III until leaving Austria for Italy**

After the eventful day I went to my block and had a short rest. As said above, each of us was given a can of meat and a loaf of bread, while leaving the camp. Although I was aware of the danger involved, I could not resist the temptation to have a 'bite' and this may have been a bit too much. I was very tired and fell fast asleep without even thinking what was happening outside. The next morning I awoke in a half-empty barrack, since many had left the camp on their own. I decided to do the same and went towards the gate.

I found myself walking towards the center of Kleinmuenchen. Armoured cars of the U.S army went the same way, much faster than I did. All of a sudden I felt a sharp pain in my

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<sup>1</sup>The memoirs of Vaclav Vaclavik, the secretary of the camp Linz III, show what Schoepperle, who in the eyes of many was simply a "good uncle" in SS uniform, was really like. During the last few weeks before the liberation the camp hospital was terribly overcrowded. Instead of doing something about it (or not doing anything about it) Schoepperle decided to starve the patients to death. He simply issued an order not to supply food for the patients. The hospital Kapo, Kaufmann, the secretary of the camp, Vaclavik, with the help of the Rapportfuehrer Sturm succeeded to alleviate the deadly order to some extent, but the mortality in the hospital was increasing. After the liberation Schoepperle was arrested by the Americans, he faced the Dachau trials and was sentenced to death by hanging. The verdict was carried out in the Landsberg prison. The main reason for this verdict was the starving of the patients of the Linz III hospital.

stomach or thereabout and had to sit down on the sidewalk. I cried out 'help me please!' but the Americans looked on me without much expression in their faces. I now know that they might have seen many prisoners in bad shape and a sitting one did not deserve stopping the convoy even if he drops dead, as many did. After some time the pain subsided and I could walk again in the general direction of the center of Linz. When I reached the neighbourhood of the railway station of Kleinmuenchen I saw an American soldier sitting near the railway with a pretty Austrian girl on his knees. I admit of having been shocked by this sight (it was the 6th of May 1945) but I no longer am! After an hour or two I reached, with quite a few ex-prisoners going the same way, the Hauptplatz or another major square. We saw an open warehouse with work clothes which may have been broken into by earlier visitors. These clothes were probably intended for workers in civil camps – there were millions of them. We gave this very little thought and our main aim was to get rid of the striped prisoners' clothes and wooden 'shoes' and put on something more decent. This was done in no time and our next thought was where are we going to stay until someone takes care of us. After that 'clothing exchange' we looked almost human but were unmistakably ex-prisoners for two reasons: (i) we were unusually skinny, almost muslimans, and (ii) in the camp they used to crop our hair frequently and shave weekly a path 5cm wide through the center of our head; this was called in the camp 'Lauspromenade' or walkway of lice.

We did not feel like returning to the camp (our only formal dwelling) and went to the camp of civil Polish workers in order to stay there for a while. I met there several Poles whom I knew from Linz III and got an unusual offer from a Polish Blockschreiber of Block no. 8, where I spent the last few months in Linz III. He was planning to go to England and asked me politely to teach him some English and wanted to repay it to me as he could. As a matter of fact he behaved quite humanly while exercising his function in Linz III and I would oblige if there were no other plans. However, I wanted to get out of Austria as soon as I could and get to Palestine (I did not know how, though). Besides, I did not like the idea of staying in a Polish camp since the feelings of many towards (even correctly Polish speaking) Jews were all but friendly. After a day or two my two Jewish friends, Niusiek Erb and Viki Neugebauer, and our Polish friend, Marian Skuza, moved out of the camp on the search for a better future.

We crossed the Danube to a suburb called Hart which was the location of a major camp

of the American army and decided to try our luck with the Americans. When we entered the camp we were asked by a guard what we wanted. I said it in my best English and we were taken to a sergeant for further investigation. He listened to me patiently and then took out a piece of paper and wrote: 'An Buergermeister von Leonding: Geben diese Menschen Essen und Schlafen. Signed: Sergeant Cohen' (To the Mayor of Leonding: give these people food and a place to sleep.) We went to the Mayor of Leonding, who seemed a bit frightened, showed him the order and were promptly given food coupons and sent to an address in the main street of this village. The owner, an elderly woman, gave us a room with a double bed and a sofa, and a permission to use the bathroom. Three of us took the double bed and Marian took the sofa. This was quite an unusual arrangement, only a few days after the liberation from a Nazi concentration camp.

After some days, pleased with ourselves, we went for a walk in the main street of Leonding, a very quiet and nearly pastoral place. We saw a little church and a graveyard nearby. Some of the stones carried beside the family history of the dead also their photographs. Inspecting them curiously we came to a sudden halt at one of them. It showed an elderly couple and the inscription said: 'Alois und Klara Hitler'. We did not know then that Adolf Hitler spent his boyhood in Leonding, that Alois and Klara were his parents and that our landlady may have known them personally. However, we no longer felt at ease in these pastoral surroundings.

After having picked up some weight and being able to walk long distances we decided to go to the Mauthausen central camp and try to find out what happened to our relatives and friends who came with us from Płaszów on 10 August, 1944, and were sent to other subcamps of Mauthausen. I know now that there were 49 such subcamps. The camp was quite a distance from the railway station of Mauthausen. When we got to the main gate we were greeted by an American MP who regretted that the entrance to the camp is forbidden. There was no point in arguing with him, since he seemed rather 'square', and after a short consultation we thanked him for his polite greeting, descended to the main road and proceeded to the infamous quarry of Mauthausen, the Wiener Graben. We there approached the well known 'Todesstiegen' (Stairs of Death), went up the 186 steps this time without carrying granite stones - and entered the camp through a side entrance. The way to the camp secretariat was straightforward and everything was neatly catalogued there.

I learned for the first time that my Father died in the subcamp Gusen II on 22 January 1945 because of heart failure. The reason of his death was most probably different. I know of several possible reasons of death in Gusen II but I shall probably never know how my father died: was it in Gusen II at the hands of a Kapo or Blockaelteste, or in the small Mauthausen gas chamber or maybe in the infamous Schloss Hartheim extermination center, one of several centers of the Eutanasia<sup>2</sup> which was ‘helping’ Mauthausen and its subcamps.

After some days we learned that there was in Salzburg a committee which registered displaced persons who would like to go to Palestine. The three of us (except Marian who thought about going home or to England) decided to go. The train went up to Wels and the rest had to be done by hitchhiking. This took quite some time, we found the committee and registered but it was too late to return by hitchhiking to Wels etc. What do we do in the strange famous city, where there is no one to go to? Of course, we go to the American MP. They were very polite, as usual, asked us to empty our pockets from all our belongings and granted us an overnight arrest. We were directed to a jail which was also occupied by SS-men and other Nazis taken prisoners. The latter roommates asked us who we were and when they heard that we were Jews, recently liberated from a concentration camp, one of them said: ‘I know why we are here but cannot understand why they put you with us’. Nothing happened and we were released the next morning in order to return where we came from.

One day, while cleaning the room, we opened the sofa and saw some good white flour lying around (or being hidden). We did not know what to do with this treasure but a suggestion was readily voiced: let us ask Marian to make some good pancakes. Marian was older than the rest of us, had much experience in preparing such delicacies in the Polish army and was ready to do it. Since my German was good I was told to ask the landlady for permission to use her gas plate. I did, she agreed and Marian started his work in the kitchen. Then said the landlady: ‘So ein schoenes Mehl habe ich schon Jahren lang nicht

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<sup>2</sup>Eutanasia was a plan devised by Hitler close to the beginning of the second world war, according to which chronically ill and underdeveloped people (Germans) were exterminated in “sanatoriums” which were equipped with small gas chambers. Those in charge of the Euthanasia centers were later in charge of the extermination centers in occupied Poland. For example, Christian Wirth who was the director of the Hartheim Euthanasia site was later the first commandant of the Belżec extermination center and later became a chief inspector of the extermination centers Belżec, Treblinka, Majdanek and Sobibór.

gesehen' (I did not see such beautiful flour for many years). Fortunately, all of us put on poker faces, the pancakes were indeed delicious and the room was clean!

A few weeks later a camp of Jewish D.P.s (displaced persons) was organized in Hart at the site which was previously occupied by the American army. This was supported by JOINT and constituted a starting point for further emigration. We decided to move there (we were of course eligible) and decided to wait for an opportunity of going to Palestine. Some time after our moving to Hart there appeared soldiers from the Jewish Brigade in the British army and collected young people who would like to go to Palestine Eretz-Israel. The three of us were of course among them and the whole group was transported illegally to the camp of the Jewish Brigade, then stationed in Tarvisio, Italy. I do not remember the exact date of my leaving Austria but it must have been sometime in August 1945. My next visit there was in May 2006 with the purpose of attending the 61st liberation ceremonies of Linz III and Gusen II.

Before leaving Austria some comments are in order. First I may have given an impression of being anti-American. This is certainly not so but a fact remains that most of our liberators were not very considerate. They may have had their reasons, of which we were not informed. Another comment is due on the relation between Poles and Jews. Although I had and have very good friends who were and are Poles, it is undeniable that in those years anti-semitism was very popular among Poles in Poland or elsewhere. Finally I must comment on the behaviour of Austrian farmers towards us. As pointed out above, we got from the Mayor of Leonding food coupons, however, these did not satisfy hungry teenagers who gained their freedom only weeks ago. Also, there was no organization that took care of people like us, although the U.N. must have had many debates on the subject of the liberated displaced persons. In that interim period between the liberation and some kind of organized support we were often going to Austrian farms in the neighbourhood of Hart and Leonding, and asked for food. More often than not our request was granted and the farmers we visited were usually rather kind. I am sure they must have had many such 'visitors' and were not supported by anyone. Their behaviour certainly deserves recognition. These words are written over sixty years after that period and the memory of that post-liberation month or so is still vivid.

For many people the decision where to go (or try to go) was a most important one. A

natural solution which suggested itself to many Polish Jews was to go go back to Poland and try to see if someone of their family survived. Many went there simply in order to return as unwelcome guests. I would have done the same if it were not for extensive conversations with prisoners who were transferred from Auschwitz to Linz III via Mauthausen. As pointed out above, it was only then that I very clearly understood that each deportation action led to a straightforward extermination in a gas chamber. It then dawned upon me that I am probably an only survivor of Mother's family and this turned out to be nearly so. Of her family only one daughter of her brother Joseph, whom I met in the 50's, and myself survived the Holocaust. I would go to Palestine anyway but going there via Italy seemed more sensible than via Poland. There were of course other possibilities: try to find some relatives in the U.S. who would send an affidavit or try to go to other countries. All that I still saw and heard in the refugee camp in Hart before leaving Austria.

### **The first period in Italy**

The military camp of the Jewish Brigade in the British Army hosted us for a few days. I felt really at home, could speak Hebrew with the soldiers and met several students of the Hebrew gymnasium in Kraków who remembered my father as their teacher. The Brigade organized a large convoy of trucks and brought us across most of Italy from Tarvisio to Bari. We registered there as displaced persons with UNRRA and the convoy proceeded to a small town on the seaside in the gulf of Taranto, called Santa Maria di Bagni (or al Bagno). This almost empty Italian summer resort was converted into a D.P. camp and was filled with incoming refugees. The youngsters who came from Tarvisio were divided in eight groups: there was one group of girls and seven groups of boys, on the average thirty five in each. Each group was located in a small house, a 'villa', and had a supervisor or instructor who was a Jewish Palestinian soldier in the British Army. These instructors were mainly associated with unit 544, stationed in Naples. These eight groups were termed a 'youth village', the purpose of which was to prepare us for the life in Palestine. In no time a kind of school was established, the main subject taught was the Hebrew language at several levels. Two or three of us, including myself, were fluent in Hebrew, were exonerated from the classes but instead had to work in the office of the youth village with its director, a very

kind man called Avner Shkurnik.

Life was relatively good. As I said, each group had a villa but there were five or six of us in a room, sleeping on foldable cots. We were fed reasonably well, nobody was really hungry but, on the other hand, there were no gourmet dishes. We spent much time on the beach, and there was much swimming in the usually very quiet bay of Santa Maria. One could hear quite a few languages: Yiddish, Polish, Hungarian and Roumanian. However, Hebrew became gradually (but slowly) a common one. From my own experience: there were several very nice guys from Lithuania who spoke very nice Yiddish. My Yiddish was nonexistent but I discovered that they all spoke Hebrew since they attended Hebrew schools in the country they came from (after what I heard I cannot call Lithuania 'their home country'). We became good friends and I even learned Yiddish from them. Most of them are in Israel and we are still in touch. I spoke Polish with my friends from Poland and Yiddish was very useful when trying to communicate with Roumanian and Hungarian colleagues.

After about two months we were told that His Majesty's government agreed to issue certificates which will enable the whole youth village to go to Palestine. Very good news! However, seven groups got the emigration certificates and the eighth group, in which I was, had to stay behind. Maybe there were not enough certificates for all of us (unlikely) or our management decided to leave one group as a nucleus for a new youth village (more likely). Whichever was the reason, it did not matter very much and my group's disappointment was serious. At that time I established contact with my relatives in Palestine, in the U.S., in Argentina and in France. My aunt from the U.S. sent me an affidavit which I could use for obtaining an immigrant's visa to the U.S. My uncle from Argentina tried to persuade me to come to Buenos Aires and stay with him. Finally, my father's cousin from Paris wanted me to come to Paris and help me get along there. I refused very politely all these invitations and wrote my kind relatives that I was determined to go to Palestine and hoped it will become a national home of the Jewish people. They understood my attitude since they knew their brother/cousin (my Father) and correctly imagined that I was brought up in the Zionist way.

Whether intentionally or not, a new youth village was created, initially organized exactly as the former one. Again eight groups were established, there were courses of Hebrew at various levels, and the usual office work. Winter in that part of the world is rather mild but

it was still too cold for swimming. There was no talk about certificates any more and various ways of illegal immigration to Palestine began to be discussed. However, there was some deterioration (in my eyes) or different approach to the organization of the youth village. The director of the youth village was still a Palestinian Jewish soldier in the British Army but the group supervisors were also D.P.s, who were supposed to be properly politically oriented and could be relied upon. Gradually, envoys of various (Jewish Palestinian) political parties began to transfer their activities to the youth village. There was a serious antagonism between the parties and the youth village lost its reason of being. Late spring 1946 the youth village ceased to exist, the youth (or most of it) being divided among 'kibbutzim' belonging to the various parties. Since I had no sympathy for the extreme leftist 'Hashomer Hatzair' which glorified Stalin and his regime (I heard enough about it from my Soviet rommmates in Linz III), and thought that the socialistic Zionist parties do not spell out their aims clearly enough, I became associated with 'Beitar' and informally with 'Irgun Tzvai Leumi' which was a clandestine organization even in Italy. I saw the necessity of creating a Jewish state, had no doubt that it has to be in Palestine and was convinced that the British are not sympathetic to this idea. They must therefore be fought, even if the fight is a symbolic one. I spent a few months in 'kibbutzim' of 'Beitar' in southern Italy, until at the end of 1946 I had an opportunity of going to Rome. There begins another part of my memoirs.

### **The second period in Italy and the Aliya**

Although my political convictions did not change they gave way, in part, to something entirely different. It was brought to my knowledge that there existed a possibility to complete external high-school examinations in Rome, in an Italian lyceum. There were only two written examinations to be done: in Italian and in the History of Art. All the other examinations were about to be oral. This program was devised especially for Italians who could not complete their high-school studies during World War II (the 'reduci') and a small number of D.P.s who were interested were also admitted. I began with the classical program. This was very difficult since I had to cope with three languages: classical Greek, Latin and Italian. Classical Greek was completely new to me, so was Italian, since in southern Italy only an incomprehensible (to me) dialect was used and the fundamentals of Latin which



I acquired during the war in Wieliczka were helpful but in no way sufficient. After two weeks I decided to move from the classical program to the scientific one: 'only' Latin and, of course, Italian were required. All the other subjects, for example mathematics, physics, chemistry, and history of philosophy were to be submitted in Italian. All this seemed to be utterly impossible but I decided to work as hard as I could and achieve this ambitious aim. It turned out that I was right because in Palestine, and later in Israel, I was on my own and none of my few relatives I had there would or could enable me to complete this stage of education. We had, in Rome, some courses, sponsored by the JOINT: a course on Italian literature, a course on calculus and several minor ones. The Italian course was very good but that on calculus seemed to be more superficial. As a matter of fact I knew what calculus is about already in Wieliczka in 1942, and this was of great help in the studies. I do not quite understand how could I find the time to learn all the required material, to spend some time with my girl friend Lily and colleagues and finally to submit in the summer session of 1947 a passing-grade external high-school examination. Most of my colleagues did it only in the autumn session of that year.

The few months after the exams were very relaxed and pleasant. I spent much time with Lily, and with my friends from the Irgun. We got to know much better the beautiful city of Rome and even could go to other places. A tour which I still remember quite well was to Naples and surroundings. Pompei and Herculaneum are most impressive. I began earning some money by giving private lessons and we could rent a room from an Italian family, with my friend Benny, in the part of Rome called Monte Sacro (one of the seven hills of Rome). I decided to begin my higher education and registered to the first year of mechanical engineering at the University of Rome. However, sometime in October I was approached by a senior envoy of the Hagana in Rome (he knew I was associated with the Irgun) with a proposition I could not turn down: they would give me a crash course of the geography of Haifa and send me to Palestine with a false travel permit as a returning envoy; my knowledge of Hebrew was more than sufficient. I forgot about mechanical engineering, accepted the proposition, went to a location near Genova for the suggested 'studies' and was brought to the passenger ship 'Pace' which made its way from Genova to Haifa in three days. It was a most comfortable journey and yet a very illegal Aliya. Beginning November 1947 found me in Palestine which soon became the state of Israel and where I have lived

for the past sixty years or so.

## Chapter 6

# Epilogue or what comes next

The previous five chapters dealt with the first nineteen years of my life. There are, however, sixty one more years to be covered but the latter were rather routine, albeit quite interesting, and a single chapter will suffice for their description.

When I arrived with 'Pace' in Haifa, I was requested to hide for a couple of days in a downtown hotel in Haifa, until an identity card with my name can be produced. I received it on time, along with some allowance, found a bus to Tel Aviv and arrived in the 'Hess hotel' close to the main street of the city, the Allenby street. My uncle Katri lived in the youth village Ben Shemen and worked there as a teacher. I let him know that I arrived safely and was immediately given instructions how to come to Ben Shemen to his place. I happily went there, met Karti and his wife Chana, and my cousin Kalmi who was still in the crib and was not yet communicative. This looked like coming home! I stayed with Katri for a few weeks, remembered that I once worked in an office of a 'youth village' in Santa Maria di Bagni and started doing the same in the real youth village Ben Shemen. After a short time Arabs from the neighbouring Beit Naballah intercepted a bus going to Ben Shemen and murdered all its travelers. This was one of the first reactions to the 29 November, 1947 U. N. resolution to divide Palestine into Jewish and Arab states. It was then decided to evacuate the youth village Ben Shemen to Kfar Vitkin and establish there a youth village called Ben Shemen B. I then decided to say 'goodbye' to Katri and Chana, try to go to Tel Aviv and be on my own. I rented a room together with two colleagues

from Santa Maria in the neighbourhood of the Old Central Station, and started to work as a salesman in a wholesale shop of oil products in Petach Tikvah. I got this job thanks to Meir Zimmels, the husband of my mother's cousin, Sabina Zimmels. Her sister Hela Jedlin offered me a small allowance which I gratefully received for a few months. However, I hated this job of selling oil products and happily received an offer of an apprentice in a factory of optical lenses which was located in Ramat Gan. I then rented a room in Ramat Gan together with a friend and went on with grinding lenses.

Unfortunately, I was not found fit for army service and missed the participation in the War of Independence of Israel.

I described here in some detail my first steps in Palestine and then Israel. The welcome was rather disappointing but I had no particular expectations and knew that I am on my own. I had no language problem whatsoever, as my Hebrew left nothing to desire, but in spite of that still felt as a stranger and had no Israeli friends. I was simply a new immigrant and that kind of person is rarely popular. I used to visit Katri and my Mother's cousins from time to time (not too often) since they were nice people, heard stories about my parents, but the circle of my friends was more or less the same as in Santa Maria and Rome: new immigrants (*olim*) who were my friends abroad. My girl friend Lily was still in Italy (there were many letters) and arrived in Israel only in 1949. Some time after her arrival she went her way and I went mine. We remained good friends, however. I met later Miriam Ajzenfeld, who became my dear friend. We used to meet for several years and married in 1954. All these years I was working in the optical lens factory, and Miriam was working as well.

Some time later Miriam suggested that I start my studies and she would work and support both of us until I was done with the studies. I gratefully accepted the suggestion because I felt that I knew enough about optical lenses and always wanted to study. There was, however, a non-trivial problem I had to cope with. I submitted my external high-school examination in Rome in 1947 and (if accepted) could register for studies at the Technion in the fall of 1956. During those nine years I learned how to make optical lenses, forgot a lot of what I knew and had to learn many things anew. I thought that I could ask the husband of one of Mother's cousins, who was a well known (in Tel Aviv) teacher of physics and mathematics, to help me with some guidance and/or books. I do not remember his

exact words but they amounted to saying that he did not believe I could cope with the studies and this would be a waste of time. I visited him again after completing my Ph.D. studies! It is true I was mad at him but he may have had a point: a Holocaust survivor 28 years old, nine years after high-school exams, did not have good chances for success in studies.

My Italian matriculation certificate and the results of an entrance exam at the Technion enabled me to start my study of physics at that institution. The first year was a 'cold shower', incredibly difficult. I failed in many final exams in the first session but did all of them in the autumn session and proceeded successfully to the following years which seemed increasingly easier. In 1957 we moved from Ramat Gan to Haifa (Neveh Shaanan) and lived there till the end of my studies at the Technion. By 1961 I completed my B.Sc and M.Sc. studies of Physics and started my Ph.D. study at the Weizmann Institute. The topic of my thesis was 'Structure of Synthetic Polypeptides in the Solid State and in Concentrated Solutions', some techniques of polymer crystallography having been employed in the course of this work. I made my acquaintance with crystallography in the fourth year of my B.Sc. studies, found it very interesting, and applied it for the first time in my M.Sc. study. When I started my Ph.D. work we moved to Rehovot and early 1962 Miriam gave birth to our son Rami.

My Ph.D. study progressed satisfactorily and was completed early 1966. I had then three possibilities for future work: (i) to remain for 'some years' at the Department of Crystallography and do what I was told to do, (ii) go for a post-doctoral study to C.N.R.S. near Paris and eventually join the Polymer Department at the Weizmann Institute, and (iii) to join the Department of Chemistry at the Tel Aviv University, establish there a crystallographic laboratory and join the teaching staff of the department. I found the third possibility most appealing and on 15 June 1966 I joined the Chemistry Department at Tel Aviv University.

About a year after I joined Tel Aviv University (TAU) and a month or so after the Six Days' War our daughter Yaeli was born and we started thinking about moving to Ramat Aviv, close to the University. We came there early 1968 and I have been living there, in part, ever since. The work in TAU was very satisfactory. By way of research, I wanted to change my former field to single-crystal crystallography. I knew that the

crystallographic techniques I used during my Ph.D. work were insufficient for good research in single-crystal work and I taught myself single-crystal crystallography while organizing the crystallographic laboratory and other teaching work. Publications started to appear soon and the self-teaching effort was fully justified. Further work consisted of study of structure, packing and motion of donor-acceptor compounds, other crystallographic studies and a study of effects of molecular vibrations on the N.M.R. spectrum of solids. All this was accompanied by teaching work and satisfactory promotions. At the end of the 1970s I took an active interest in structure-factor statistics which was my research subject till the retirement, in 1996. I was promoted to the rank of full professor in 1984. Another activity, carried out in parallel to research and teaching was editing Volume B of International Tables for Crystallography. I have been busy at its three editions from 1983 till 2008, long after my formal retirement. I skipped here most of the details, did not mention people with whom I collaborated and contented myself with a general and superficial description. I belonged to the staff of the Department, and then School, of Chemistry for over thirty years.

I might add, however, that after my retirement I have continued teaching graduate courses of crystallography, wrote a book entitled "Theories and Techniques of Crystal Structure Determination", published by Oxford University Press in 2007, and have recently co-authored some articles on resonant scattering of X-rays.

My wife Miriam passed away on 22 December 1997 after an illness which started 1991. She fought it bravely and during her suffering I learned something about practical oncology.

I then met my children, grandchildren and friends, tried to carry on my teaching and not to be alone. After some time I met Magda Leuchter, whom I first met in Rome in 1947, and whom Miriam and I met on some occasions. Magda was also a widow and we have been together ever since. When friends ask us how do we live I say that we are two elderly people with two apartments, two cars, two driver's licenses but always stay together in one of these apartments. We often meet Rami with his wife Roni and their children Gal, Ben and Nir, and Yaeli with her husband Omri and their children Noa, Mic-Mic (Michael) and Tamar. We also meet friends and Magda's son Alon with his wife Susie and their children Shahaf, Lior and Aviv. Much less often we meet Magda's son Yoram and his daughters Roni and Iris because they live in Canada. However, we have an excellent way of talking to Yoram thanks to the internet communication facilities.

I have been many times abroad, in connection with my scientific work or privately, but there are two trips, related to these memoirs, I would like to comment on. First, as was said in Chapter 2, I left Kraków in the fall of 1940. After all that happened and the image of Kraków as related to my family, I felt no urge to go there and deleted it from the list of the destinations of my travels. I have even refused a very kind invitation to come to Kraków, extended to me by a young Polish colleague who was working at the same laboratory in which I spent my sabbatical in The Netherlands. There were more invitations and discussions in which I found out that the young generation of Poles is not well informed of the relations between Poles and Jews in ‘those’ years. After some years I was invited by the organizers of the European Crystallographic Meeting, to be held in Kraków at the Jagiellonian University in 2001, to deliver a plenary lecture on a topic intimately related to my research interests. I accepted the invitation and after an absence of 61 years I found myself again in Kraków, albeit only for ten days or so. The scientific part of the visit was all right and I could show Magda where I come from. The second trip was invited by Yaeli quite a few years earlier and was realized only in year 2003. We went then with Rami, Yaeli and my cousin Leah Shmueli-Helfgot to Kraków. The purpose of the trip was to show the children the house in which I spent my childhood and other sites related to it. The apartment in which we lived on Kołłątajka street 12 was closed but the neighbours from a floor below ours invited us to come and see the layout of their apartment which was the same as that of ours. We were also in Brzozowa 5, the house of my basic school, which is now a professional Polish school. The history of the Hebrew schools is now shown briefly in Hebrew and Polish on two plates affixed to the building. The center of Kraków is completely unchanged, except that there are no Jews to be seen (our company excluded). We also went to Wieliczka, visited the salt mine and also walked along Słowackiego street in which my gandparents, aunt Bluma Horowitz and uncle Jakub Seidenfrau lived. I could show them uncle Jakub’s house in which we spent over a year and a half during the war (see Chapter 3). The house seems to be in good shape but the garden is no longer the same. After Wieliczka we spent a very pleasant evening with my good friends Ala and Wiesio Łasocha and their sons, in their house in Gaj near Krakow. During that four-day trip I was intensively investigated about my past, especially by Leah, and hope these memoirs will help her coordinate her notes!

I think it is in order to mention some stimuli for writing these memoirs. We participated with Magda in a very interesting series of lectures by Batia Dvir on "Thousand years of Jews in Poland". Batia took the class to Yad Vashem for some expert guidance. Following a question of mine about the first commandant of Bełżec Batia asked if I am ready to be interviewed about my experiences during the Holocaust. I did not want that but I promised to send Batia a concise story of these experiences. My letter to Batia looks like an abstract of these memoirs!

The second stimulus was my description of the photograph of my Mother which was published in the collection "Wieliczka citizens on described photographs" by Wiesław Żyznowski in year 2007. Mr. Wiesław Żyznowski, joined enthusiastically by his wife Mrs. Urszula Żyznowska, then started to plan a comprehensive book on Jews from Wieliczka and Klasno. and I also participated in its creation. Apart from this project, we discussed in year 2011 the possibility of creating a memorial table which would commemorate the Holocaust of the Jewry of Wieliczka and surrounding cities, briefly described at the end of Chapter 3 of these memoirs (their first version was written in year 2009). This idea was pursued by Mr. Wiesław Żyznowski and Mrs. Urszula Żyznowska through a series of negotiations and meetings and ultimately, their initiative received the full support of the municipality of Wieliczka and many of its citizens. On 27 August 2012, that is exactly 70 years after the deportation of the Jews from Wieliczka to the death camp Bełżec, a memorial table was affixed to a building in the central square of Wieliczka and unveiled in an unprecedented ceremony, organized by the Mayor and secretary of the municipality of Wieliczka. The whole ceremony was filmed and can be viewed from the website: [www.zyznowski.pl](http://www.zyznowski.pl) rather close to the beginning of the main page. On the same day copies of the book "Żydzi Wieliczki i Klasna - 1872 do 2012" were distributed. This book, edited by Urszula Żyznowska and Anna Krzeczowska, is also a monument to the history and fate of the Jewry of Wieliczka. The text of the memorial table, in Polish and in English, is shown in Fig.6.1 below.

I wrote these memoirs primarily for my children and friends. Part of them is very sad and I hope that they will not be read often but also hope that some of these memoirs will be of some interest.

*THE STORY IS NOT YET OVER*



**27 SIERPNI 1942 ROKU Z ROZKAZU OKUPANTÓW NIEMIECKICH  
 ŻYDZI Z WIELICZKI I OKOLICZNYCH MIEJSCOWOŚCI,  
 ZGROMADZENI WCZEŚNIEJ W MIEŚCIE,  
 STAWILI SIĘ NA ŁĄCE W POBLISKICH BOGUCICACH.  
 PRZYBYŁO OKOŁO DZIESIĘCIU TYSIĘCY OSÓB.  
 PONAD TYSIĄC STARYCH I CHORYCH ROZSTRZELANO  
 W PUSZCZY NIEPOŁOMICKIEJ.  
 KILKASET ZDOLNYCH DO PRACY WYWIEZIONO DO OBOZÓW.  
 POZOSTALI ZGINĘLI W KOMORACH GAZOWYCH W BEŁŻCU.  
 CI, KTÓRZY NIE PRZYBYLI NA ROZKAZ,  
 BYLI MORDOWANI W WIELICZCE I GRABÓWKACH.  
 Z WIELICKIEJ SPOŁECZNOŚCI ŻYDOWSKIEJ OCALELI TYLKO NIELICZNI.**

**W 70. ROCZNICĘ TYCH WYDARZEŃ – WIELICZANIE  
 27 SIERPNI 2012 R.**

**ON 27 AUGUST 1942, ON THE ORDERS OF THE GERMAN OCCUPIERS,  
 THE JEWS OF WIELICZKA  
 AND THOSE FROM OTHER PLACES CLOSE BY, WHO HAD BEEN MOVED HERE,  
 GATHERED IN A MEADOW IN NEARBY BOGUCICE,  
 SOME TEN THOUSAND PEOPLE IN ALL.  
 MORE THAN A THOUSAND OF THE OLD AND SICK WERE SHOT  
 IN THE NIEPOŁOMICE FOREST.  
 SEVERAL HUNDRED OF THOSE FIT TO WORK  
 WERE SENT TO GERMAN LABOUR CAMPS.  
 THE REST PERISHED IN THE GAS CHAMBERS OF THE BEŁŻEC DEATH CAMP.  
 THOSE WHO DID NOT OBEY THE SUMMONS  
 WERE MURDERED LATER IN WIELICZKA AND GRABÓWKI.  
 BARELY A FEW MEMBERS OF WIELICZKA'S JEWISH COMMUNITY SURVIVED.**

**THE PEOPLE OF WIELICZKA ON THE 70<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THESE EVENTS  
 27 AUGUST 2012**

Figure 6.1: Memorial Table for the Wieliczka Holocaust